THE ROLE OF CULTURE:

EFFECTIVE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS DESCRIBE

LEADING IN AN ERA OF CONTINUOUS REFORMS

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore how effective elementary school principals described the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms. A case study methodology was used to consider the perspectives of research participants: two elementary principals leading schools with both high levels of academic achievement and positive school climate. For over a year, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document review. Findings revealed the effective elementary principals involved in the study described: (1) positive culture as the priority in leadership during an era of continuous reforms; (2) distinct approaches to leadership; (3) the importance of a good fit between a school and its leadership; and (4) influences of district culture. The researcher concluded, for the effective leaders in this study, school culture was the highest priority. While each principal had a distinct approach best suited to her unique site, both used school culture to accomplish organizational objectives, emphasizing trusting relationships to unify collective efforts in overcoming challenges created by continuous reforms. These conclusions led to recommendations for elementary school principals for effective leadership during an era of continuous reforms and suggestions for future research in this area.

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Prologue

As appalling as it may seem to the conscience of science, given its obsession with sterilized and objective measurement, this research story is my story. How can we truly tell any story other than our own? Researchers struggle to mitigate the impact of bias in their work; but in the end, our humanity—our stories—always find their way in.

Struggling with a looming deadline for a qualitative dissertation on the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms—while deeply entrenched in the realities these changes were creating for people around me—I came to appreciate the power of the human story. Inspiring, rich, and able to create unimaginable impact on others, the human story is at the heart of my research.

In a collection of compelling human stories, Robert Quinn (2004) explained how the narratives reveal an important relationship between individual ego and organizational culture. At the core of each of these concepts is the notion of identity. Who are we? Alone? Together?

Perhaps this phenomenon is best captured not in grand theoretical monoliths or massive meta-analyses of quantitative studies, but in a simple conversation. Over coffee. In Elizabeth Gilbert's (2006) autobiographical novel, *Eat Pray Love*, the author described precisely such a conversation with an Italian friend at a café in Rome. In response to her concerns that Rome simply did not feel like home to her, her companion provided some insights.

Giulio said, "Maybe you and Rome just have different words."

"What do you mean?"

He said, "Don't you know that the secret to understanding a city and its people is to learn—what is the word on the street?" Then he went on to explain, in a mixture of English, Italian, and hand gestures, that every city has a single word that defines it, that identifies most people living there." (p. 103)

The conversation between Gilbert and Giulio quickly narrowed from the cultural gestalt of various cities to the matter of individual ego. As Gilbert (2006) wrote, "But Giulio was already on to the next and most obvious question: 'What's your word?'" (p. 104).

The soul-searching journey described in Gilbert's novel, when examined through the lens of Quinn's deep change, represents a willingness to let go of control and "[walk] naked into the land of uncertainty" (2004, p. 9). Gilbert's search for "her word" illustrates the agonizing and intimately personal process of deep change, which Quinn argued allows individuals to make radical transformations in their personal lives and to have a powerful impact on many well beyond themselves. According to Gilbert's biography:

Eat Pray Love… was an international bestseller, translated into over thirty languages, with over 10 million copies sold worldwide… made into a film starring Julia Roberts, [and] … became so popular that Time Magazine named Elizabeth as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. (Cahill, 2013)

There is little argument that Gilbert's story of deep and personal change has had an impact on the lives of potentially millions around the globe. Like Gilbert, I undertook a journey to understand a city and its people—in this case, a school and its leadership. In

the process, I, too, discovered a great deal about myself and the world around me. Like all journeys, mine began with a first step. It began with a decision to tell a story, to search for the words that define, and consequently, to make an impact on myself and those around me. This is my story.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Elementary school principals are entering a new era of leadership. The

conceptual age of the current century is defined by new ways of seeing, learning,

understanding, and interacting with the world (Pink, 2006). Old metaphors no longer

capture the essence of the modern era. Bridges (1996) asserted, "When an age changes

its leadership metaphors, that is a major event" (p. 12). Fundamental changes in

scientific understanding, global economics, capacities for communication, and an

unprecedented need for ingenuity and adaptability require a new metaphor for describing

organizational life and the implications for leaders of this age (Bridges, 1996; Kuhn,

1996; Morgan, 2006; Sashkin, 2003; Wheatley, 2006).

"There was a time when leadership metaphors favored…the hierarchical....

Organizational dynamics were mechanistic," explained Bridges (1996), yet contemporary

understanding of organizational life holds that "wisdom is distributed throughout the

system[;]… [it is] organic, integrated, holistic, and natural" (p. 12). Wheatley (2006) also

described this shift from a vision of organizations as Newtonian machines with discrete

components structured along rational hierarchies to an understanding of organizations as

complex systems based on relationships. Interconnectedness is essential in a world

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guided by a metaphor of complex, non-linear systems. In the modern era, leadership is more a function of relationships and influence. Wheatley (2006) concluded that this new metaphor reveals important implications for leaders of the current era:

> For several years now, leaders have been encouraged to consider the impact of non-material forces in organizations—culture, values, vision, ethics. Each of these concepts describes a *quality* of organizational life that can be observed in behavior yet doesn't exist anywhere independent of those behaviors. (p. 54)

Consideration of fields of influence, strange attractors, hidden order-generating rules, and the like, found their way from the labs of scientists into the journals of organizational management. Physicists, such as Thomas Kuhn, who coined the term "paradigm shift," have had much to teach leaders about the nature of change in our modern world and its organizations (Sashkin, 2003). Along with advancements in scientific understanding, technology and global economics also play a role in defining leadership for the present age; they are the catalyst for an exponential rate of change impacting organizations today. Social scientists, organizational psychologists, and management researchers also have noted the effect of a rapidly changing world on leadership.

In sum, these insights build on a broad and deep foundation of change and leadership theory and practice spanning decades. They also provide a wealth of information for leaders seeking to successfully navigate their organizations in an ever-evolving, complex age. Thus, elementary school principals may be entering a new era, but not without the benefit of an enormous body of knowledge regarding organizational change and leadership.

Problem Statement

A growing body of literature provides elementary school principals with a rich framework of theories, models, and practices to enhance their effectiveness when leading during an era of continuous reforms. Ideas about change accumulated since the days of ancient Greece (Heraclitus, 2001) and evolved into theories of social psychology and organizational culture during the mid-twentieth century. Seminal works from these disciplines described a compelling link between social-cultural contexts and change (Lewin, 1947, Schein, 1968). As with the study of change, ideas about leadership have developed since antiquity, finding their rightful place in a range of disciplines. Marzano, et al. (2005) noted, "The traditions and beliefs about leadership in schools are no different from those regarding leadership in other institutions" (p.5). More than 100 years of leadership literature is available to guide elementary school principals' efforts (Sashkin, 2003). Further, Marzano, et al. (2005) asserted that "research over the last 35 years provides strong guidance on specific leadership behaviors for school administration" (p. 7).

Despite this substantial body of work to guide their efforts, many leaders, including school principals, struggle to lead effectively during an era of continuous reforms. Gilley, McMillan, and Gilley (2009) concluded, "Despite the proliferation of numerous theories, models, and multi-step approaches, leaders continue to lack a clear understanding of change…or the ability to successfully engage organizational members in change initiatives" (p. 38). Although the statistics vary, strong evidence reveals that efforts to institute change often fail (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990; Bibler 1989; Cope 2003; LaClair & Rao, 2002).

Like their counterparts in other institutions, school principals face significant challenges when leading during an era of continuous change. For school leaders, continuous change has come in the form of unrelenting educational reforms. In an all-too-familiar account, Fullan (2006) depicted several education reform initiatives in cities across the nation that were well funded, politically supported, and focused on all the "right" things. Despite these factors, school principals were unsuccessful at their attempts to effectively lead the changes necessary to achieve organizational objectives that would improve widespread practice. While organizational objectives for public schools arguably extend beyond the successful implementation of educational reforms, effective school leaders must rely heavily on their ability to engage stakeholders in continuous change.

Why do school principals continue to struggle in their efforts to lead effectively during an era of continuous reforms despite the volumes of theory, models, and practical suggestions available to assist them? There are a number of possible explanations. Some educational policy makers suggest that an organizational culture of a unionized status quo is to blame (ED, 2009). They contend that an absence of significant rewards and consequences impairs the success of educational reforms (Pallas, 2012). However, synthesis of the available change and leadership literature leads to a more likely cause: challenges principals face trying to mitigate the destabilizing effects of fundamental change. (Marzano et al., 2005). Fullan (2001) explained, "Leadership is difficult in [an era] of change because disequilibrium is common" (p. 6). In their meta-analysis of school leadership research, Marzano et al. (2005) found that out of 21 principal responsibilities, culture was perceived the most negatively when stakeholders were impacted by deep, fundamental change. Based on this research, it may be that elementary school principals have difficulty promoting

positive culture—defined as well-being, cohesion, cooperation, purpose, and vision—while attending to the complex and comprehensive demands placed on them when leading during an era of continuous reforms. Fullan (2009) concluded,

> The principalship is being placed in an impossible position. In short, the changes required to transform cultures are far deeper than we understood; principals do not have the capacity to carry out the new roles; and principals are burdened by too many role responsibilities that inhibit developing and practicing the new competencies— add-ons without anything being taken away…. In sum, the principal is key, though we haven't yet figured out how to position the role to fulfill the promise. (p. 68)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how effective elementary school principals described the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this inquiry were as follow:

1. How do effective elementary principals describe the experience of leading in an era of continuous reforms?

2. How do they describe the impact change has on their ability to meet organizational objectives?

3. How do they view the role of culture in their efforts to lead in an era of continuous reforms?

4. What other realities were revealed in this study?

Theoretical Orientation

The broad historical and social contexts surrounding change and leadership literature make a social constructivist epistemology a logical foundation for the present study. Summarizing Crotty's assumptions about constructivism, Creswell (2009) noted, "Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives" (p. 8). Creswell (2009) further explained that the emphasis of a constructivist study is on understanding participants' perspectives as they develop "subjective meanings of their experiences" through "interaction with others" (p. 8). Accordingly, the present study sought to understand the perspectives of elementary principals as they developed their own subjective meanings of the experience of leading their unique sites during an era of continuous reforms.

This study used Fullan's model of the *Forces for Leaders of Change* as a theoretical framework to guide and inform the research process. Harris (2006) observed that frameworks serve as a valuable complement to inductive inquiry methods of qualitative research. He noted, "Theory helps bring order to experience and provides a common language to explain behaviors and interactions " (p. 131). Particularly when describing pervasive topics of change, leadership, and organizational culture—as this research does— theoretical models can frame a qualitative study, providing structure to "reflect and portray comprehensive and complex sequence of social conditions" (Harris, 2006, p. 145).

Fullan's model provided a structure for considering the complex and interrelated ideas of leadership, change theory, and organizational culture, without restricting a richness of inquiry. Instead, Fullan's model served to provide what Harris (2006) called "one construction of reality that might provide order, clarification, and direction to a study"

(p. 142). Harris (2006) indicated reasonable cautions against oversimplifying the nature of socially-constructed realities, over-classifying data by the categories defined in any single model, and allowing theory to predetermine or force research designs and processes. Keeping these precautions in mind, I used Fullan's theory to "negotiate through layers of meaning," while connecting the present study to the greater body of research, theory, and practice on leading during an era of continuous reforms (Harris, 2006, p. 142).

Research Method

I employed a case study methodology to investigate this study's research questions. My investigation of complex and dynamic themes of leadership, change, and organizational culture was born of what Yin (2009) described as "the desire to understand complex social phenomena" while maintaining the "holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p. 4). In addition to this scope and logic of design, Yin (2009) noted that case study research is further defined by its data collection and analysis techniques. In order to construct a deeper understanding of both the phenomenon and the context relevant to my research questions, I collected data through multiple sources including interviews, artifacts, and contextual observations of the principals' real-life experiences leading during an era of continuous reforms. I employed an emergent design process consistent with the study's constructivist lens; however, theoretical propositions also loosely guided my data collection and analysis. Creswell (2009) noted that the emphasis of a constructivist study is on understanding participants' perspectives as they develop "subjective meanings of their experiences" through "interaction with others" (p. 8). While careful not to "interfere with the openness of naturalistic inquiry," I took advantage of what Patton (2002) referred to as "in-

the-field insights," to guide my inquiry in more relevant and authentic constructions of participants' experiences and deepen data collection (p. 436). During data analysis, I sought trends across multiple data sources, triangulated results for credibility, and considered how the data provided a richer understanding of the principals' perspectives on leading during an era of continuous reforms.

Significance of the Study

In describing their work on school leadership, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) noted, "Given the perceived importance of leadership in schools…one might assume that suggestions regarding leadership practices in schools are based on a clear, well-articulated body of research spanning decades. Unfortunately, this assumption is incorrect…" (p. 6). Marzano et al. explained that prior to their efforts, only a limited number of isolated studies "examined the quantitative relationship between building leadership and the academic achievement of students" (p. 6). The authors also described what they viewed as an inherent weaknesses of narrative reviews, namely, an overwhelming "bias by conventional wisdom" leading to potentially incomplete, crude, and invalid results (p. 9). Consequently, their research ruled out comprehensive narrative reviews of school leadership research and focused exclusively on a methodology of empirical meta-analysis.

Considering the purpose of the Marzano team's research—to identify specific behaviors of school leaders highly correlated with student academic achievement—their selection of a methodology that supports greater generalizability than narrative synthesis was an appropriate choice (Creswell, 2009). However, qualitative investigation of individuals leading schools during an era of continuous reforms can complement and extend the value of

findings such as Marzano's. Digging deeper into the realities of a complex educational

context allows researchers to glean rich and meaningful results beyond the limits of

controlled quantitative studies. Whitaker (2013) explained why quantitative research alone is

inadequate in educational settings:

> First of all, research about what works or doesn't work in schools rarely involves a
>
> control group. We don't lock half of the third graders in a closet while we teach the
>
> other half, then bring them out and compare the results. The reality is much more
>
> complex than that. (p. 37)

In addition to Whitaker's case against the limitations of a purely quantitative approach to

research in school settings, there is ample evidence to support the significance of qualitative

research to educational leadership. Powerful narrative summaries about effective leaders that

originally targeted corporate audiences have made a broad impact in the educational arena.

Marzano et al. (2005) considered two of these narrative summaries—*Good to Great* by Jim

Collins (2001) and *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Steven Covey (1996)—to be

significant and described their authors as prominent theorists who "greatly influenced

leadership practice in K-12 education" (p.19). Another author recognized for this distinction

was Michael Fullan. "Fullan's contribution to the theory on leadership is

expansive…focused on the process of change and.… characteristics of effective leadership

for change" (Marzano, 2005, p. 22).

Recognized by his peers as an expert in the field of effective change leadership for

public school systems K-12, Fullan has promoted his own framework for guiding the efforts

of school leaders of change. Much of his work describes "new ways of thinking about

change" that are both grounded in theory and supported by empirical studies (Marzano, 2005,

p. 22). Fullan (2009), however, stressed the significance of developing a deeper

understanding about the role of principal in effective leadership during an era of continuous

reforms. He noted, "An understanding of what reality is *from the point of view of people*

within the role [emphasis in original] is an essential starting point for constructing a practical

theory of the meaning and results of change attempts (p. 55).

Thus, while Fullan's (2009) framework of *Forces for Leaders of Change* incorporates

evidence found in empirical studies on effective leadership, he argued that considering

educational reforms from the perspective of principals is essential to developing practical

theory. The present study takes up Fullan's challenge to tell the story of effective principals

leading during an era of continuous reforms. In so doing, this study not only advances

current theory and practice, but also provides the opportunity to discover the greater meaning

embedded in principals' attempts to effectively lead organizations inextricably woven into a

dynamically evolving social and historical context of the modern era.

Assumptions

Leaders. This study is founded on a few basic assumptions. First, it is assumed that

the principals involved in this investigation are effective leaders, and not simply managers.

For the purpose of this study, effective leadership is defined as the ability to achieve

organizational objectives. Drucker (1967) made the distinction: "Management is doing

things right; leadership is doing the right things" (p. 11). Put another way, Covey (1989)

explained, "Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership

determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall" (p. 101). In contrast, Schein

(1993) held that an examination of an individual's cultural role was key to distinguishing management and leadership:

> One of the most decisive functions of leadership is the creation, the management, and sometimes even the destruction of culture…. If one wishes to distinguish leadership from management or administration, one can argue that leaders create and change cultures, while managers and administrators live within them. (p. 370)

Therefore, effective school leaders must have the vision to guide their faculties in the right direction and the capacity to create and change school cultures that can thrive in continuously-evolving environments. This study assumes that both leadership and management are important to organizational success; however, efficient management alone will be insufficient for effective leadership during an era of continuous reforms.

Change agents. Second, the present study assumes that effective leadership during an era of continuous reforms requires principals to play an important role in facilitating change initiatives at their schools. As previously noted, effective leadership is defined in this study as the ability to achieve organizational objectives. In the present age of high-stakes accountability, the primary objective for public schools in America perhaps is student achievement. Gabriel and Allington (2012) noted, "Current goals for public education are all written in terms of scores… As long as we define the purpose of public education by scores, we'll define… effectiveness as nothing other than a… test score" (p. 47). To this end, researchers have searched for correlations between leadership and the organizational objective of improved student test scores. Marzano, et al. (2005) found a "statistically significant correlation between school-level leadership and student achievement" (p. 26 of Appendix B). Thus, the evidence is clear: school leadership makes a difference. Numerous

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educational reforms aimed at raising student scores on standardized achievement tests have

taken note of such research, stretching the role of school principals to include serving as

change agent as well. Reform mandates now hold school principals publically accountable

for facilitating fundamental changes at their buildings.

As managers of building resources and leaders of site vision and culture, principals do

influence how messages about change are communicated to their faculty and staff. Schein

(1996a) described how leaders can apply a practical understanding of organizational culture

to facilitate change initiatives. For example, school principals can use cognitive broadening

to expand a familiar concept to include new and uneasy ideas, making it easier for groups to

accept uncomfortable change. In this way, elementary principals can influence how

stakeholders perceive changes by reframing externally mandated reforms impacting their

schools. Although Schein (1993) cautioned against believing "culture is easy to create or

change or that leaders are the only determiners of culture," he none-the-less argued, "The

only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture" (p. 370).

Whether or not school leaders are the most important factor in creating cultures where

adaptation and continuous improvement are the norm, they remain accountable for

implementation of change initiatives, as educational reforms become increasingly embedded

in both organizational objectives and legal mandates.

Fundamental Change. A third assumption of this study is that educational reforms

implemented by principals represent deep, or fundamental, changes. For the purpose of this

study, deep change is defined as any change that is perceived to be a break with the past,

outside of existing paradigms, conflicted with prevailing values and norms, or requiring new

knowledge and skills to implement (McREL's PES, p. 37). To determine whether or not a

change is deep, as the term is conceptualized here, the perspective of stakeholders must be considered. At the time of the present study, the district involved was implementing three significant educational reforms: replacement of existing Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to guide the state's public schools K-12 curriculum; all new, and remarkably more rigorous, student assessments modeled after those developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) coalition; and a new Teacher Leadership Evaluation (TLE) system, requiring the use of student test scores as a quantitative component accounting for 50% of teacher and administrator evaluations. For elementary schools, a fourth high-stakes educational reform also went into effect at the time of this study. Modification to the Reading Sufficiency Act (RSA) meant that all third grade students, with inconsequential exceptions, who scored Unsatisfactory on their more rigorous state-mandated reading assessments of new curriculum standards could not be promoted to the fourth grade. One example of the law's good cause "exemptions" stated that students being served on an Individualized Education Plan for reading could only be retained once under the law. In sum, teachers were asked to change what and how they taught, told their students would be assessed in new and challenging ways, and warned that their professional evaluations and their students' promotion would be based on the results of these new assessments. Complicating matters, a dramatic eleventh-hour legislative session in the spring of 2014 further compounded the impact of unrelenting change in Oklahoma's educational reforms. In response to political backlash against perceived federal intrusion, the 2014 legislative session adopted laws that explicitly banned the use of CCSS. In another last-minute reversal, legislators overrode Governor Fallin's veto of a modification to the retention mandates of the RSA. Retention decisions, at least for the

present, were returned to the authority of local control. Like news of a stay of execution,

third grade students and their families breathed an emotional sigh of relief when they learned

of the announcement on what was the last day of instruction for many elementary schools.

The cumulative effect of simultaneously implementing multiple high-stakes state-

mandated reforms, then watching as they were eliminated over the course of a few final

weeks of the school-year, meant that most teachers in the district experienced one or more of

the criteria for deep change. To be fair, this magnitude of reform also represented deep

change for building and district leadership.

Positive School Culture. The final assumption for this study is that not all culture is

positive. Defining exactly what constituted positive school culture for the purpose of this

study was critical to clearly focus the lens through which I considered its data. Gruenert and

Whitaker (2015) noted, "Writers such as Seymour Sarason, Michael Fullan, Andy

Hargreaves, Mike Schmoker, Terry Deal, and Kent Peterson all agree that culture is both

very important for leaders to understand and also a difficult topic to pin down" (p. 27).

Organizational (school) culture has been defined by many; however, the work of Schein

(1993) was foundational to the present study. He defined school culture as a pattern of

shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved problems of external adaptation

and internal integration that is taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think,

and feel (Schein, 1993, p. 373). This definition was enhanced by the work of Deal and

Kennedy (2000), adding that shared beliefs guide behavior about how things are done.

Just as there are a number of ways to define culture, they are many ways to describe

it. For example, culture can be described by how it is revealed in an organization's climate,

mission and vision, language, humor, routines, rituals and ceremonies, norms, roles, symbols,

stories, heroes, and values and beliefs (Geertz, 1973; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

Description of organizational culture also includes typologies, such as collaborative,

fragmented (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996), or toxic (Deal & Kennedy, 2000).

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) observed that there is "no one-size-fits-all recipe for

ensuring a positive culture… but there are identifiable ingredients that the most effective

cultures have in common" (p. 48). It fell beyond the scope of the present study to consider

all the many ingredients of positive school culture. Instead, in keeping with the

comprehensive research of Marzano et al. (2005) that informed the development of its

problem statement, elements defining positive school culture for the present study were

drawn from associated behaviors for their principal responsibility for culture: well-being,

cohesion, cooperation, purpose, and a shared vision (p. 48).

Definition of Terms

Change Capacity. The extent to which a school develops new knowledge, skills, and
     competencies, new resources, and new shared identity and motivation to work
     together for greater change. (Fullan, 2009, p. 10)

Change Knowledge. Understanding and insight about the process of change and the key
     drivers that make for successful change in practice. (Fullan, 2009, p. 9)

Deep (Fundamental) Change. A change that is perceived to be a break with the past, outside
     of existing paradigms, conflicted with prevailing values and norms, or requiring new
     knowledge and skills to implement. (McREL's PES, p. 37)

Education Insiders. Individuals and groups working to improve public education from the

 inside out.

Effective Change. Change initiatives that result in modified employee behavior toward

 improved organizational outcomes beyond superficial compliance.

Effective Leadership. The ability of leaders to achieve organizational objectives.

High Levels of Academic Achievement. Demonstrating on overall score of a "B" or higher on

 the Oklahoma State Department of Education's A-F accountability report card.

Lasting Change. Changes that endure as an ongoing part of the organizational culture.

Organizational (School) Culture. A pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned

 as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration that is taught to

 new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel (Schein, 1993, p. 373).

 In other words, shared beliefs that guide behavior about how things are done (Deal &

 Kennedy, 2000).

Positive School Culture. Elements of positive school culture are defined as well-being,

 cohesion, cooperation, purpose, and vision (Marzano et al., 2005).

Positive Climate. An environment that promotes feelings of belonging and hope (Gallup,

 2015).

Traditionalism. A way of operating that promotes a bias toward the people and processes

 that have historically proven successful while ignoring evidence of problems that

 challenge this bias.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the notion that leadership is in need of a new metaphor, one that is more closely aligned to the zeitgeist of the present age. Rapid changes in technology, communications, global economics, and scientific understandings have resulted in what Covey (1989) called a "metamorphosis taking place in most every industry and profession" (p. 101). Next, I explained how this metamorphosis impacts both the context and the work of school leaders. I made a case that despite a broad and deep body of knowledge on leadership and change to guide their efforts, elementary school principals struggle to lead effectively during an era of continuous reforms. The purpose of this study was to explore how effective elementary school principals described the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms. Next, I detailed the relevance of both an epistemology of social constructivism and a theoretical framework of Fullan's *Forces for Leaders of Change* for guiding the evolution of a case study design and providing structure for consideration of results. Finally, I described important assumptions and the significance of the current study for building upon existing theory, research, and practice.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Since the earliest days of civilization, great minds have contemplated the existing knowledge, experience, and deeper understandings of change and leadership. In the fifth century B.C., Greek philosopher Heraclitus remarked, "Nothing endures but change" (Heraclitus, 2001). Commenting on the challenge of leadership during an era of continuous reforms, in the first century B.C. Syrus noted, "Anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm" (Darius & Jun, 1856). Great minds continue to consider change during the conceptual age of the current century, an era defined by fundamental changes in ways of seeing, learning, understanding, and interacting with the world (Pink, 2006). Wisdom about change and leadership accumulated over millennia guides present efforts to develop practical models for leaders challenged with holding the helm during a time when seas are not so calm.

Leaders of the modern era have access to a wealth of cumulative knowledge regarding effective strategies for navigating the stormy seas of change. Despite this substantial body of work to guide their efforts, effective leadership during an era of continuous reforms remains a challenge for many organizational leaders, including elementary school principals. Although there are several possible explanations for the

inconsistency between knowledge and practice, one possibility may be that principals have difficulty promoting positive culture while attending to the complex demands of their role when leading during an era of continuous reforms.

Change Theory and Models

Although change knowledge has evolved over millennia, Kurt Lewin's seminal work in the 1930s and 40s introduced formal change theory to the halls of academia. Cherry (2013) described Lewin as "the Father of Social Psychology," whose "work pioneered the use of scientific methods to study social behavior" (para. 10). Burnes (2004) observed, "Few social scientists have received the level of praise that has been heaped upon Kurt Lewin" (p. 311), and Schein (1988) referred to Lewin as "the intellectual father of contemporary theories of applied behavioral science" (p. 239). Lewin's robust theory regarding change—coupled with his insight about the compelling human need for practical solutions addressing change—make him a critical starting place for inquiry on change theory as well as a relevant voice in the evolution of and modern conversation about change.

Kurt Lewin: Change Theory Emerges

Influenced by Wertheimer's teaching in Berlin, Lewin (1935) reported that Gestalt theory was foundational to his field research. Briefly, gestalt refers to an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts (Koffka , 1935). For Lewin, this meant the phenomena of social behavior could not be understood by dissecting field data into discrete boxes of cause and effect. Instead, Lewin considered individual behavior to be the result of complex interactions between persons and their

environment (Schein, 1996a). Although elements of Lewin's change theory were meant to be considered in whole, each contributed an important meaning to his change theory.

Field Theory. In an age of electromagnetic force fields and unprecedented connectivity across the planet, the idea of Field Theory may not seem revolutionary. In the early 1930s, however, when Lewin was developing his work at the University of Iowa, Field Theory was something akin to science fiction. Lewin (1943) used Field Theory to describe social behavior, stating, "One should view the present situation—the status quo—as being maintained by certain conditions or forces" (p. 172). Burnes (2004) noted that Lewin saw "individual behavior [as] a function of the group environment or field… which [itself is] in a continuous state of adaptation which [Lewin] termed 'quasi-stationary equilibrium'" (p. 312).

Group Dynamics. Closely tied to the idea of Field Theory, Group Dynamics was a term introduced by Lewin to describe how change efforts in isolation are overcome by conforming pressures of the group. "Consequently," explained Burnes (2004), "the focus of change must be at the group level and should concentrate on factors such as group norms, roles, interactions and socialization processes to create 'disequilibrium' and change" (p. 312).

Action Research. In Lewin's (1946) words, action research involves a circle of "planning, action, and fact-finding about the results of the action" (p. 206). In other words, a cycle of research leads to an action plan, which generates further research, evaluation, and the next action step. According to Schein (1996a), despite its deceptive simplicity, "The concept of action research is absolutely fundamental to any model of

working with human systems" (p. 65). Burnes (2004) explained how action research

relates to the gestalt of Lewin's first two elements of change theory:

> Action Research draws on both Field Theory, to identify the forces that focus on
>
> the group to which the individual belongs, and Group Dynamics, to understand
>
> why group members behave in the way they do when subjected to these forces. It
>
> stresses that for change to be effective, it must be a participative and collaborative
>
> process which involves all of those concerned. (p. 312)

Three Steps of Planned Change. Lewin (1946) integrated the above elements

into what he called Planned Change, a three step process of unfreezing, moving, and

refreezing. He believed these were necessary in order to avoid regression to previous

group behaviors. As Lewin (1946) clarified, "A change towards a higher level of group

performance is frequently short lived; after a 'shot in the arm,' group life soon returns to

the previous level" (p. 228). Below is a summary of how Burnes (2004) described the

ways in which Lewin's three stages of Planned Change encourage greater permanency

for change initiatives.

Unfreezing. Unfreezing refers to the difficult and varied process of destabilizing

the existing quasi-stationary equilibrium, described by Field Theory, that motivates

individuals and groups to change.

Moving. Moving refers to the process of evaluating options through group

learning in context, as described by Action Research.

Refreezing. Refreezing is influenced by Group Dynamics, as groups stabilize at a

new quasi-stationary equilibrium with changes in culture, norms, and practices.

Together, the elements of Lewin's change theory represented a solid foundation for research and practice that endured virtually unchallenged for over three decades. Dramatic revolutions in the domains of politics, economics, and technology raised questions about Lewin's relevance to a world experiencing changes at an unprecedented rate.

From Lewin to Complexity: A Timeline of Change Theory

From the 1950s all the way through to the early 1980s, Lewin's Planned Change model remained popular as a way for social psychologists, researchers, and organizations to approach change efforts. During the 1970s, however, rising fuel costs, competition with corporate Japan, and rapid inflation led to criticisms that his Planned Change model was too slow and incremental for organizations needing to transform themselves in response to economic pressures
(Burnes, 2005).

Emergent Approaches. In the 1980s, an emergent approach to change theory rejected previous ideas of incremental change. Instead of describing slow changes over time, two new models emphasized organizational change that took place at a much more rapid pace. First, in the Punctuated Equilibrium model, Romanelli and Tushman (1994) described organizations that evolve "through relatively long periods of stability… punctuated by relatively short bursts of fundamental change" (p. 1141). In contrast, Burnes (2005) explained that proponents of the Continuous Transformation model argued, "Organizations must develop the ability to change themselves continuously in a fundamental manner" (p. 76). I created Table 2.1 to illustrate how Emergent approaches developed as part of the evolution of change theory over time.

Table 2.1

Change Theory Over Time

	1950 – 1980	1980 – 2000		2000 – present
Approach	Incremental	Emergent		Third Kind of Change
		Punctuated Equilibrium	Continuous Transformation	
Frequency	As needed	Occasionally	Continuous	In response to system issues
Scope	Unique to individuals, settings	Organizational level	Organizational level	Groups or teams
Intended Impact	Isolated	Transformative until stabilized again	Transformative	Transformative
Source	Individuals	Politics and Power	Top-down Coercion or Bottom-up Input	Groups or self-organized teams
Exemplar	Organizational Development	Postmodernism	Corporate Restructuring or TQM	Planned Change, Complexity

Note: Based on the work of Burnes (2005).

In addition to considering the rate of change, new ways of analyzing organizational change resulted from dramatic economic and political challenges of the 1970s and 80s. The role of power and politics came to the forefront as change models considered the source and purpose of change initiatives. Advocating a Postmodern approach exemplified by an explosion of nationalism in post cold war eastern Europe, Hatch (1997) argued that organizational changes must "create opportunities for freedom and innovation rather than simply for further domination" (p. 368). The Culture-Excellence model advised organizations to develop cultures that encouraged change

initiatives to start at the bottom and work their way up the organization, unless top-down coercion was necessary for an organization's survival (Burnes, 2005).

Complexity Theories. The Emergent models for change lasted nearly two decades, until scientific advances at the dawn of the millennium led change theory into dramatically new territory. Based on the ideas of several theories often grouped under the overarching term of Complexity Theories, this new approach to organizational change developed from the natural sciences. Wheatley (2006) argued that using science as a metaphor to describe organizations and the changes within them is not new, but the science should be:

> If we are going to draw from science to create and manage organizations, design research, and to form ideas about organizational design, planning, economics, human motivation, and change processes… then we need to at least ground our work in the science of our times. (p. 8)

Morgan (2006) also described the value of "using different metaphors to understand the complex and paradoxical character of organizational life [and thus]… manage and design organizations in ways that we may not have thought possible before" (p. 13). Scientific revolutions have recently transformed and connected the world in dynamic and complex ways never before witnessed, resulting in the evolution of change theory as well.

Complexity Theories—including chaos, dissipative, and complex adaptive systems—have several common threads that tie them to the new sciences (Burnes, 2005). The first thread tethering Complexity Theories to the modern scientific paradigm is language grounded in a holistic and dynamic worldview. Whether considering macro-patterns of weather or the behavior of subatomic particles, advances in science and

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technology have not merely provided new understandings about the world—they have changed the very way we see and describe it. Embedded in this new language is an appreciation for the interconnected nature of systems. Systemic thinking is a way of seeing relationships and influence, once accepted as nonexistent, suddenly appear. Studies of quantum physics, for example, reveal that the universe is exploding with the possibilities of realities, often defined by the nature of relationships across the system (Bohm, 1978, Wheatley, 2006).

A second important thread among Complexity Theories is an understanding that chaos may conceal a hidden order beneath what appears to be utter randomness. Scientists tracking complicated patterns from weather data to the flocking behaviors of birds have shown that chaos and order are actually twin attributes of dynamic, non-linear (complex) systems. Computers can now reveal strange attractor patterns, guided by hidden order-generating rules. These rules define the edge of chaos for a system, providing bounded instability (Bohm, 1978; Prigogine, 1978; Wheatley, 2006). Patterns found in these scientific discoveries unfold in irregular but similar forms as a result of self-organization. Prigogine (1997), a Nobel Prize Winner in Chemistry, found any open system has the capacity to respond to change and disorder by reorganizing itself at a higher level of organization. All that is required are a few guiding principles to express the system's overall identity while allowing for high degrees of individual autonomy (Fullan, 1993; Weick, 1995; Wheatley, 2006).

Despite the evolution of change theory over the years, the wisdom in seeking to understand the nature of change remains as timeless as the rivers. Observing the constancy of change, in the fifth century B.C. Heraclitus said, "No man ever steps in the

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same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man" (Heraclitus, 2001, p. 33). Lewin (1947) noted that group life is always changing, like a river that moves, but keeps a recognizable form. Finally, Wheatley (2006) commented that like a stream, organizational identity is sustained; "the forms change, but the mission remains clear" (p. 18).

Finding Lewin in Complexity: Back to Basics

The world has experienced revolutionary changes since Lewin introduced his change theory and model for Planned Change. For a time, his approach was seen as out of touch with the rapid and dynamic nature of modern change. Kanter (1992) criticized Lewin's model as "quaintly linear and static… so wildly inappropriate that it is difficult to see why it has not only survived but prospered" (p. 10). Since the rising popularity of Complexity Theories to frame ideas about change, however, many authors have returned to Lewin's model, recognizing in it a fundamental quality that endures today.

Field Theory. Lewin's concept of Field Theory emphasized the idea that invisible forces inextricably connect and influence individuals within a system. Wheatley (2006) observed that Complexity Theories describe a world where nothing is isolated, not even by "empty" space. Experiments in quantum physics, for example, demonstrated how subatomic particles influence the behavior of other subatomic particles even when they are removed from the same system (atom) and placed at vast relative distances from one another. Other experiments revealed how waves of energy flow through space much like those in the ocean. Lewin would be very much at home discussing social behavior from the systemic view of Complexity Theories; they marry up well with his application of Gestalt theory.

Group Dynamics. In his work facilitating social changes, Lewin (1947) found that lasting and meaningful change was best effected at the group level. Much like the change described by Complexity Theories, Lewin held that Group Dynamics required a deep and fundamental transformation of the values, beliefs, and norms of groups for change to occur.

Action Research. Lewin's research regarding fundamental social changes involved working with members of a group. Complexity theories also hold that attractions for systemic change occur when fundamental changes take place within subsystems. Burnes (2004) put forth, "Small-scale incremental change and large-scale radical transformational change will need to be rejected in favour of a 'third kind' which lies between these two, and which is continuous and based on self-organization at the team/group level" (p. 318). Looking back at Lewin's approach through the modern lens of Complexity Theories, his work more closely represents this 'third kind' of change. Lewin's research reflected a desire to enact transformational changes to resolve broad issues of social conflict, yet his efforts to facilitate these changes occurred through participative and collaborative groups.

Planned Change. Finally, the three stage system developed by Lewin may not be as "quaint" and "static" as Kanter (1992) proposed. Contemporary consensus holds that any level of change, whether systemic or individual, is motivated by a discomforting disequilibrium. Lewin called this unfreezing. Lewin's second stage, moving, described the process of evaluating the hidden rules that govern a system to broaden or adapt these in ways that allow change. Complexity theories also put forth that dynamic, non-linear systems adapt by following fundamental order-generating rules. These rules, once

challenged through disequilibrium or other pressures, can be identified and changed to allow the system to function at a higher version of itself (Wheatley, 2006). Finally, Lewin's third stage of refreezing recognized that in order for changes to be lasting and meaningful, they had to become the new norm. He described this as a quasi-stationary equilibrium. Complexity theories contend that as a system continues to provide self-referencing feed back loops using order-generating rules, a new order emerges from the chaos (Wheatley, 2006).

One of Lewin's studies illustrates that he was already putting to work concepts found in modern complexity theory. Always considering social dynamics, Lewin worked with a group of housewives who were reluctant to use canned meat products when preparing meals for their families. Lewin was able to help the women first identify and then reconsider the hidden rules associated with their avoidance. Later, each positive experience that Lewin's housewives had with canned meats in preparing meals or sharing recipes with their friends, reinforced a self-referencing feed back loop where a new equilibrium included their use (Schein, 1996a).

Literature on Leadership

Similar to change literature, the body of research on leadership has evolved in response to changes in historical and social contexts. Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) distilled the development of literature on leadership into four primary time periods. Based on their work, I created Table 2.2 to provide a brief synthesis of their findings.

Table 2.2
Leadership Research Over Time

	1900 – 1945	1945 – 1965	1969 – 1978	1970s – present
Research Focus	Leader Traits	Leader Behaviors	Situational Leadership	Transformational Leadership
Measurement	I.Q. Tests	Relationship versus results orientation	Quality of exchanges	Systemic change
Ongoing Study	Essential groups of traits	Integration with other research	Leader-member exchanges	Systemic change

Note: Based on the work of Sashkin and Sashkin (2003, pp. 18-37).

Great Man Theory

Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) began their summary with the leadership approach that dominated the United States at the turn of the century: the Great Man Theory. This theory holds great leaders are simply born that way, and the task of social science is to identify which individuals possess these inborn leadership qualities. The authors pointed out how the development and widespread application of IQ tests to screen men entering the United States Armed Forces resulted in large quantities of data for researchers. However, after reviewing hundreds of studies on leader traits, Stogdill (1948) concluded that no individual traits were statistically significant for identifying leaders. Despite Stogdill's lesser revelation that *groups of traits* were associated with leadership, his findings ultimately closed the door on most studies of leader traits in favor of research into leader behaviors.

Leader Behaviors

In the mid 20th century, researchers on leadership focused their efforts on studying leader behaviors. Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) detailed how studies based out of the University of Michigan, Ohio State University, and Harvard all centered on leader behaviors that were oriented toward relationships and results. Ultimately, social-emotional and task-centered behaviors (under various names) became two dimensions that served as the foundation for leadership development programs. Fleishman and Harris (1962) concluded that these efforts to improve leadership by providing training on relationship- and result-centered behaviors were unsuccessful due to the "wash out effect"; in other words, when leaders reentered their same environments, cultures, and expectations, they often returned to their previous ways of behaving. Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) concluded that while leadership training did prompt some improvement, it did not result in dramatic improvements in organizational objectives such as productivity.

Situational Leadership

Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) described the third period of research as situational or contingent leadership. This theory held that leadership was not simply about leader traits or behaviors; rather, it was about leaders doing the right things at the right time. Contingent upon the situation, leaders must sometimes be task-focused. Other times they must center their efforts on relationships. Further, leaders may occasionally need to delegate or let followers alone. To determine the situation, Hersey and Blanchard (1969) suggested leaders must consider employee readiness. They defined readiness as a combination of an employee's skill and motivation.

Recent research in the area of situational leadership emphasized the leader-member exchange, or LMX, to investigate ways that leaders exchange rewards for performance. Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) noted that with rewards ranging from financial benefits or preferential treatment to social or emotional exchanges, the LMX model fails to "specify what actions a leader must take under which contingencies… [in order to create] a positive exchange relationship" (p.30). Furthermore, when considering the impact of situational leadership, Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) argued that it was little more than "applied common sense" adding, "In terms of research, it's simply not clear how much of a difference situational leadership makes, or whether it does matter at all" (p. 26).

Transformational Leadership

In contrast to the transactional focus of leader-member exchanges, Burns (1978) ushered in a new paradigm in leadership research. His approach, transformational leadership, asserted that exceptional leaders go beyond getting results to fundamentally transforming followers:

> A leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result… is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. (p.4)

In, *Leadership*, Burns (1978) illustrated how extraordinary leaders of the 20th century, from Ghandi to Hitler, personified his concept of transformational leadership. By engaging followers on a deeper and more compelling level, these leaders transcended the

simple leader-follower exchange, creating revolutionary systemic changes experienced

throughout the world. In contrasting transactional and transformational leadership,

Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) wrote, "Burns argued that leadership is about transforming

people and social organizations, not about motivating employees to exchange work

efforts for pay" (p. 39). In this way, they asserted, the ideas of Burns were as

transformational as the leaders he highlighted. Burns not only united the ideas of change

and leadership, he defined leadership in terms of the leader's ability to transform entire

organizations, systems, and even the world.

Practical Models for Leaders

Known for saying, "There is nothing so practical as good theory," Lewin was a

firm believer in the application of theory to resolve social conflicts (Schein, 1996a). In

fact, his commitment to practical results could be credited with blurring the lines between

change theory and practical models for leading during an era of continuous reforms. In *A*

Dynamic Theory of Personality (1935), for example, Lewin argued that psychology

needed to "transition from an abstract classificatory procedure to an essentially concrete

constructive method" (p. 93). So how does Lewin's change theory guide practical

models for school principals during an era of continuous reforms?

Change As Managed Organizational Learning

A prominent expert on organizational development, Schein (1996a) put forth that

"Lewin's basic model of change leads to a whole range of insights and new concepts that

enrich change theory and make change dynamics more understandable and manageable" (p. 63). Change management is a consistent theme throughout today's educational leadership literature. According to Schein (1996a), when leaders initiate planned changes, they must unfreeze the cultural assumptions that act as barriers to change. This proposition can unsettle followers, as it brings disequilibrium to the status quo. Awareness of Lewin's change theory, Schein (1996a) maintained, helps leaders during an era of continuous reforms understand the importance of balancing a compelling need for change with psychological safety. It is not enough for school leaders to convince followers that change is necessary; they must also ensure stakeholders feel safe enough to step outside the boundaries of existing hidden assumptions.

After unfreezing, Lewin's moving stage described how followers learn to think in new ways about their hidden cultural assumptions. In referring to moving, Schein (1996a) explained, "Change is better defined as learning" (p. 71). This is not a deviation from Lewin's original theoretical framework; rather, it serves as an important clarification of his moving phase. Schein (1996a) elaborated, "Cultures change through enlarging and broadening, not through destruction of elements, and [this is] why the involvement of the learner is so crucial to any kind of planned change or… managed learning" (p. 71). Schein's (1996a) suggestions for leaders to use semantic redefining, cognitive broadening, and new standards of judgment to expand followers' attitudes and behaviors serves as another practical application of Lewin's theory for principals leading during an era of continuous reforms.

Finally, Schein (1996a) encouraged leaders during an era of continuous reforms to appreciate Lewin's concept of group dynamics. He argued that lasting change, the kind

described by Lewin's refreezing stage, is best accomplished if the group that holds the cultural norms is trained together. Otherwise, individuals who participate in change initiatives often regress to previous patterns of behavior after returning to an environment where group dynamics support conflicting hidden cultural assumptions (Fleishman and Harris, 1962).

Other experts on organizational learning have also proposed a number of practical strategies for leaders during an era of continuous reforms that can be traced back to Lewin's Change Theory. Like Schein, Senge (1990) suggested leaders must understand how to create the disequilibrium that motivates organizational change. In an interview with O'Neil (1995) about how school leaders, in particular, can employ organizational learning, Senge contended that disequilibrium cannot be directed from the top; followers are too cynical and compliant. In his work on challenges facing school leaders during an era of continuous reforms, Elmore (2004) added historical context to explain why top-down attempts by the national accountability movement have proven ineffective at creating the disequilibrium needed for unfreezing school cultures:

> No external accountability scheme can be successful in the absence of internal accountability…Cultures do not change by mandate; they change by the specific displacement of existing norms (*values*), structures, and processes (*behaviors*) by others; the process of cultural change depends fundamentally on modeling the new values and behavior that you expect to displace the existing ones. (p. 71)

While Elmore's statement expressed his issue with present educational reforms mandated at levels high above the building principal's authority, it highlighted practical strategies

for school principals serving as learning leaders in their organizations when cultural changes are necessary.

In his interview with ONeil (1995), Senge also emphasized that school leaders should implement changes based on systems thinking, where learning occurs in context as teams of teachers work together in safe and reflective environments. Similarly, Elmore (2004) held that organizational learning must occur in context, stating, "Teachers must learn to do the right things in the setting in which they work… engag[ing] in continuous and sustained learning about their practice" (p. 73). Beyond collaborative teacher teams, Senge argued that all levels of the educational organization must build a shared vision, engage in dialogue, and reflect on their mental models (O'Neil, 1995).

Fullan's Model: Forces for Leaders of Change

When it comes to leading public schools K-12 during an era of continuous reforms, Fullan is recognized as an authority. With nearly a dozen books on the matter in as many years, his work serves as a valuable tool for school principals struggling to hold the helm in stormy seas (Marzano et al., 2005). Fullan's *Forces for Leaders of Change* serves as an open-ended framework for addressing real issues facing school principals. The individual forces are free from a rigid sequential structure, can be skipped as the situation may require, and contain a symbiotic and dynamic relationship reflective of the complex work of school principals struggling to lead during an era of continuous reforms. I have uncovered no other framework that organizes the complexities of the vast body of change and leadership knowledge in such a cohesive and relevant manner as Fullan's model. I created Table 2.3 to illustrate the strong foundation of research and theory embedded in his practical model, *Forces for Leaders of Change*.

Table 2.3

Research and Theory Foundations for Fullan's Eight Forces

Eight Forces for Leaders of Change	Key Elements	Connection to Literature
Engage moral purpose	Define the purposes of education: • economic opportunities, • health and well-being, and • closing the achievement gap	Planned Change (disrupt the status quo, motivation) Leadership Traits (integrity)
Develop evaluative cultures	Deepen the meaning, create assessments for learning, conduct action research beyond accountability	Organizational Culture (modifying group norms)
Focus on leading change	Distribute leadership to improve sustainability and active engagement	Managed Organizational Learning (develop capacity) Situational Leadership (when to delegate)
Focus on coherence	Consider alignment and connections within the big picture	Managed Organizational Learning (done by teams in context) Transformational Leadership (vision, ethics, culture, values)
Cultivate tri-level development	Encourage systemic thinking across networks of teams	Complexity Theories (dynamic, non-linear systems)
Build capacity	Promote learning new skills and understandings, a shared identity, and motivation to work together	Managed Organizational Learning (modifying group norms, done by teams in context)
Develop learning cultures	Embed learning in the doing, collective commitments to improve, and learning from one another	Situational Leadership (when and how to use limited resources)
Understand the change process	Encourage energy, ideas, and commitment through ownership; establish the conditions for continuous improvement	Planned Change (refreezing new norms) Leadership Traits (flexibility, persistence, humility)

Change Theory. Fullan's *Forces for Leaders of Change* provides a

comprehensive and practical application of Change Theory, including key elements of

social psychology, organizational culture, Complexity Theories, and managed

organizational learning. For example, *Engage Moral Purpose* and *Develop Evaluative*

Cultures are two of Fullan's forces that help leaders motivate their organizations to

disrupt the status quo and embrace changes that deepen meaning and accountability.

Furthermore, three of the forces describe practical strategies to assist leaders with

organizational structures during an era of continuous reforms. Fullan's *Focus on Leading*

Change encourages distributed leadership, a systemic approach that research has shown

promotes active organizational learning (Senge, 1990). Alignment and meaningful

connections, also components of Complexities Theories, are emphasized in his *Focus on*

Coherence. Fullan's *Cultivate Tri-level Development* refers to organizational structures

that facilitate dynamic interaction across local, state, and national levels. While this level

of collaboration is not something typically under the control of individual school

principals, they can still benefit from its suggestion of systemic thinking across networks

of teams. Adding to literature on organizational culture and structures, three of Fullan's

forces apply key ideas from managed organizational learning research. *Build Capacity*

offers school principals ideas about how their sites can learn new skills and

understandings. *Develop Learning Cultures* explains the critical role of action research,

as collective learning takes place in context. Finally, Fullan's force of *Understand the*

Change Process encourages principals to be flexible and persistent as changes, including

mandated education reforms, refreeze into the new norm at their schools.

Leadership Literature. In addition to its strong foundation of change theory,

Fullan's *Forces for Leaders of Change* reflects critical research from leadership literature

that remains pertinent today including leader traits and behaviors, situational leadership,

and transformational leadership. One area of leadership research included in Fullan's

model is the renewed interest in Stogdill's (1948) work on groups of traits for identifying

leadership potential. Frequently mentioned in current leadership literature (Collins, 2001;

Covey, 1996; Hesselbein, 1996; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Pink, 2006;

Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003), groups of character traits such as integrity, humility, courage,

and flexibility are central to Fullan's *Engage Moral Purpose* and *Understand the Change*

Process. Situational leadership literature supports Fullan's *Focus on Leading Change*

and *Build Capacity*, as school principals use their best judgment to determine when and

how to distribute leadership and how to best use limited resources to meet organizational

needs. Most importantly, his *Forces for Leaders of Change* model relies heavily on what

Wheatley (2006) referred to as "non-material forces in organizations—culture, values,

vision, ethics" (p. 54). These qualities cannot be observed independent of behavior, yet

they are so inextricably woven into Fullan's forces that he forges strong ties between his

model and seminal works on transformational leadership (Collins, 2001; Covey, 1996).

For example, his *Focus on Coherence* emphasizes a look at the big picture, alignment

between key issues, a focus on connections, and authentic creation by teams in the field.

All of these elements allude to the vision, values, culture, and ethics work of great

transformational leaders

Discrepancies Between Knowledge and Practice

Despite the substantial body of work in the areas of change theory and leadership to guide their efforts, many organizational leaders, including elementary school principals, struggle to effectively lead during an era of continuous reforms. In referencing the work of Armenakis and Harris (2002), Gilley, McMillan, and Gilley (2009) best articulated the perplexing discrepancy between extensive knowledge and effective practice in the area of change leadership:

> Research has attempted to explain the fundamentals of change, explain why change is so difficult to achieve, and develop models to manage the change process. Despite the proliferation of numerous theories, models, and multistep approaches, leaders continue to lack a clear understanding of change, its antecedents, effective processes, or the ability to successfully engage organizational members in change initiatives. (p.38)

Essential to note is that the distinction between leading change and leading during times of change is often blurred for school principals in an era of continuous reforms. If leadership efficacy is determined by the ability to achieve organizational objectives, clearly, leaders must understand how to lead change when the successful implementation of new initiatives is described as a primary organizational objective. As Gilley et al. (2009) noted, leaders' inabilities to successfully accomplish the objectives of change initiatives represents a significant problem for organizations desperate to adapt in an ever-changing world. Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990) concluded that "change programs often fail or make the situation worse" (p. 59). Kotter (1995) concurred that the majority of change efforts were closer to failure than success. Beer and Nohria

(2000) reported change effort failure rates of one third, while LaClair and Rao (2002) found that of 40 major change initiatives, 78% realized a third or less of the value expected and 58% were deemed failures. Cope (2003) suggested failure rates for change initiatives may be as high as 80% to 90%.

Failed Educational Change Initiatives

Although the studies above represent business and industry, public school leaders from K-12 frequently struggle with the same inability to successfully accomplish the organizational goals of educational reforms. In a review of several high-profile education reforms, Fullan (2006) described a number of examples of failed efforts. These efforts represented reforms in the areas of standards, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and teacher leader effectiveness.

Standards. The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform (2005) studied standards-based reforms implemented in districts in Seattle, Milwaukee, and Chicago. Fullan (2006) argued that a number of characteristics of these change programs should have made them successful: political support at all levels, literacy and math focus, learning data, professional development, system wide change, multimillion dollar funding, and reasonable expectations of progress over time. Despite the presence of all these factors, the Cross City Campaign (2005) revealed, "The districts were unable to change and improve practice on a large scale" (p. 4). Thus, educational leaders at multiple levels were unable to accomplish intended objectives of the change initiatives. Fullan (2006) concluded that although school leaders considered many factors to support their changes, because they completely overlooked "any notion about *school or district culture*… they [were] bound to fail" [emphasis is original] (p. 4).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Another educational reform that has struggled to achieve its intended purpose is the use of PLCs. Fullan (2006) argued that while the change theory behind implementation of PLCs is sound, the way they are actually put into practice in schools often results in superficial, isolated program innovations. When this occurs, Fullan (2006) noted, school leaders fail to accomplish their intended goal: to develop enduring capacities that change school cultures.

Teacher Leader Effectiveness. Finally, and of particular note to the present study, Fullan (2006, 2009) analyzed two studies highlighting the failed attempts of initiatives to dramatically improve teaching and learning through developing principal leadership. Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006) studied reforms in San Diego City Schools where principals "were called upon to be leaders of instruction" (p. 75). Fullan (2009) noted principals were encouraged to "spend more time in classrooms, engaging teachers in conversations about instruction, and to spend less time on administrative, logistical, and financial matters…[resulting in] highly detailed and explicit roles for principals as instructional change agents" (p. 67). Similarly, a case study by Supovitz (2006) considered efforts in Duval County, Florida to provide training and support for principals as "integral to the spread of instructional reform" (p. 85). Noting "enormous difficulties… in linking school leadership to instructional improvement across classrooms," Fullan (2009) concluded that reforms in both San Diego and Duval County failed to accomplish their intended goal of dramatically improving student learning (p. 67).

If school principals make a difference in student achievement (Marzano, et al.,

2005), why were reforms aimed at developing principals unsuccessful in their objective

of instructional improvements? Fullan (2009) provided three explanations for the

failures. The first reason is supported by research in organizational culture and managed

organizational learning: school principals were expected to carry out the vision of central

administrators, a top-down approach to change that research has shown is rarely effective

(Elmore, 2004; Senge, 1996). According to Fullan, another factor in the failures

described in the two studies was an underestimation of the role of instructional leader,

which requires capacities often beyond the professional development experiences

provided to principals. Research has shown that instructional leadership encompasses a

broad set of responsibilities and a mastery of numerous processes (Hallinger and Murphy,

1998). These include the daunting task of actively engaging teachers with the shared

belief in a common purpose through a collaborative model where distributed leadership

builds the capacity for continuous improvement throughout the school (Leithwood and

Jantzi, 2000). Finally, Fullan's third explanation for why school principals struggled is

compelling; new roles and responsibilities were added to the already staggering

expectations of principals without considering whether they were even possible under

current conditions. Numerous studies have noted the rapidly evolving role of principal

and the implications of expanded expectations for school leaders in the modern era of

continuous improvement (Allen, 2003; Crow, Hausman, and Scribner, 2002; Hoppey,

2006; Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, 2005; Pounder, Reitzug, and Young, 2002).

Fullan (2009) summarized challenges facing school principals leading during these times

of fundamental change:

The changes required to transform cultures are far deeper than we understood,

principals do not have the capacity to carry out the new roles, and principals are

burdened by too many role responsibilities...hard change, low capacity, plenty of

distractions—a recipe for frustration. (p. 68)

Woven throughout Fullan's explanation is a suggestion that the role of culture during an

era of continuous reforms may be more crucial than school leaders have acknowledged

previously. Here, the distinction between leading change and leading *schools* during

times of change is magnified. Waters et al. (2003) concluded that four of 21 distinct

principal responsibilities —culture, communication, input, and order—were negatively

correlated when the magnitude of change represented a deep, fundamental shift. Thus,

effective school principals are not simply accountable for implementing education

reforms in support of organizational objectives; to be effective, they must also consider

the complex and disruptive cultural implications of these changes in their schools.

The Challenges of Educational Change

Why is it that despite the substantial body of work in the areas of change theory

and leadership to guide their efforts, many organizational leaders, including elementary

school principals, struggle to effectively lead during an era of continuous reforms? There

are several possible explanations for this inconsistency between knowledge and practice.

Educational reformers have offered up a number of theories as part of their campaign to

implement widespread changes to schools across the nation. In addition, experts in

transforming America's schools from the inside-out have their own views on obstacles

facing principals struggling to lead effectively during an era of continuous reforms.

Educational Reformers Suggest Obstacles to Change

Critics of public education in the United States have led an aggressive charge to implement educational reforms across the country. At the heart of their efforts, the Race to the Top (RTTT) grant program became the catalyst for a staggering rate of legislative reforms with sweeping impact on educational standards, assessments, performance evaluations, and models. For example, the National Council on Teacher Quality reported a "dramatic increase in the number of states setting policies requiring that student achievement factor into evaluations of teacher performance (NCTQ, 2012). Critics of public education embedded a number of reforms in the criteria for states applying for RTTT, including steps to mitigate teachers unions, apply value-added measures to evaluate teacher effectiveness, use standardized test scores to reward and punish educators and schools for performance, and promote parent trigger laws to allow charter schools to take over when public schools fail (ED, 2009; Otterman, 2011). Each of these integrated reform strategies represents deeply held beliefs about why school leaders struggled to implement changes in the ways and at the pace that reformers believed needed to take place.

Reformer Obstacle #1 - Teachers Unions Protect Bad Teachers. According to critics of public education, the first obstacle to educational change is that teachers unions protect bad teachers. Upheld in several big-budget movie productions as the primary obstacle to improving schools, teachers unions have been portrayed by educational reformers as self-serving, bloated organizations that protect incompetent and bad teachers from the natural consequences of termination (Thomas, 2010). *Waiting for Superman* told a story of poor, minority families struggling to secure quality educational

opportunities for their children, because unions allowed terrible teachers to populate their schools. In a review of the film and its key actors, Corliss (2010) noted, "The coddling of bad teachers by their powerful unions virtually ensures mediocrity, at best, in both teachers and… students…. The movie's major villains are the National Education Association, the country's largest union, and the American Federation of Teachers" (para. 4). As a result of poor neighborhood schools, families in the film were forced to participate in agonizing lotteries for a remote chance to enroll their children in the solution—charter schools. Charter schools, and the parent trigger laws adopted to facilitate their expansion, are also the message behind the $25 million movie production, *Won't Back Down*. Weil (2012) explained:

> *Won't Back Down* surrounds the issue of the parent trigger laws which… permit
> parents to go after "bad" teachers and even overrule administrators in bottom-
> ranked schools. Ben Austin, a former attorney and employee of a for-profit retail
> educational charter chain, is responsible for the idea and the trigger law. *Won't*
> *Back Down* is a production of Walden Media, backed by… billionaire Philip
> Anschutz… [who] teamed up with Bill Gates [to finance]… the documentary
> "Waiting for Superman" another anti-union, anti-teacher, anti-public-education
> piece of Hollywood propaganda. (para. 6)

The conclusion that union protection of bad teachers is the obstacle to improving education has not been isolated to movies. On March 8, 2010, *Newsweek* ran a cover that read, "The Key to Saving American Education: We must fire bad teachers." A campaign to convince the public of an anti-union agenda has opened the door for districts to terminate unprecedented numbers of teachers (Strauss, 2011; Wood, 2012). The problem

with blaming teachers and their unions for blocking educational change is that it fails to provide a meaningful solution. Camins (2012) applied the logic test to the notion that improving education means weeding out all the "bad" teachers:

> There is no substantial evidence that there are so many ineffective teachers or that this is the principle cause of low student performance. Unless it is inexplicably assumed that there is a pool of more effective teachers just waiting to be hired, replacement can only work for a minority of schools. (para 18)

In other words, even if union protection was completely stripped away, and evidence effectively identified "bad" teachers for removal, what then? Reformers suggest that accurately measuring teacher effectiveness is the next obstacle to implementing changes for improving education.

Reformer Obstacle #2 - Educators Do Not Know Their Jobs. Out-funding the United States Department of Education (ED) by a rate of 40 to 1 on studies that aim to measure teacher effectiveness, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation invested over $45 million dollars to define and measure quality teaching (Gabriel & Allington, 2012). In a 2011 Wall Street Journal editorial, the Gates (2011) gave their reasoning for this:

> It may surprise you—it was certainly surprising to us—but the field of education doesn't know very much at all about effective teaching… This ignorance has serious ramifications. We can't give teachers the right kind of support because there's no way to distinguish the right kind from the wrong kind. We can't evaluate teaching because we are not consistent in what we're looking for. We can't spread best practices because we can't capture them in the first place.

Gabriel and Allington (2012) noted why the Gates got it wrong. Citing a number of studies that span decades of research into best practices for effective teaching, they concluded, "No 'one right way' finding has held true across federally funded, large-scale national studies of exemplary [teaching]… This is because exemplary teaching looks and sounds different across different classrooms and contexts" (p. 45). In fact, distilling teaching into a simple checklist of behaviors could actually promote ineffective practices. Gabriel and Allington explained that research did not indicate "one monolithic set of indicators or best practices; instead, there were many—sometimes contradictory— successful approaches" (p. 45). Thus, what works well in one setting may not prove effective in another.

Despite evidence that education is more complex than basic input/output business models would suggest, market-driven corporate reform of education remains obsessed with a bottom-line, accountability-for-results philosophy. By defining effective teaching in terms of a teacher's added value to students' scores on standardized achievement tests, researchers of the Gates' Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project narrow the intended purposes of education. Gabriel and Allington (2012) elaborated on the problem with this perspective:

> Current goals for public education are all written in terms of [test] scores… As long as we define the purpose of public education by scores, we'll define teacher effectiveness as nothing other than a teacher's effect on a test score. There can be no other measures of teaching while there are no other articulated goals for learning. (p. 47)

Critics of public education contend that ineffective teachers are the obstacles to change. Even if the "bad" teachers are fired, how can measuring those who remain improve student learning? According to educational reformers, that obstacle is solved by basic motivation.

Reformer Obstacle #3 - Educators Are Not Motivated Enough to Perform. The third obstacle to change suggested by educational reformers is that teachers simply do not care enough about student success. Criticisms of teacher apathy and incompetence form the basis for two motivational tools of educational reformers: reward and punishment.

Rewards based on merit. The primary reward educational reformers suggest is the incentive of increased pay for improved student performance on standardized tests. Barnett and Ritter (2008) argued that merit pay can "motivate existing teachers to focus increased effort and innovation on student achievement… draw a more talented pool of candidates into teaching… and through natural selection, more competent teachers would remain and less effective ones would leave" (Merit Pay as a Lever for Change section, para. 4). The original plan for merit pay in their study included the use of value-added measures, or VAMs. Di Carlo (2012) defined value-added measures as "a specific type of growth model" that include a "diverse group of statistical techniques to isolate a teacher's impact on his or her students' testing progress while controlling for other measureable factors, such as student and school characteristics, that are outside the teacher's control" (p. 38).

Opponents of merit pay for performance argue that including invalid and unreliable VAMs make the system unethical. Validity refers to the ability of a test to measure what it is designed to measure. Considering that student achievement tests are designed to measure student achievement, one of the sharpest criticisms of using value-added data—and student test scores in general—as part of a teacher evaluation system is "the degree to which they [do not] actually measure teacher performance" (Di Carlo, 2012, p. 38). In fact, the Board on Testing and Assessments of the National Academics, a panel of researchers employed under the ED, actually warned Secretary Duncan in October of 2011 of "significant concerns that the RTTT grant competition was placing too much emphasis on measures of growth in student achievement that have not yet been adequately studied for the purpose of evaluating teachers and principals" (Dillon, 2010). In addition to validity issues, value-added measures are riddled with problems of unreliability. Di Carlo (2012) argued that results of value-added data for teachers have been proven to be very imprecise estimates, "subject to huge margins of error; 20 to 40 percentage points [are] not unusual" (p. 40). Pallas (2012) revealed that Teacher Data Reports, made public in New York City tabloids, "replete with ambush-style photos," were found to have "an average confidence interval of more than 50 percentiles" (p. 56).

Critics of teacher merit pay also suggest that the practice of rewarding teachers based on VAMs leads to unintended consequences that interfere with high levels of student learning for all. The system of using student growth data to evaluate teachers raises equity concerns; after all, as Marshall (2012) noted, "Standardized test data is only available for about 20 percent of teachers" and "doesn't take into account the work done by pullout teachers, specialists, tutors, and teachers in previous grades" (p. 52) nor the

cumulative work of teams of educators in a given site. Holloway-Libell, Amrein-Beardsley and Collins (2012) found that as teachers grow "savvy about moving out of subject areas in which value-added measurement matters, moving to the grades in which it is easiest to show growth, or teaching students who are likely to test well," government interference could be creating "a system that is deterring some teachers from teaching in classrooms in which they are the most prepared to teach" (p. 67).   In addition, Di Carlo (2012) warned about the competitive nature of value-added models' artificially imposed variability—that is, much like grading on a curve, they are "designed to produce a spread of results, [placing] some teachers at the top, some at the bottom, and some in the middle" (p. 40). Peer comparisons can create barriers to collaborative practices shown to improve student learning. Marshall (2012) found that sorting and ranking of teachers based on "test results can have a negative impact on collegiality and teamwork" (p. 52), critical elements of school culture (Harris, 2006) necessary to systematically improve instruction (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

Worth noting is that schools in the successful program Barnett and Ritter (2008) studied defined merit in ways that ultimately excluded the originally-planned use of value-added measures due to the unreliability of available data. They also applied merit pay broadly, including rewards for teaching in high-need areas. In fact, the available research on the impact of teacher merit pay actually based on VAMs indicates that it makes little to no difference in student performance (Fryer, 2013, Glazerman & Seifullah, 2010, Sawchuk, 2013).

Punishment based on VAMs. The work of Harvard economist, Roland Fryer, optimizes the paradox of teacher merit pay tied to VAMs. His analysis of New York City's teacher incentive pay program, championed by educational reformers as a model for the nation, proved the reward of merit pay did not result in improved student performance on test scores. Fryer (2013), concluded, "I find no evidence that teacher incentives increase student performance, attendance, or graduation, nor do I find evidence that these incentives change student or teacher behavior. If anything, teacher incentives may decrease student achievement, especially in larger schools" (p. 373). Another study by Fryer, Levitt, List, and Sadoff (2012), however, found that in Chicago Heights teacher merit pay tied to VAMs actually did have an impact—when used as a punishment instead of a reward. How can extra pay possibly serve as a punishment? Some participants in the Chicago study were given their bonuses in advance, but required to pay them back if they ultimately did not meet the required standard. Fryer et al. concluded, "Exploiting the power of loss aversion… increases math test scores" (p. 1).

Although the ethics of using VAMs to, in essence, "fine" teachers like those in Chicago Heights certainly warrants caution, there is little doubt that VAMs are effective for removing teachers who fail to produce higher student test scores. According to Holloway-Libell et al. (2012) four Houston teachers, all fired on the basis of value-added measures, discovered that glaring problems with the reliability and validity of VAMs previously discussed were irrelevant in high-stakes employment decisions. Holloway-Libell et al. (2012) noted that one teacher had three years in which her value-added data "could have been produced by a coin flip" and then, "within a single year" in which she experienced a significant inpouring of English language learners, she "surprisingly

appeared to go from being a teacher with vacillating effectiveness to one of the worst

teachers in the district" (p. 67). A due-process hearing officer later ruled that

the "high-needs students most likely limited her capacity to add value, regardless of what

the statisticians maintained" (Holloway-Libell, et al., 2012, p. 67). Teachers across the

country are facing a similar reality. In fact, hundreds of teachers have lost their jobs over

the use of VAMs as part of the Washington DC teacher evaluation system, IMPACT

(Strauss, 2011, Wood 2012).

If the reform trend continues, teachers like those in Houston and DC may be

considered the lucky ones. With strong pressure from its governor-appointed Chair,

Fielding Rolston, the State Board of Education in Tennessee recently made a reluctant

decision to approve a measure that allows teachers to lose not only their jobs as a result

of poor student test scores, but their license to teach as well (Fingeroot, 2013). Banchero

(2013) reported, "Many states have begun to link teachers' pay to their effectiveness in

the classroom. On Friday, Tennessee joined a handful that are taking the idea further:

pull the license of teachers whose students consistently fail to improve." Noting that a

delay of implementations was ultimately made to "give the state time to work through

lingering concerns about using the state's complicated formula for assessing teachers'

contributions to student achievement in license renewals," Banchero (2013) highlighted

that even Rolston admitted the forumula was not "straightforward [but]… the best

measure that we have" (para 6).

Even with knowledge that VAMs represent a poor measure of teacher

effectiveness, policy makers continue to pile up punishments for teachers who fail to

raise student test scores. How can reformers argue VAMs will transform America's

public schools into institutions of quality learning? The answer is they do not.

Educational reformers essentially have given up on public education, in favor of market-driven, for-profit charter schools. Public education, they argue, IS the problem.

Reformer Obstacle #4 - Charter Schools Can Do Better. Perhaps the ultimate obstacle to change, according to the most zealous reformers, is the institution of public education itself. In a balanced look at the charter school movement, Zimmerman (2013) summarized the primary complaint of charter school proponents, "Our schools are still operating under a 19th century philosophy.… We are still propping up lifeless and loveless institutions that stifle creativity largely through their avoidance of democratic ideals and modern communication and business practices" (para. 2). Public education is an institution deeply mired in bureaucratic structures that have traditionally insulated schools from the economic pressures of a market-driven environment. Certainly, some insulation is not always a bad thing, given the work schools do with children, but it does tend to slow the rate of innovation compared to corporate organizations.

The charter school movement has discovered, however, that too much growth too soon can be equally problematic. Observing that exponential expansion has created conflicts for charter school proponents, Strauss and Bryant (2013) noted, "Just as states across the country are ramping up efforts to increase the number of charters,… proponents of charter schools are calling for tougher oversight… that would result in many more of them being closed down" (para 4).

Why would charter school proponents want to close charter schools? A growing number of studies have shown that charter schools fail to outperform their public school counterparts (CREDO, 2013). Such reports erode public confidence in charter schools'

claims of dramatically improved results over traditional schools. Toppo (2012) reported

on concerns from National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) that the

proliferation of new school charters has diluted their quality, with "as many as 1,300

charter schools in the lowest 15% of schools statewide." Strauss and Bryant (2013)

wrote, "When confronted with the evidence that poor quality charter schools are now

more-so the norm than not, NACSA's leader Greg Richmond declared, 'We didn't start

the charter school movement in order to create more underperforming schools'" (para

36). Unfortunately, educational reformers eager to replace public education with for-

profit charter schools have done more harm than creating underperforming schools; their

efforts to portray educators as unmotivated, uncaring, and unaccountable have

manufactured a hostile climate for public school teachers all across the country (Strasser,

2014). Consequently, principals are challenged with overcoming the impact of mandated

educational reforms on their school cultures in order to effectively lead meaningful

improvement efforts.

Education Insiders' Perspectives on Change

Unlike policymakers backed by a political agenda for educational reform, those

who work in the trenches with America's teachers and administrators tend to view

obstacles of change in more complex terms than simply blaming public schools as unable

or unwilling to get better results. For the purpose of this study, these individuals and

groups are referred to as *education insiders*, because they represent efforts to improve

public education from the inside out. While efforts to initiate sweeping educational

reforms have played out on a national stage, education insiders suggest that lasting and

meaningful changes must be locally led, by principals engaging their schools in the work

of continuous improvement every day. Obstacles to change proposed by education

insiders are grounded in extensive research and field work, pass the common sense test,

and reflect the often messy, complicated realities of America's schools.

Insider Obstacle #1 – Teachers Are Defensive. Given the arguments

educational reformers make about the quality of public educators, it is easy to see why

teachers have become defensive. They are tired of the constant accusations from

reformers that teachers do not care enough or work hard enough. Teachers are also

defensive about and exhausted by the unending wave of educational reforms, many

poorly managed or short-lived. Senge (1996) noted three problems with the top-down

management approach favored by educational policy-makers: cynicism that initiatives

represent a "flavor-of-the-month" approach, compliance instead of commitment, and the

reality that many initiatives will backfire or actually make the situation worse (pp. 43-

44). Tierney (2013) warned, "Policies and practices that are based on distrust of teachers

and disrespect for them will fail. Why? The fate of the reforms ultimately depends on

those who are the object of distrust" (p. 7). How, then, do school principals overcome the

understandable defensiveness of their teachers? Education insiders suggest principals

work to overcome the effects of educational reforms by facilitating positive cultures that

break down barriers to trust and engage teachers with a focus on what matters most.

Building trust. Positive school culture is founded on elements such as cohesion

and cooperation, yet those elements first depend on individuals' sense of well-being.

Principals must ensure that their teams feel safe before they can expect them to be open

in their work together. Schein (1996b) maintained that any leader of fundamental or

cultural change must possess "the ability to create for the organization a sense of

psychological safety" (p. 64). In a prophetic warning, Schein (1996b) added, "What cannot be ignored by leaders is that the destruction of culture is extremely costly on a human level" (p. 66). Educational leaders dealing with "fewer qualified candidates entering teacher training institutions, massive turnover, and record-low levels of job satisfaction" can attest to the fallout of unfair and unreasonable educational reforms and the human cost to staff morale (Scherer, 2014, p. 7). Hesselbein (1996) emphasized a leader's critical role in developing trust by demonstrating through "word, behavior, and relationships" that "people are the organization's greatest asset (p. 122). Encouraging an "inclusive" culture, where people are mobilized around a central mission, Hesselbein (1996) explained, provides people the "opportunity to find meaning in their work" and a belief in their "worth and dignity" (pp. 122-123). Covey (1996), who proposed leading by principles, emphasized that trust, in particular, is critical when leading during an era of continuous reforms:

> The fundamental reason most quality initiatives do not work is because of a lack of trust in the culture—in the relationships between people. Just as you cannot fake world-class quality, so also it is impossible to fake high trust. (p. 150)

In a similar way, Fullan (2001) observed, "Teachers will only be mobilized by caring and respect" (p. 63). As important as it is, building trust can not be rushed. Developing trust is a cultural change, and as Gruenert and Whitakeer (2015) noted, "The pace of cultural change is slow; people need… to process and reflect" (p. 55). Thus, educational leaders need time to create and support the cultures necessary for teachers to feel safe taking risks, talking about shared challenges, and discovering ways to accomplish goals that represent a higher purpose.

Motivating with a higher purpose. Positive school culture also includes the elements of purpose and vision. Reformers contend they want to attract new talent to the profession (Barnett & Ritter, 2008), but the consequences of their reward/punish motivation policies have had the opposite effect. Teaching is a difficult profession to do well, especially for its newest members (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). New teachers today are asked to perform a multitude of tasks, at the same levels of proficiency as experienced veterans, with very high accountability for results (Wong & Wong, 2009). Studies on motivation showed that extrinsic punish and reward mandates, like policies found in the educational reform agenda, are perceived as manipulative and only provide temporary and superficial compliance (Gill, 2003; Ogbonna & Harris, 1998).

In contrast, research has shown that internal motivation is far more powerful for creating lasting and meaningful changes (Covey, 1989; Deci & Flaste, 1995; Fullan, 2006; Quinn, 1996). Fullan (2006) argued that motivation is key for effectively leading during an era of continuous reforms, commenting, "Change… all boils down to one word: motivation. If one's theory of action does not motivate people to put in the effort—individually and collectively—that is necessary to get results, improvement is not possible" (p. 8). Principals who engage their teachers' deeper, internal purposes and use this to develop a shared vision of what their schools can become have a better chance of motivating their teams. Unlike the sweeping mandates promoted by education reformers, education insiders understand that lasting and meaningful solutions for the complex problems facing schools will take time, as stakeholders build on trusting relationships to create a shared vision with a higher purpose.

Obstacle #2 – Principals Are Overloaded. Recall the observation made by

Leithwood et al. (2004), "Next to the classroom teacher, research has shown the role of

principal is the second most important in terms of impact on student learning" (p. 5).

Given the nation's present obsession with accountability for academic achievement,

research on how, exactly, principals may impact student learning is far from lacking.

From complex meta-analyses of principal behaviors correlated to student achievement

outcomes to comprehensive qualitative investigations from the trenches of public

schools, researchers have resoundingly shown that being a school principal is hard work!

Qualitative Perspectives. In 1973, Wolcott first published his efforts to

comprehensively understand the work of an elementary school principal in his book, *The

Man in the Principal's Office: An ethnography*. Using an anthropological approach, this

research described the role of elementary school principal in such a depth and richness

that it became a seminal part of the literature both for educational leaders and

ethnographic researchers alike. Ultimately, Wolcott's study of the daily work of a

principal highlighted how his relative autonomy and local authority revealed cultural

assumptions of the late sixties (Wolcott, 2012).

In the decades since Wolcott's research, the role of elementary school principal

has transformed dramatically. Like Wolcott, Allen (2003) used a qualitative approach to

further understand the roles and responsibilities of elementary school principals at work

in America's schools. Her interviews with principals about their perceptions of

implementing educational reforms revealed how conflicts between new roles in the areas

of instructional, transformational, participatory, moral, managerial, and contingent

leadership created stressful challenges for school administrators.

Hoppey (2006) also investigated the evolving role of school principals, as they "navigate the treacherous… waters associated with high-stakes reform" (p. 2). Hoppey's study—a series of in-depth interviews with a principal about his perceptions of leading during an era of increased accountability—was developed from Wolcott's methodology, literature about the evolution of the role of principal, and Fullan's model for leading in a culture of change. Hoppey observed that authority and autonomy are much harder for principals to come by in the present era; however, perhaps the greatest shock to Wolcott's man in the office would be the impact of current expectations regarding accountability on his daily work. In exploring the perceptions of principal "Tom Smith," Hoppey described the tension of leading during an era of continuous reforms in terms of experiencing the paradox of conflicting roles. DuFour and Eaker (1998) summarized:

> [Principals] must have a sense of urgency about improving schools that is balanced by the patience that will sustain them over the long haul. They must focus on the future but also remain grounded in the reality of the present. They must have both a long term view and a keen, up close focus on the present. They must be both "loose" and "tight" in their leadership style, encouraging autonomy while at the same perpetuating discontent with the status quo. They must be strong leaders that empower others. (pp. 195-196)

Hoppey noted that despite the stressors of such conflicting roles, Tom focused on ways he could invest in his teachers: "(1) buffering his staff from anxiety associated with teaching in an era of high-stakes accountability; (2) nurturing his staff; and (3) promoting teacher professional growth" (2006, p. 164). Finally, Hoppey concluded further research, practice, and policy-making could be positively impacted by additional consideration of

principals' perspectives on and professional growth in key areas of leading during an era of high-stakes educational reforms (p. 161).

Quantitative Measures. Various models have been designed to evaluate and develop professional capacity of principals engaging in the complex work leading today's schools. One particular system, the Balanced Leadership Framework, connects McREL's research findings with "existing research-based knowledge on change management, diffusion theory, collective efficacy, institutional theory, living systems theory, community development, asset utilization, and school improvement" (Waters, 2003, p. 31). In *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) fleshed out the research that formed the foundation of the Balanced Leadership Framework. In their study, Marzano et al. conducted a meta-analysis of school-level leadership and its effects on student achievement, resulting in three findings. The first finding was that leadership matters; a correlation of .25 between school level leadership and student achievement was determined.

Second, Marzano et al. (2005) found 21 distinct leadership responsibilities and 66 related practices or behaviors that were correlated with student achievement. The Balanced Leadership Framework organized the 21 principal responsibilities identified in the study's second finding into three categories: purposeful community, focus, and magnitude [of change]. These categories made the distinction among principal behaviors related to culture, instructional leadership, and contingent leadership effected by the magnitude of change initiatives. Although community and focus may seem obvious categories for evaluating school leadership, the need for an equally-emphasized category for magnitude of change may not be as apparent. The study's third finding was so

important to researchers at McREL, however, they chose to create a magnitude of change category to describe one third of all principal behaviors.

In the third finding, the researchers concluded that not all strong leaders had a positive impact on student achievement. Waters et al. (2003) termed the McREL team's third finding the "differential impact of leadership," and discussed two explanations (p. 29). The first possibility was that strong but ineffective principals could have a focus problem; that is, their attention may center on practices that do not positively influence student achievement. The second possibility suggested by researchers was a problem of magnitude of change. Waters et al. (2003) explained, "Simply stated, even when principals focus on the right classroom and school practices, they must understand the implications these changes have for stakeholders and adjust their leadership behaviors accordingly" (p. 29). Exactly how school principals perceive the cultural implications of fundamental changes—for stakeholders within their schools and themselves as leaders— is a underlying interest of the present research as well.

Furthermore, the researchers at McREL reported that a factor analysis determined statistically significant correlations between each of eleven of the leadership responsibilities and second-order [fundamental] change. Seven were positively correlated and four—culture, communication, input, and order—were negatively correlated. Waters et al. (2003) explained that the four negatively correlated responsibilities were neither neglected by principals, nor did they have a negative impact on change; in actuality, researchers concluded it was a matter of perception.

When schools undertake an initiative with second-order [fundamental change] implications for most stakeholders, teachers may feel like there is less cohesion…

(*culture*)… like the principal is less accessible (*communication*)… like they have less influence (*input*)… [and] like the patterns of behavior, communication, and decision making are no longer predictable (*order*).   (p. 13)

In other words, the fact that they are experiencing fundamental change negatively impacts the very way teachers perceive their school leaders' effectiveness in these areas.

Consistent with the evidence that deep, fundamental change negatively impacts stakeholder perceptions of school leaders' efforts, findings by Waters et al. (2003) also showed that several important principal responsibilities had a destabilizing effect on schools. They noted, "Change agent, flexibility, ideals and beliefs, intellectual stimulation, and optimize are [responsibilities] likely to disrupt routines, procedures, and practices" (p. 33). So what is a principal to do? One third of all principal responsibilities fall under the magnitude of change category; yet, their associated behaviors may destabilize school operations and increase stakeholders' negative perceptions.   The McREL team suggested, "Balancing when and how to maintain the status quo with when and how to challenge it is often the difference between effective and ineffective leadership" (p. 33).

With so much to keep in mind, it is no wonder principals are overloaded. They are expected to be managers of school resources and facilities, instructional leaders, culture facilitators, and change agents. Fullan (2009) noted, "New expectations have been added to the traditional ones without any consideration of whether the new role in its entirety is feasible under the current working conditions faced by principals" (p. 68). The differential impact of leadership practices suggested by the McREL research team indicated that even when principals were effective, stakeholders perceived their

leadership as weak in the areas of communication, input, order, and culture (Waters et al., 2003, p. 30). Thus, one might conclude the inconsistency between knowledge of change and leadership literature and effective practice may be that principals have difficulty promoting positive culture while attending to the complex and comprehensive demands placed on them when leading during an era of continuous reforms. As Fullan (2009) observed, "The principal is key, but we haven't figured out how to…[unlock] the promise" (p. 68).

Summary

In Chapter II, I established that there is, indeed, a great volume of literature on change and leadership available to guide the efforts of school principals leading during an era of continuous reforms. I detailed the evolution of change theory, starting with and returning to the seminal work of Kurt Lewin, and describing its practical application in managed organizational learning. Next, I described the history of leadership literature: leader traits, leader behaviors, situational leadership, and transformational leadership. Then, I explained how Fullan's *Forces for Leaders of Change* organizes the complexities of change and leadership knowledge into a cohesive and relevant framework that serves as an open-ended outline for considering the complex and dynamic work of school principals leading during an era of continuous reforms.

I also illustrated the difficulties that organizational leaders, including elementary school principals, experience leading during an era of continuous reforms, despite the extensive body of knowledge available on the subject. I highlighted research describing examples of failed attempts by school leaders struggling to accomplish organizational

objectives through educational reforms. The research showed that effective leadership during an era of continuous reforms remains a challenge.

Finally, I presented a case for possible reasons for the discrepancy between available knowledge and the actual practice of leading during an era of continuous reforms. I presented possible obstacles to successful change initiatives in public schools from the perspective of both educational reformers and education insiders. I concluded that the research suggests, most likely, principals have difficulty promoting positive culture while attending to complex demands placed on them when leading during an era of continuous reforms.

In Chapter III, I describe the methodology used in this study to explore how effective elementary school principals described the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms. In particular, Chapter III includes a discussion of qualitative research practices in the study's design, procedures, and ethical considerations. Next, Chapter IV unfolds the story of principals leading during an era of continuous reforms, as detailed by the data. In Chapter V, I apply Fullan's theoretical framework to provide a lens for analyzing the data. Finally, in Chapter VI, I summarize the findings revealed in the data, draw relevant conclusions, and make suggestions regarding implications for further study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how effective elementary school

principals described the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms.

Fullan (2001) asserted that purposeful efforts to learn from examples of system-wide

transformations can ultimately reveal better ways to lead in a culture of complex change.

Indeed, "the knowledge base for what makes for [effective leadership] under conditions

of complexity is getter better—deeper, more insightful" (Fullan, 2001, p. x). This desire

to gain a deeper, more insightful understanding of the experiences and nuances of

principals leading during complex times meant a controlled, experimental design would

have been too restrictive. Thus, I used a qualitative approach to answer the study's

research questions.

Four questions guided this inquiry: How do elementary principals describe the

experience of leading during an era of continuous reforms? How do they describe the

impact change has on their ability to meet organizational objectives? How do they view

the role culture plays in their efforts to lead during an era of continuous reforms? What

other realities were revealed in this study? These questions sought to capture the perspectives of elementary school principals engaged in the complex and dynamic work of leading during an era of continuous reforms.

Research Design

The present study employed a case study research design to explore how effective elementary school principals described the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms. Creswell (2009) explained that the worldviews, strategies, and methods of a study create implications for its research design.

Social Constructivist Epistemology

Given the broad historical and social contexts surrounding change and leadership literature, I found a worldview grounded in a social constructivist epistemology effectively guided the present inquiry. Summarizing Crotty's assumptions about constructivism, Creswell (2009) noted, "Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives" (p. 8). Fundamental changes in the modern era of organizational leadership (Wheatley, 2006) define the current social context in which, as Fullan (2009) stated, "the meaning and results of change attempts…from the point of view of people within the role [of principal]" can be considered (p. 55). Through their interactions with others, the principals in this study constructed their own subjective meanings about their experiences leading during an era of continuous reforms. Creswell (2009) noted that the emphasis of a constructivist study is understanding participants' perspectives as they develop "subjective meanings of their experiences" through "interaction with others" (p. 8).

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Qualitative Methods and Case Study Design

   As with worldviews, particular research methods are recognized as consistent

with a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative strategies for research are used

in grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative research, case studies, and ethnography

(Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). After consideration of the options, I selected a case study

design for this study. Yin (2009) explained, "In general, case studies are the preferred

method when (a) "how" or "why" questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little

control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life

context (p. 2). In fact, the study of principals' perspectives on leading during the present

era loses its meaning if extricated from the real-world context of continuous education

reform mandates; the two are that closely intertwined. Yin (2009) explained that in the

scope of case studies, "boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly

evident" (p. 18).

   An important factor in the decision to use a case study research design instead of

an alternative qualitative approach was my interest in gaining a richer understanding of

this specific case, for both instrumental and intrinsic reasons. While sweeping

generalizations are not the purpose of case study research, instrumental case studies can

use findings about a particular case to refine existing understandings (Stake, 1995). The

purpose of the present study was to explore how effective elementary school principals

described the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms. I

narrowed the parameters to consider particular cases of effective leadership, which was

operationally defined for the present study as the ability to achieve organizational

objectives. Cases in the present study were selected from Excellence Public Schools,

where much like other districts across the state, organizational objectives included high levels of academic achievement and positive school climate. Furthermore, while research has not shown significant differences in role perceptions between elementary and secondary principals, a tacit knowledge of public education K-12 reveals an understanding that elementary school years form a critical foundation for learning in later years (Allen, 2003). Elementary principals ultimately bear responsibility for students' development of crucial skills in literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking, and for creating a school culture that fosters a lifelong love of learning. Consequently, I defined the unit of analysis as elementary principals leading sites with high levels of academic achievement and positive school climate. I hoped to refine current understandings about how such administrators described the role of culture in efforts to effectively lead their schools toward organizational objectives.

Case studies that include an instrumental intent also support the use of issues to "force attention to complexity and contextually" (p. 16). In the present study, principals led in an environment of overwhelming reform mandates, where schools were buffeted by dramatic political and social contexts. The use of an instrumental case study design provided me an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding as "the nature of people and systems becomes more transparent during their struggles" (Stake, 1995, p. 16). Principal leadership remains pivotal to the national dialogue about how best to improve public education, so deeper attention to their stories also highlights a critical piece of the conversation. Stake (1995) summarized, "Issues are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical, and especially personal contexts" (p. 17).

A case study design also suited the present study well for intrinsic reasons. Working in an elementary school, I witness first-hand the pressure on principals struggling to balance the many roles and responsibilities expected when leading during an era of continuous reforms. The principalship is a complex and difficult position; but when executed well, this role has been shown to make a powerful difference (Marzano, et al., 2005). A deeper understanding of the perceptions of principals in this study served to construct meaning from this complicated, often paradoxical, reality.

Methodological Procedures

Patton (2002) described several components commonly found in qualitative inquiry. These included characteristics of design, fieldwork, and analysis. Because the current study contained nearly all of Patton's (2002) themes, I created Table 3.1 to illustrate a more comprehensive synthesis of his work in this area.

Table 3.1:

Patton's Common Themes of Qualitative Inquiry

Design	Fieldwork	Analysis
Naturalistic inquiry	Qualitative data	Unique case orientation
Emergent design flexibility	Personal experience and engagement	Inductive analysis
Purposeful sampling	Empathic neutrality and mindfulness	Holistic perspective
	Dynamic systems	Context sensitivity
		Voice, perspective, and reflexivity

Note. Based on the work of Patton (2002, pp. 40-41).

In addition to providing a holistic perspective, the table organizes many of the

characteristics my research addressed in depth, such as the use of purposeful sampling to

select participants.

Participant Selection

For this study, I used purposeful sampling to ensure participants met the case

criteria for effective leadership. To avoid confusion of definition with those used in

research on effective schools, I operationally defined effective leadership for the present

study as the ability of leaders to achieve organizational objectives. In this case, that

meant leading schools with both high levels of academic achievement and positive school

climate. Patton (2002) noted, "Purposeful sampling involves studying information-rich

cases in depth and detail to understand and illuminate important cases rather than

generalizing from a sample to a population" (p. 563). During the 2011-2012 academic

year, Excellent Public Schools (EPS) conducted a Gallup Q12 Survey to measure school

climate. At the time the survey was presented to the district's school board for approval,

the EPS Executive Director of Personnel explained, "The Survey is a tool for measuring

and improving employee engagement and improving a building's climate." Having an

established, valid and reliable data source on school climate among each of its elementary

sites also made the EPS a convenient choice for considering participant selection. The

Gallup Q12 Survey was taken again during 2013-2014 school year, so I used the most

current results to rank all 16 elementary schools in the district by their reported levels of

school climate. Principals ranked in the top half of the district for positive school climate

were invited to participate in the study with one exception; I am currently employed in

the district as an assistant principal, so any principal acting as my immediate supervisor,

now or in the past, was removed from the list of potential participants. Of those

principals invited to participate in the study, two responded affirmatively.

As mentioned in the Assumptions section of Chapter 1, I was interested in the

perspectives of those principals who demonstrated the distinction between effective

leadership over basic management. I wanted to study elementary principals who were

effectively leading their schools toward the organizational objectives of high levels of

academic achievement in addition to fostering a positive school climate. Results from

State Department of Education's standardized assessment program, reported in public

report cards of individual school performance, confirmed that my two willing participants

also served schools with high levels of academic achievement. This was operationally

defined for the present study as receiving a designation of a "B" or better on the state's

A-F report card assessment program.

Data Collection

I addressed two of Patton's (2002) qualitative themes—qualitative data and

dynamic systems—during the course of my fieldwork.   In order to construct a deeper

understanding of principals' perspectives on my research questions, I conducted two,

open-ended interviews, lasting from 90-120 minutes each, with two elementary

principals. I designed my initial interview questions to capture principals' perspectives

regarding the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms. With a

relaxed, conversational approach, I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) to guide my

questions while allowing for deviation from any formal script, particularly when

comments suggested a topic was important to a participant in an unanticipated way.

Research on deep change encourages reflective practice (Fullan, 2009; Quinn, 1996), so I

used the second round of interviews to learn if participants noticed any additional details after the passage of time for reflection. Data from participant interviews were extended through periodic text messages, emails, and brief conversations that spanned over a year. These contacts, along with second-round interviews, served as follow-up for member checking and allowed me to further probe emerging themes.

The ability to gather data from multiple sources for greater depth of insight is a relative strength of the case study research design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). In fact, interviews are simply one of six sources of evidence for case studies described by Yin (2009); the others include direct observations, documentation, physical artifacts, archival records, and participant observation. I made direct observations of each of the principals interacting with colleagues, faculty, staff, students, and families within the context of their respective school environments and at various district functions. Participants provided input about which activities would best represent the role of culture in their work as leaders during an era of continuous reforms. One participant encouraged me to attend her school's weekly community celebration of student and faculty accomplishments; the other suggested I observe her leading teams of Professional Learning Communities in a new initiative at her site. In addition, I was able to make observations during district events such as School Board and Administrative meetings. I also attended the professional development training led by one participant for other district principals wanting to improve their school culture.

Noting environmental factors such as the condition of physical surroundings as well as more holistic impressions such as the energy of a crowd, I was able to better appreciate contextual factors impacting the work of my participants. I found such

information helpful to inform possible follow-up questions. Throughout the process, I used field notes and descriptive journaling to capture details relevant to my research questions. Additionally, I gathered documentation regarding each of the sites, including newspaper articles, meeting agendas, and communications such as faculty emails provided by the principals. While physical artifacts were not found to be significant for the present study, archival records available from the district and state web sites provided data such as maps of school boundaries, results of district-issued employee surveys, and state-reported student achievement data. The district website was also helpful for information on community data as well as descriptions of progress toward its organizational objectives and cultural expectations.

Finally, participant observation proved a powerful source of evidence in a number of ways. First, as an administrator in EPS, I had easy access to district training materials, email communications, and online group collaboration sites available to all administrators in the district, including the study's participants. This data helped me to better understand the organizational culture surrounding principals in the district. Second, my experiences working toward the same organizational objectives under similar pressures allowed me to more easily uncover the significance of various data. This aided in efficiency in many areas of data collection. More importantly, however, it provided insight during the course of interviews that encouraged an unexpected agility in responding to participant comments. Because I have a strong working knowledge of logistical and cultural issues facing principals in EPS, I was able to probe participants for additional details or identify the need to transition when a participant shared what might

have otherwise appeared to be irrelevant but was, in fact, an important reality unfolding in the data.

I compiled the data collected from the above sources into an informal case study database. Yin (2009) argued, "Every case study project should strive to develop a formal, presentable database, so that in principle, other investigators can review the evidence directly and not be limited to the written case study reports" (p. 119). My database was a notebook containing my case study notes, documents, tabular materials, and narratives (Yin, 2009). When possible, I printed digital data and added these pages where appropriate. Organizing my database in a way that paralleled the study's problem statement and research questions helped me search for any gaps in the data and also created a chain of evidence for others to follow.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis phase of this research, I addressed Patton's (2002) qualitative themes of context sensitivity, inductive analysis, voice, and holistic perspective. One question that emerged during the process of collection was, "When, exactly, does data collection end and data analysis begin?" Patton (2002) responded to the problematic question of data collection versus data analysis:

> In the course of fieldwork, ideas about directions for analysis will occur. Patterns take shape. Possible themes spring to mind… While earlier stages of fieldwork tend to be generative and emergent, following wherever the data lead, later stages bring closure by moving toward confirmatory data collection—deepening insights into and confirming (or disconfirming) patterns that seem to have appeared. (p. 436)

My data collection began with a very open-ended set of research questions; however, emerging themes in the data evolved during fieldwork, and the beginnings of analytical insights refined the direction of my inquiry. For example, during fieldwork, I analyzed the possible influence of topic sequencing, question probing, and interviewer intrusion on the data I collected. How did context play a role? What questions were not asked? Most importantly, what answers warranted the time and attention of following up for more details during the second interview?

After completing data collection, I began a more formal analysis. Creating my case study database proved helpful for me in becoming thoroughly familiar with my entire data set. Miles and Huberman (1994) described other ways researchers can "play" with their data by putting it into different arrays, creating data displays, tabulating the frequency of events, and putting information in chronological order. Yin (2009) suggested that while preliminary data manipulations can be helpful, a general analytic strategy is key in case study research. He noted that relying on the theoretical propositions that led to the development of a study's research questions, review of literature, and hypothesis is a preferred strategy (p. 130). Because it thoroughly incorporated seminal works in change knowledge and leadership literature, I used Fullan's (2009) *Forces for Leaders of Change* as a theoretical framework for providing order and insight to the data analysis process. Harris (2006) explained that theoretical frameworks do not have to restrict the process of inductive inquiry; rather, they can provide structure for research to "reflect and portray comprehensive and complex sequence of social conditions" (p. 145). The *Forces for Leaders of Change* framework provided an initial structure for analyzing the large volumes of data collected, without

prohibiting consideration of classification codes required by disconfirming data. Yin

(2009) described this analytic strategy as examining rival explanations (p. 133).

Carefully considering the quality of emerging codes for data was critical in my analysis

of meaningful and authentic patterns in the data. I read and rereading interview

transcripts, field notes, reflexive journal pages, and collected artifacts in my case study

database, noting to the side any words that stood out or exemplified an idea in the data.

Becoming deeply familiar with the data set allowed me to discover what Guba (1978)

defined as convergence, or recurring regularities, unfolding in the data. After combing

through the data, I collapsed similar or redundant ideas until a few, clear themes

emerged. Although loosely considered in terms of my theoretical framework, my

classification efforts focused on maintaining the genuine voice presented in the data. In

order to strengthen the authenticity of data coding throughout the analysis process, I

considered four criteria Patton (2002) described:

1. The set [of codes for classification] should have internal (consistency) and
   external plausibility (comprise a whole picture).

2. The set should be reasonably inclusive of the data and information that do
   exist.

3. The set should be reproducible by another competent judge.

4. The sets should be credible to the persons who provided the information.
   (p.466)

Thus, my decisions to carefully reflect on the integrity of determined codes, include

member checking, and allow for the emergence of alternative themes to my theoretical

framework, all affirmed the value I placed on giving the data an authentic voice.

Finally, I analyzed how interview transcripts, artifacts, field notes, and other data sources each contributed to the gestalt of my participants' narratives. Using multiple sources of evidence allowed me to identify a holistic view of common themes across the data, triangulate results for credibility, and consider a richer understanding of the principals' perspectives about leading during an era of continuous reforms. Further efforts to ensure an authentic narrative are described in the next sections on Researcher Role and Trustworthiness of Findings.

Researcher Role

Although all research is subject to bias, qualitative design requires a heightened awareness of the impact researcher bias has on the process and results of inquiry. Harris (2006) explained, "Qualitative inquiry is a value-bound enterprise. The primary instrument in qualitative inquiry is human; therefore, all data collection and analysis are filtered through the researcher's worldview, values, perspectives, and…theoretical frame(s)" (p. 141). For the present study, some level of personal bias could not be completely eliminated from the selection of a theoretical lens for framing inquiry, the purposeful sampling of participants, and the choice of research questions. However, as a researcher, I was diligent to be ever-mindful of ways personal bias could serve as a strength or a potential weakness in the quality of my work. Thorough self-examination and continuous self-monitoring were critical to my efforts to mitigate any potential negative impacts of this reality.

Self-examination highlighted the influence of my family connections with the military that started in childhood and later continued as I began my educational career. I

have taught students across three states in special and general education settings in grades Kindergarten through eight. Consequently, I bring a range and depth of personal experiences to the research process. In addition, a life defined by frequent moves instilled in me the capacity to adapt. My nomadic life highlighted for me the important roles that change, leadership, and social contexts play in my personal life and in the organizations I serve.

Another important consideration I made for limiting the impact of bias involved reflecting upon my relationship to the research environment. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) warned against potential compromises created by "backyard" research. While none of the elementary school principals chosen for the present study are close friends or employed in my immediate setting, education is a small world. I have worked in three schools during my fourteen years with the district described by this research, and as such, can honestly say I have six-degrees-of-separation from most folks in our large, but close-knit community. I mitigated this reality from impacting my research by falling back on a quality I honed as a military brat that continues to serve me well: I am a life-long student of culture. Whenever joining a new community, I find it helpful to get to know—in a deep and authentic way—the people, their values, and the way they do things. I have found that holding on to preconceived notions about a group, and the individuals within it, is counterproductive to successfully understanding, belonging to, and effectively serving these communities. My ability to enter the study with an open-mind and a sincere desire to truly understand the experiences of principals leading during an era of continuous reforms allowed me to limit the effect of a back-yard bias.

Currently, I serve as an assistant principal in the district where the study took place. This role informed my understandings of the extraordinary rate of educational reforms being mandated for our schools and the impact these change initiatives have on elementary school principals. My position as an educational leader guided the direction of my search for answers throughout the change and leadership literature. Fullan's (2009) comment, "In the field of educational change, everyone feels misunderstood," resonated with me (p. 55). I wanted to know, what were the experiences of other elementary school principals? What were their stories? Consequently, my role as a school administrator also informed my choice of questions for colleagues struggling with similar challenges. Finally, my role deepened my capacity for insight and understanding the views of participants.

My life experiences, connections with others, and position in the district all played important roles in the questions I asked throughout the design, implementation, and analysis of my research. In describing theory or worldview as metaphor, Morgan (2006) stated, "[Metaphors] can create powerful insights that also become distortions, as the way of seeing created through a metaphor becomes a way of not seeing" (p. 5). Likewise, the inherent bias of research design means that the questions asked also define the questions unasked. The challenge in qualitative inquiry, then, is maintaining an openness to the process and data as they unfold. Thus, critical to the qualitative researcher's role is a continuous reflection on how personal bias might inhibit insight and the development of a plan for mitigating its effect. Additional details of my plan are included as part of Ethical Considerations.

Ethical Considerations

My ethical considerations began with efforts to mitigate, to the greatest extent possible, researcher interference. Developing procedures to offset the biases described in the researcher role was one way to limit their potential impact on my findings. In fact, procedures for this purpose were of such import, an entire section of the present study is devoted to them in the Trustworthiness of Findings section.

Mitigating Researcher Interference

Beyond bias, I gave ethical consideration to mitigate the impact of researcher interference during the data collection stage of inquiry. Key to illustrating this point is a famous feline, Schrödinger's cat. In 1935, physicist Erwin Schrödinger designed a theoretical experiment with his cat-in-a-box. He proposed that given a 50/50 probability of a release of poison or food, one cannot possibly know whether the cat is alive or dead until the box is opened. Ergo, argued Schrödinger, the cat is both dead *and* alive until the moment one observes it. As Wheatley (2006) concluded, "Before we peer in, the cat exists as probabilities. Our curiosity kills the cat. Or brings it back" (p. 62). The influence of measurement is not isolated to the labs of physicists. Wheatley (2006) explained how Schrödinger's hypothetical experiment also speaks to the power of self-fulfilling prophecies in organizational leadership: "I had been living in a Schrödinger's cat world in every organization… [with] endless renderings of organizational charts. Within each… lay a 'cat,' a human being, rich in potential whose fate was determined, always …by the act of observation" (p. 62). In an interview by Taplin and Carter (2005), Schein addressed the ethical responsibility of recognizing that observation and measurement change the subject being studied:

I said there was no such thing as pure "inquiry"—the act of asking the questions

has already impacted the data. The act of asking the question is an intervention…

not diagnosis.… Consultants are often used… without any consideration of how

the organization will handle it, and that seems unethical…. they don't know

they're doing harm at the organizational level. (p. 79)

Through the lens purported by Wheatley (2006), Schein's message evokes a cautionary

image. When organizational consultants claim to be conducting diagnostic research, they

are, in actuality, opening Schrödinger boxes of human potential, creating self-fulfilling

prophecies that can direct the fate of individuals and the organization. Thus, researchers

have a responsibility to consider the potential impact of their work and ensure the

protection of their participants.

Protecting Research Participants

In the same way it was my ethical responsibility to reduce researcher interference,

I also had to consider any potential harm my inquiry may have on individuals or the

organization itself. How might the very act of my collecting data affect those I meant to

study? While it is unlikely that the impact of inquiry can ever be completely eliminated,

I took several steps to reduce the likelihood that individual research subjects or the

organization itself were harmed by my work. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) described

three ethical considerations for protecting research participants: transparency,

confidentiality, and avoidance of harm (p. 433). My research included efforts to ensure

all three.

Transparency. I incorporated the first consideration, transparency, with an open and honest explanation of my study's purpose to individual research participants and their organizational leaders. I accomplished this by first securing permission to conduct my research with district-level leadership. I then used district Gallup Q12 Survey results to purposefully select principals invited to participate in the study, which I did with letters of research introduction via interschool mail and coordinating phone conversations. Appendices B and C include the introductory letter for my district superintendent and participants respectively. Finally, I met with each participant in person to go over the details of the Adult Consent form. All data collection, from artifacts to interviews, was done with express knowledge and consent of participants. I used the Adult Consent form, included in Appendix D, to inform participants of the details of the study and provide a way to document their consent to be a part of the research. This document clearly outlined the purpose of the study and included a guarantee that every effort would be made to safeguard the second consideration for protecting participants—confidentiality.

Confidentiality. Ensuring confidentiality of participants in my study involved masking and guarding participants' identities to protect them from any potential harm. I honored a commitment to my research participants' confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms for individuals, school sites, and even the community. I secured signed consent forms in my home office, locked in a safe away from other records. Protecting data storage is an important component of confidentiality. Thus, hard copies of data with potentially identifiable information, from artifacts to transcriptions of interviews, were locked in a file cabinet in my home office, restricting access to only me or my advisor as necessary. I also contracted a professional agency, committed to rigorous legal

confidentiality standards, to create digitally encrypted transcriptions of participant interviews. All audio recordings were deleted immediately after transcription. Electronic copies of data were encrypted with password protections.

Avoidance of harm. The third ethical consideration for protecting participants involved safety from harm. In addition to transparency and confidentiality issues, I protected participants in my study from harm by following the prescribed procedures for ethical research included in my Institutional Review Board (IRB) plan. My IRB plan explained how I planned to mitigate potential psychological stressors implied by my research questions. To accomplish this, I assured participants that none of the information gathered would be used for evaluative purposes. The intent of this study was to explore the broader experience of leading during an era of continuous reforms, not to conduct a critical analysis of individual leadership skills.

In the context of modern sensibilities and a qualitative design, the process of gaining IRB approval may seem like an extraneous and technical requirement. However, Patton (2002) established a compelling argument for why the IRB process is critical to research:

> The necessity for such procedures comes out of a past littered with scientific
> horrors for which those of us engaging in research today may still owe penance…
> and that means being ever vigilant in fully informing and protecting the people
> who honor us by agreeing to participate in our research. (p. 271)

I am appreciative of the participants in the present study, and took every measure necessary to safeguard their well-being.

Trustworthiness of Findings

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that traditional social science lacked the language required to determine the quality of constructivist inquiry. They proposed the term trustworthiness be used as a set of criteria designed to measure the rigor, or quality, of research specifically founded in a constructivist epistemology. The authors defined trustworthiness as a study's dependability, transferability, credibility, and confirmability.

Dependability. The first two components of trustworthiness relate primarily to research methods. Dependability refers to a study's ability to demonstrate that findings are consistent with the research data and the process could be repeated. This was accomplished in the present inquiry through what Patton (2002) called "rigorous methods for fieldwork that yielded high-quality data" (p. 570). In addition to systematic procedures for data collection, the attention given to establish a high-quality classification system of codes with internal and external plausibility increased dependability in my research. Finally, by organizing my database of case study notes, documents, tabular materials, and narratives in a way that paralleled the study's problem statement and research questions I created a chain of evidence for others to follow.

Transferability. Unlike the more precise quantitative notion of generalizability, transferability refers to the application of findings to other contexts. In this study, transferability was accomplished through thick description. The rich details that emerged in the unfolding of my participants' stories allow others to evaluate for themselves the extent to which any findings are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people (Holloway, 1997).

Credibility and confirmability. The final two components of trustworthiness

focus on truth. Credibility, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), refers to a study's

internal validity; put another way, it means confidence in the truth of the findings.

Closely related to credibility is confirmability, which refers to a study's degree of

neutrality from researcher bias. While credibility emphasizes how authentically research

methods capture the truth about a phenomenon, confirmability emphasizes how

authentically this truth is translated into findings, without researcher interference or bias

(Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Table 3.2 provides a description of ways I established

credibility and confirmability in my research.

Table 3.2

Establishing Credibility and Confirmability

Goal(s)		Research Phase	Strategy	Evidence	Results
Credibility: internal validity or authentic truth		Field Work	Prolonged Engagement	Fieldwork from December 2014 to December 2015	Built trust Developed rapport Built relationships Obtained wider scope of data Obtained accurate data
		Field Work	Persistent Observation	Observation of participants in their school environments, engaging with school stakeholders	Obtained in-depth data Obtained accurate data Sorted relevancies from irrelevancies
	Confirmability: researcher neutrality	Design Field Work Analysis	Peer Debriefing	Continuous informal discussions with three peers regarding design, interview process, data analysis, and feedback on consideration of results	Tested working hypotheses Founded alternative explanations Explored emerging design and hypothesis
		Field Work	Member Checking	Informal discussions with participants and their peers regarding design, interview process, and data analysis	Testing of categories, interpretations, and conclusions
		Analysis	Triangulation	Multiple sources of data: interview notes, interview transcripts, observations, reflections, architectural and other artifacts	Verified data to be accurate and free from researcher bias
		Analysis	Reflexivity	Reflexive journaling, particularly during data collection and analysis, to mitigate researcher bias	Awareness of and transparency about researcher perspectives in the present study

Together, my efforts to establish dependability, transferability, credibility, and

confirmability comprise the relative trustworthiness of the present study.

Limitations of Study

Despite the numerous efforts described throughout this chapter, no research is without its limitations. Malterud (2001) explained that a researcher's background impacts all areas of a study, from "what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (pp. 483-484). In particular, the nature of the researcher's role in framing, collecting, and analyzing data requires special consideration with qualitative research. By selecting the case of effective elementary principals, the present research is limited to their perspectives of culture and only considers the viewpoints of teachers, staff, and other stakeholders as they triangulate the data.

In addition to the researcher's role, qualitative methods themselves impose limitations. Not all research participants are equally candid or articulate. Not all documents are equally complete, accurate, or readily accessible. For example, the Oklahoma State Department of Education's A-F report card, which was used in the purposeful sampling of participants, has been shown to contain validity and reliability problems. However, given that it serves as the only official measure recognized by the state and participating district for levels of academic achievement, its use was unavoidable. For the present study, triangulation helped mitigate these limitations; still, there remains no guarantee that errors or omissions in the data set did not restrict study findings from thoroughly and accurately describing participants' experiences.

Finally, the contextual- and time-bound nature of the qualitative methods employed in the current study prevent its broad generalizability. As discussed in the

section on transferability, any application of findings from this research by others is discretionary and should consider dynamic contextual factors before determining potential implications. However, Fullan's (2009) assessment that understanding educational change from the point of view of principals "is an essential starting point for constructing a practical theory of the meaning and results of change attempts," establishes the present study as one piece of "social science's contribution" to developing the body of literature addressing educational leadership in an era of continuous reforms (p. 55). As such, any "transferability of the findings is left to the reader's judgment of the applicability or the fit of the finding into his or her context" (Roettger, 2006, p. 13). The present study tells the story of two effective elementary school principals leading during an era of continuous reforms; in the current climate of educational policy debate across the nation, they most certainly are not alone.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Introduction

Any story teller knows, whether the medium is film, novels, a crackling camp fire, or even a qualitative study, a good story starts by setting the stage. This study explored how two elementary principals described the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms. The context of continuous change, a rapid evolution fueled by unprecedented rates of education reforms, is critical to their narrative. Their story unfolded before a backdrop of political and legislative drama played out on stages at the state, district, and local levels.

State Level Changes

It could be argued that the entire milieu of frenetic education reforms was fueled at the national level, by those corporate and private entities pushing their reform agenda through the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top (RTTT) grant program. That position notwithstanding, individual states could have elected to accept the harsh penalties for failing to meet the unachievable standards (requiring 100% of all students to be proficient in reading and math by 2014) required by the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act (ESEA)—also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—and declined participation in the RTTT's competition to return millions of tax dollars to state allocations for public education. Instead, state-level leadership in Oklahoma chose to (1) request a federal waiver for ESEA Flexibility as well as (2) complete the closely-aligned application for RTTT funds. Although most of the criteria for both federal offerings were explicitly outlined, focusing on Oklahoma's particular "deal with the devil" places on state policymakers the responsibility for exactly how the national education reform agenda was written into this state's educational blueprint. Following a template that was adopted in just a few years by over 80% of state legislatures across the nation, Oklahomans passed a massive reform package that included the following changes to educational policy:

- college and career ready standards, Common Core State Standards (CCSS),

- standardized assessments to determine VAMs,

- the use of VAMs for high-stakes decision-making, and

- parent choice (to close public schools or remove their children from them in favor of for-profit charters).

Educational reformers in the state held that K-12 public schools above all needed two things: accountability and transparency of results. Accountability was proposed through more rigorous assessments of the state's newly-adopted CCSS. Transparency was provided through the state's recently-revised assessment reporting program, A-F report cards for schools. Accountability and transparency were critical for keeping parents informed, reformers argued, so they could make better choices about where their children—and their tax dollars—would go.

Since this legislation was adopted, the cause of educational reformers has lost its original momentum. Like other states across the country, Oklahoma saw the rise of a grassroots campaign opposed to the reform agenda. Citizens concerned about a federal education agenda superseding local decision-making began to resist what they believed were heavy-handed tactics used by reformers to alter state laws and usher in what many have described as a nationalized privatization of public education (Ravitch, 2010). Those who had pushed for Oklahoma's educational reforms found themselves in a precarious political position. Governor Mary Fallin, the chair of the Governors' Association responsible for the CCSS, attempted to quiet the critics by making several public assurances in support of them. Next, in an effort to distance herself from the growing controversy, then-State Superintendent Janet Barresi, who ran on a reform platform, directed the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) to quickly rename the CCSS as the new Oklahoma Academic Standards (OAS). Then, in July of 2013, responding to increasing political pressure and despite the state's continued status as a governing member of the its board, Barresi withdrew Oklahoma from participating in CCSS assessments developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) coalition. Unfazed by these efforts, voters sent a clear message through their representatives in the 2014 legislative session, who repealed Oklahoma's adoption of CCSS as federal intrusion. The debate was finally laid to rest when the state supreme court ruled the repeal was constitutional. Baressi lost her bid for reelection during the 2014 primary election, and the process to replace the CCSS with standards that meet a college and career-ready level of rigor was passed off to a new state superintendent, Joy Hofmeister.

In addition to concerns about CCSS, a second reform in Oklahoma that led to great controversy was the state's A-F reporting system. Designed to be more easily understood by the public, the school report cards were riddled with problems from their inception in 2012. A joint report from Oklahoma State University and the University of Oklahoma found that the statistics and logic used to determine schools' grades were invalid and unreliable. In an unprecedented show of unity, superintendents from nearly 200 of Oklahoma's districts held a joint press conference to appeal to the OSDE and the public regarding their concerns for the inaccuracies of the A-F reporting formulas. A primary concern among district leadership was the manipulation of data when calculating schools' lowest quartile growth scores. In a deviation from any of its previous formulas for calculating student growth, the OSDE determined to compare the average change in performance of students from schools' lowest 25th percentile to the state's average positive-only change rate, misrepresenting the true progress public schools were making with their most challenged students.

Other problems with the OSDE's A-F accountability system were exposed in following years. One complaint involved the OSDE's altering of proficiency levels in science *after* the tests were scored, resulting in a sharp decline in their reported performance. Another complaint described the invalid scoring of 5th grade writing tests, which eventually had to be removed from the calculation formula when overwhelming evidence regarding their inaccurate (failing) scores could no longer be ignored by the OSDE.

Despite opposition to their flawed results, Barresi and the OSDE moved forward with publicizing district and site A-F report cards in 2012, 2013, and 2014. Newly-elected Superintendent Hofmeister asserted that the OSDE will consider significant changes in the state's reporting of school performance starting in 2015. In an interview with Rains (2014), Hofmeister commented, "What we should have is a metric that is stable so that when you receive a grade, it really is reflecting back accurate information. We have more of a carnival funhouse mirror that's reflecting back a distortion" (para 3).

Although far from ideal, A-F report cards represented the only available way to determine officially recognized levels of academic achievement for the purpose of this study. Evidence indicates that, in all likelihood, actual achievement levels are actually somewhat higher than reported by the state. District results for the three years that Oklahoma has used the A-F report card systems, along with those for each of the two sites described in the present case study, are included in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1:

A-F School Report Card Grades

	Excellence Public Schools	Amazing Elementary	Outstanding Elementary
2011-2012	A (93)	B+ (89)	B (83)
2012-2013	A- (91)	A- (92)	B- (80)
2013-2014	A- (90)	B- (81)	B- (81)

In the same way the OSDE pushed on with its A-F report cards despite concerns about their accuracy, the state's recently-adopted TLE rolled out the VAM portion of its mandate regarding teacher and administrator evaluation in 2014. Finally, charter school

development in the state continued to expand, supported by popular political rhetoric about school choice. In sum, the political efforts of educational reformers have created unprecedented levels of state-mandated changes for public schools in Oklahoma.

District Level Changes

In the rapidly growing suburban community of Excellence, the school district serving 23,000 students is led by a central office administrative team of only seven. This hardworking handful of individuals make all key decisions impacting students, faculty, and staff, particularly influencing the daily business of teaching and learning, through curriculum, instruction, and assessment policies and practices. Perhaps the small team's strongest influence is exerted through its promotion of long-held cultural values. Excellence is a community of high standards for achievement—academic and otherwise. For many decades, EPS has attracted families who value a quality education and the opportunities it can afford. By building on the traditions that produced acclaimed student success, district leadership perpetuates a legacy they refer to as "The Excellence Way."

Although sustaining tradition defines "The Excellence Way," a lack of continuity among central office administrators during the time period of the present study proved to further complicate the implementation of the many new state-level mandates. District leadership experienced a 71% turnover in the time immediately prior to and concurrent with the present study. By the spring of 2015, when the district's well-regarded superintendent retired, only one of the current administrators had been in her position for four consecutive years. Significantly, the directors of elementary education, secondary education, educational services, and chief financial officer were all new to their roles when wave after wave of educational reforms began sweeping across Excellence.

Beyond the central office, dramatic personnel changes represented fundamental shifts in school leadership across the district. In anticipation of their retirements, former district leaders had filled a high a number of elementary principal positions with individuals they believed would best continue on the legacy of "The Excellence Way." In fact, in less than three years, 11 of 16 (69%) elementary schools were under new principal leadership. Many of the new building administrators replaced retiring principals who had been in place a decade or longer.

This new leadership at all levels of administration struggled to adapt. Not only were there changing expectations from external reform mandates, but also internal changes brought about by a community experiencing extraordinary growth in its overall student population and sharp increases in poverty and diversity. During a presentation to school principals in August of 2014, the superintendent emphasized that EPS was realizing the impact of significant changes in its student populations. One area was an increase in students from poverty, particularly noted in the needs of students at the district's Title I schools, where greater than 50% of students required financial assistance through the federal Free and Reduced lunch program. He explained that students in EPS also represented greater diversity than ever before, creating new challenges in ways of addressing their social, economic, cultural, and educational needs. For example, he described district challenges in its efforts to support a growing population of English Language Learners with very limited resources. The increase in students from impoverished and/or academically disadvantaged homes enrolling in EPS was also represented at the schools included in this case study. Figure 4.1 shows the historical changes in poverty levels, as reported by percentage of students requiring Free/Reduced

lunch, and diversity, as reported by percentage of students with ethnic minority status, for the district and each of the two schools described in the present study.
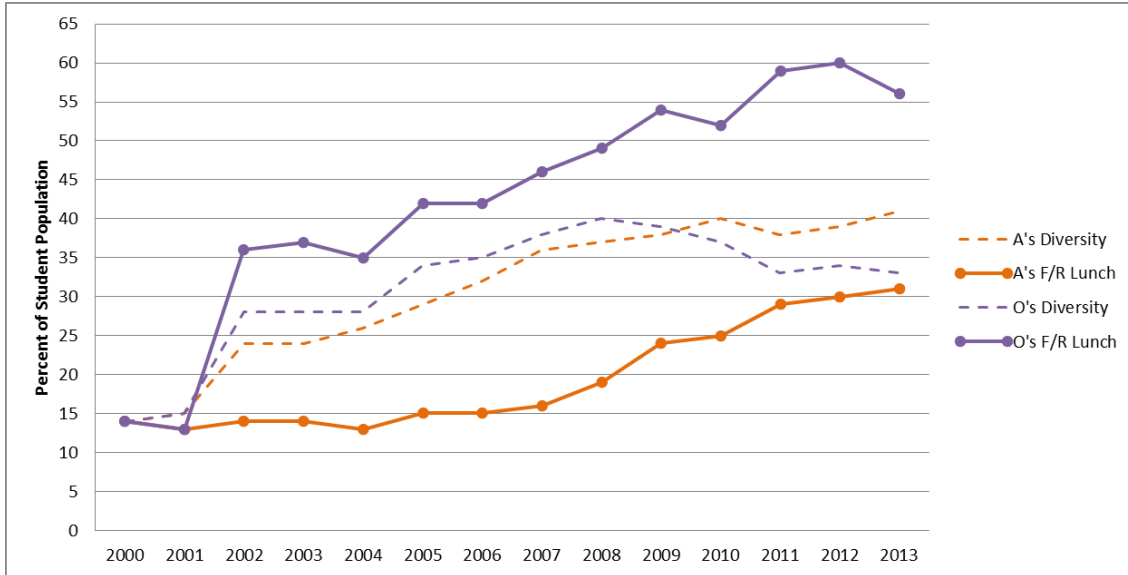
Figure 4.1. Demographic data for case schools. This figure illustrates historical changes in poverty levels and diversity for each of the schools in the present study.

As school principals worked to meet the growing needs of their students, changing expectations from state-mandated reforms and new central office leadership added to their challenges. New district administrators did not always hold to the same priorities as their predecessors; in some areas, they were more relaxed, in others, they were more rigid. An example of the striking difference in district-level leadership is the use of supplemental curricular materials. The previous director of educational services, an office with oversight of curriculum and instruction, held teachers strictly accountable for following a district pacing guide that required the exclusive use of district-adopted curricula. Curriculum specialists were deployed into the schools to ensure the fidelity of implementation. Materials from previous adoptions, still popular with teachers as

effective supplemental resources, were literally taken from their classrooms and eliminated from district inventories. In contrast, present district leadership has conveyed to teachers a suggestion to loosely follow the district's curricular units or modules, with an understanding that teachers are now expected to supplement with other materials as they deem most appropriate. Such extreme shifts in the expectations by district-level leadership—even if they may represent improvements—still manage to rock the boat for elementary school principals already struggling to navigate their schools through the stormy seas of continuous reforms.

Sharon Fields: Principal of Outstanding Elementary

Sitting in an old office chair, probably on its third lifetime of reupholstered updates, I scanned the narrow and oddly-shaped office of Sharon Fields. Tucked into a small round table littered with the half-completed project of sorting student award tags, I listened to the muffled din of telephones ringing and noticed the way the afternoon sun cast a warm ribbon of light across the room. The small space was crowded but welcoming. Across from me, a large desk and coordinating hutch were laid out in an "L" pattern. The walls around it were adorned with colorful collages of student faces, framed family photos, inspirational quotes, and recognitions of achievement. One photo caught my attention: a group of educators posed in a room at the White House, all finalists for National Principal of the Year. Sharon Fields sat smiling from the front row. Behind a tall bookshelf, an angular nook cut into the corner, hiding a rack covered with a motley assortment of costume pieces. Draped neatly over the top was a super hero cape.

Soon the door opened, and Sharon strode quickly into the office, the sound of children's

voices fading as she closed the door behind her. She smiled and took her seat behind the

formidable desk. It was then I noticed that on the corner was a childhood picture of

herself, a beautiful girl with bright eyes and the very same, confident smile.

Paging a Future Leader

Not long after the childhood picture on Sharon's desk was taken, a close family

friend and legislator encouraged her to participate in Oklahoma's page program.

Sharon's father, a Caucasian business owner, and her mother, whom she described as "a

very strong African-American woman," had supported the then-senator's successful bid

for the Oklahoma legislature and valued the opportunity to expose their daughter to

politics in action. During a week-long tour, the Senator took Sharon "everywhere she

went," making a deep and lasting impression on the future leader. Sharon described her

as, "always aware of the issues, always reading, staying up to date, and being connected

to social realities of different people." Perhaps most important of the lessons Sharon

gleaned from her time as a page occurred after a speaking engagement by the Senator

with waste management union workers. During their drive home, a discussion unfolded

between the two on what the term "blue collar" meant. The Senator spoke about the

importance of education in making a meaningful difference in the world, telling Sharon,

"You must first be educated. You must second be motivated. And thirdly, you must be

agitated." The woman Sharon found to be "eloquent and passionate" remained her

friend for many, many years. Sharon reported that her mentor never took for granted

what her educational opportunities (e.g. law school at Georgetown) provided, and

always had an "awareness of the underdog." And as a self-proclaimed "quotes

person," Sharon has held onto the powerful message in the words of her earliest mentor.

Professional Background: Getting to the Principal Position

Sharon benefitted from a long line of strong women mentors. She considers her elementary, middle school, and high school principals among her true friends to this day. They fueled her desire to make a difference in the world through education, particularly as a building principal. She explained how she viewed education as a powerful tool for lifting others and making the world a better place:

> I could do a lot of different things in my life, but as far as a profession I choose education, because I believe in that. I believe in, regardless if you're only on the second or third floor, it's important that no matter how high you get that you are always mindful of sending the elevator back down to help someone else out.

Realizing she needed to be a teacher before she could be a principal, Sharon taught second through fifth grades, vocal music, and social studies and geography at the middle school level. She quickly began work on her Master's degree, interned by age 30, was hired by and ultimately replaced her own elementary school principal soon thereafter. Sharon applied as a principal in the current district several times, but explained she "wasn't a fit for the schools… or the administrative teams at the time." When a specific need developed that represented a better fit, Sharon was recruited by the district to consider a position as head principal of an elementary school where she would serve as the third administrator in three years. She was hired in 2012.

Changes in Education: Sharon's Observations

When asked about the changes in education during her time as an administrator, Sharon began by telling about one change she was glad had *already* taken place prior to her becoming a principal: the evolution of the role from a manager to "being a true instructional leader." Sharon explained that while management—particularly of details— was not her "strongest area," her talents in other areas, such as being forward-thinking, helped her lead during an era of continuous reforms. Sharon observed that many changes in education started within schools themselves, as continuous improvement initiatives. From her time in middle school, Sharon saw the development of a co-teaching model as the beginning of bigger changes to come. She described this as a shift toward a service delivery model for Special Education that emphasized greater inclusion and differentiation for all students. Formative assessments became a way for teachers to better determine and then target the needs of students at all levels of abilities. Another educational initiative Sharon observed was a transition from teachers and administrators working in isolation to working in collaborative teams. This new way of working also led to a new way of thinking about teaching, a transition from teaching curriculum to teaching kids.

While some changes grew from within schoolhouse walls, Sharon noted, accountability mandates from legislative and regulatory agencies have had a tremendous impact on schools and those who lead them. "It is very challenging and stressful to be in education where there's so much accountability [especially since] the target is continuously moving, and there's so much pressure from outsiders, non-educators," she explained. The OSDE, guided by sweeping legislative mandates and until recently

headed up by a former dentist, was one source of these many changes. Sharon included

the state department's use of a new A-F grading system to measure new CCSS with

higher cut-scores for students to pass as a change impacting schools. School report cards,

she noted, also increased demands with higher expectations for attendance as well as for

science and social studies achievement. Another OSDE reform included the overhaul of

existing teacher and administrator evaluation systems that heavily emphasized the result

of students' standardized tests. Evaluations were not the only area impacted by new

applications for standardized test results. Sharon described the OSDE's implementation

of the Reading Sufficiency Act as bearing particular significance to school leaders

working with elementary-aged students and their families.

Finally, Sharon listed society as a third source of changes impacting educational

leaders today. She observed that in an era of bullying that extends well beyond the

school yard, schools are now expected to teach digital citizenship. Changes in student

health issues, such as the increased incidence of children diagnosed with Autism

Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, also impact educators.

In addition, Sharon shared that challenges faced by children from lower socioeconomic

conditions—grief and loss due to abandonment or drugs or incarceration—are on the rise

as grandparents and foster parents struggle to raise children with serious physical,

emotional, and academic needs.

Changes at Outstanding Elementary

Outstanding Elementary School was not immune to the tidal wave of

unprecedented changes that Sharon described. However, she believed the greatest

change during her time at the school was new leadership. Hired as the third principal in

as many years, Sharon had asked the district superintendent about his priorities for her regarding changes at Outstanding. His response was clear and concise, "There's only one thing I need you to change…and I've already done it. It's the leader."

With humility and honesty, Sharon explained how previous administrators at Outstanding had not turned out to be the right fit—much like she, herself, had not been the right fit for other schools in the district. Prior to her arrival, a culture of passive leadership and vocal teacher opposition had gradually taken hold of Outstanding, making it difficult for its retiring principal or Sharon's immediate predecessor, who was also new to the principalship at the time, to make much headway toward the district's goals of high levels of academic achievement and positive school climate. The teachers were running the building, yet without direction. In Sharon's words, "They were not purposeful."

So Sharon, with her experience and charisma and accolades, had been called in to serve as a "change agent" for a school with real challenges. Following the announcement of her selection as the new principal of Outstanding Elementary in May of 2012, Sharon learned that 16 of her 38 certified staff members, including her assistant principal, would be brand new to the building. Research has shown that high rates of turnover can have a negative impact on a school (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012); but in the case of Outstanding Elementary, Sharon used the significant turnover as a way to clean the slate. She also took it as an opportunity to show her staff just what kind of leader she would be at Outstanding Elementary: kid focused and data driven.

Summertime and the Meeting is Easy

The summer after Sharon officially took the helm at Outstanding Elementary, she invited her staff to a series of informal meetings to talk about kids. Over plates loaded

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with Sharon's home cooking, teachers gathered to discuss one of the challenges created

by high teacher turnover—class placements. Sharon described the problem:

> *You know those pink and blue cards for pre-enrollment for [class placement] next*
>
> *year? They were already bundled up, and [for] people who weren't hired yet, it*
>
> *would say Teacher A or Teacher B…. Yes, they had done some divvying up*
>
> *between boys and girls….kinda moved around the special needs kids, and yes,*
>
> *they looked at parent requests of which kid they didn't want their kid hanging out*
>
> *with… but they had not really looked at the substance of a fit for kids and their*
>
> *teacher.*

The first to arrive were the Kindergarten and first grade teachers. Sharon had invited

her behavior teacher, school psychologist, and Title I reading specialist to join in as well.

With the cards, literally, all out on the table, teachers crowded into the office conference

room and simply talked about kids—about their needs and their strengths, and about

which environments would nurture the types of relationships necessary to support their

success. After a while, Kindergarten teachers left for the teachers' lounge, and second

grade teachers joined the conversation around the card table. This organic and

collaborative process continued to unfold throughout the day, working its way vertically

through the faculty. Long after that summer day, these meetings had an impact beyond

determining class placement; they created among the teachers a sense of commitment to

students and one another that transcended isolated classrooms or teams. Who taught

their kids mattered, because each individual student mattered. Class placement decisions

became kid focused and data driven.

Addressing Change Capacity

      Getting to The Heart of Change. Sharon explained how she used an understanding of the change process to improve her faculty's capacity to adapt when working toward organizational objectives. She noted that at the heart of the change process was an understanding of why change was needed in the first place. Sharon recognized that her teachers at Outstanding Elementary would benefit from being reminded about the heart of why their work mattered. Using data from end of year state-mandated assessments and beginning of the year universal screeners as a guide, she assembled a collection of digital student portraits; each child was identified at risk for academic failure. During the first faculty meeting, with the music of Whitney Houston's *Greatest Love of All* playing in the background, pictures of 156 sweet, smiling children flashed across the screen for every teacher to see. At the end of the slide show, Sharon asked, "Do you know who those kids were?" With tears streaming down their faces, teachers described seeing new and powerful connections. Primary teachers saw paths their former students had followed. Patterns also became clearer, such as siblings who survived in the same difficult environments and struggled to find success at school. This exercise launched a discussion about the mission at Outstanding Elementary and about why a "no excuses" policy was critical to its success. As Sharon later noted, "The data looks different when it's a kid's face to it." Her teachers began to understand that being kid focused and data driven started with having a heart for relationships with students and one another. Engaging teachers' moral purpose with a heartfelt slide show was only the beginning for building positive culture at the school. Sharon had a plan to focus their

efforts on quality relationships and student success; it involved celebrating one another consistently and in a big way.

Celebrating with STYLE. *The morning bell was about to ring. Like those awaiting the dramatic entrance of a bride, family and friends of students at Outstanding Elementary were seated in rows of brown folding chairs, anxiously awaiting the arrival of young people about to parade through the gymnasium doors. One father, dressed simply in a grey sweatshirt and jeans, enthusiastically explained to first-time parents seated around him why they were in for a real treat. Weekly assemblies involving the entire school were not unusual, but there was something special about today's event. In addition to the regular agenda of character education, recitations, and important announcements, just once each month very special recognitions were made with great pomp and circumstance. In preparation for the big day, letters were sent out to parents of students representing every grade, requesting their attendance at the STYLE Awards. Today was that day!*

With upbeat music playing over the speakers, the doors were opened, and groups of students, accompanied by teachers and other staff, filed into the old gymnasium towards their designated areas. First, fifth, and fourth grade students occupied bleachers at the back of the gym. Along the two walls perpendicular to this, PreK and kindergarten students faced off with second and third graders, across from one another on either side of a large empty space serving as a stage area. Three rows of 20 folding chairs, separated by a narrow aisle, were filled nearly to capacity by excited family members enjoying precious real estate in front of the bleachers at the edge of the stage area. As each class arrived, the sound of children's singing and clapping along to the

music grew, filling the crowded space with an electric energy. Straggling youngsters,

backpacks dangling off their shoulders, suddenly remembered what day it was and

hurried in to join their classes. They didn't want to miss a thing.

From center stage, Sharon gave a signal to the group, immediately quieting the

crowd of students and adults. Quite simply, she was a presence. First, she approaches

six feet tall when wearing heels. She is also quite attractive, with her dark hair slicked

back into a long ponytail. In keeping with the school's super hero theme, she wore a

shiny navy cape tied around her neck, and it fluttered dramatically as she moved around

the stage addressing her audience. Most notable, however, was the way she spoke,

engaging the crowd with her confident, yet playful voice. She gave no margin with her

high expectations for behavior and participation, but drew her audience in with all the

drama of a circus ring leader. These boys and girls, she announced, were going to

amaze and astound everyone with their talents, intellect, and character!

Sharon's build-up didn't disappoint. When students sang their school creed, she

commented, "Make me believe it!" and they obliged, generating enthusiastic applause at

its conclusion. Various groups of students led the recitation of multiplication facts, the

Eight Expectations for Living, and a poem entitled, "I Am Bright." Throughout the

assembly, students encouraged and praised one another. When a small girl from the

kindergarten class volunteered to go to the stage area and successfully recited a poem

before the entire assembly, the crowd erupted in applause.

Formal recognitions came next. The neatest class in the school was presented

with a Golden Broom award. Then attention shifted to the teachers, and the Midas Touch

Award. Sharon explained the process for determining recipients, recognized previous

winners of the prestigious award (who, wearing their capes on this special day, twirled

them with great flair), and thanked a parent volunteer for personally sewing each unique

super hero cape awarded. The excitement was nearly palpable. Sharon then shared

nomination emails from students and colleagues, dropping clues here and there, all while

omitting the name of the winner to build suspense. When it was almost beyond what the

crowd could bear, she announced the teacher's name. Her class went wild with chanting

and she paraded through a line of high-fives up to the stage to have her cape tied on by

last month's winner. Returning to her students, her smile and pride were equally evident

from across the gymnasium.

Finally it was time to recognize the student STYLE awards. Sharon explained

how she had used a $2500 grant from Big Lots to purchase STYLE t-shirts. She directed

the audience's attention to all those children wearing their STYLE shirts from previous

months. They beamed. One by one, students from various grades were recognized by

their teachers and brought up to the stage area to receive their STYLE t-shirt and a

portfolio of pictures and letters from their teachers and parents congratulating them on a

job well done. Their families, teachers, and peers cheered and clapped. One little girl,

standing on her mother's lap in order to see her sister among all the excitement, threw

her hands up and cried out, "That's sisah!" The energy continued to build to a climax,

and when Farrel's Happy *began to play through the speakers, the crowd spontaneously*

began dancing and singing along. With this, Sharon dismissed everyone to have a great

day. Parents and young siblings who had waited for this moment could no longer

contain themselves. They rushed to their winners at the stage area with balloons and

cards and lots of hugs. While exiting classes danced in their lines heading out to the

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halls, recognized students in their new STYLE t-shirts lingered with their families, poured

over their portfolios, had their pictures taken, and soaked it all in. Cutting her way

through the huddles, pausing occasionally to congratulate a student or accept a grateful

hug from a parent, Sharon made her way back to her office. In addition to her flowing

cape, she wore a wide grin.

     At last, the gym was nearly emptied. The sound system was unplugged and rolled

away, and volunteers helped custodial staff put up the folding chairs. The gym seemed

diminished somehow, without the grandeur of its earlier purpose. It was the kind of

space that children would remember many years later, especially given the importance

and energy of the event, as being much grander in scale and quality than it really was.

The walls were plain and the space was tight, but the people—the families, the teachers,

the students, and its charismatic principal—provided all the décor it needed to be much

more. In the minds of the children seated there that morning, it was larger than life. In

their enthusiasm to be the best they could be, they raised the roof on its limitations as

well as their own.

     Looking at Data. Celebrating STYLE was a start, but making critical changes in

the way teaching and learning impacted students at Outstanding Elementary was the next

big step in Sharon's journey of leading continuous improvement. Sharon described

working extensively with her staff on developing a healthy understanding of data and its

role in improving schools. First, she made data readily available during team PLC

meetings. Teachers were given information about their students' performances compared

to other students in the district as well as other schools in surrounding districts with

similar demographics and challenges. Repeatedly, she emphasized, "Data is not

personal. What we do about it is." And she meant "we." Sharon described her approach to leading others through change:

> I'm not afraid to put my feet in their shoes. So, where maybe most leaders, lead from the front, that's really not my style. My style is kind of arm in arm… we're gonna do this together… every change is something that I'm going through with them at the same time.

Gradually, this unity and support developed at Outstanding Elementary a culture that was safe enough for transparency and internal accountability to inform efforts to improve. The message was clear: We are making changes, but we will do it together. Sharon pointed out that this approach was contrary to literature about gaining buy-in before taking action; but, as she put it, "I believe you make change and the results will yield buy-in." With growing confidence, teachers used data to guide decisions in new ways. For example, one grade piloted the idea of leveling math students across the entire team, in an effort to best meet student needs. They used data to mark their progress and evaluate the plan. Once teachers began to see a difference in their students and their school, the idea of being kid focused and data driven was not so difficult for Sharon to sell. At that point, the outliers were individuals who did not buy-in to the positive changes at Outstanding. After one short year under Sharon's leadership, her teachers ranked Outstanding as the number one elementary school in the entire district for positive school climate, a measure that included factors such as enjoying the people with whom you work and having the opportunity to make a meaningful difference.

Challenges to Change: Overcoming Hidden Cultural Obstacles

Sharon was candid about the fact that leading fundamental change at Outstanding Elementary was not always easy. Some changes, she noted, such as reinvigorating teacher morale with purpose and recognition, were popular among faculty and staff. However, when the focus of change became teaching and learning, not everyone was pleased. Sharon explained that by the time she had hired replacements for positions vacated at her arrival and then worked with remaining staff to establish a vision of positive school climate and academic excellence, there were only a few outliers who resisted change. But in Excellence, Sharon found, high expectations were not enforced equally across the board. Some individuals, those who were politically connected or vocal with their complaints, were outside the espoused vision and norms held by the district. She was not alone in this observation. As one administrator shared during a district meeting, "Even though [Excellence] has grown, there is an influential group of people who still think of it as a small community of 30,000 very like-minded people. These stakeholders have a sense of entitlement, of keeping things the way they like them." Other administrators concurred. Although most educators in Excellence were exemplary models of outstanding teachers committed to continuous learning for themselves as well as their students, some belonged to an exclusive group that felt entitled to keep things the way they liked. They did not hesitate to contact school board members, church elders, well-connected friends and neighbors, and union reps to lodge unquestioned complaints about their administrators, all in an effort to avoid having to make improvements. Like her colleagues at the district meeting, Sharon had to deal with her share of obstacles created by this hidden cultural rule: Some people were allowed to

get by with less than their best, and efforts to correct this would be done without the support of district leadership. Thus, for a few individuals on her staff, no strategies would prove effective when leading during an era of continuous reforms. For the rest, Sharon had some ideas.

Strategies that Work: Packaging Change Effectively

Despite the challenges of leading during an era of continuous reforms, Sharon described several strategies she found to be helpful when working with the vast majority of her teachers. These techniques represented what she considered to be a critical balance that asserts building capacity cannot come at the expense of building relationships. To do this, Sharon explained that it was necessary to make many deposits in the emotional bank accounts of her teachers before she asked for a withdrawal.

From the beginning, Sharon understood this meant she would have to be purposeful in her approach when asking teachers to make changes to their classroom instruction. She had to engage teachers who needed improvement in crucial conversations without straining the good will and trust she was striving to establish with them. Her strategy was in the packaging. Seen as a source of fundamental change for teachers at Outstanding, the OSDE's new Teacher Leadership Evaluation (TLE) tool also became a way for Sharon to package feedback for her teachers in a more positive and constructive way. She described using a "coaching" approach when providing feedback with the new model, framing her suggestions within a mindset that "I'm gonna walk with you." She found that many teachers responded favorably, particularly as, over time, they began to trust their relationship with her. Sharon recalled how this approached worked:

After her first observation, [this teacher] walked out and I remember watching

her… walk away, and she was mad as hell. She did everything she could not to

cry in here, but I had to give her [the truth]. She wasn't bad. It's just, "Here's

where you are. Here are my suggestions." I don't say concerns. I write

suggestions. "Here's how to get to this next level… This is what I saw. Here is

what I would recommend." You know? That's kinda how I do it. She was mad,

'cause [she thought], "I'm better than that." And she processed it. By the time we

had coached through it and we were collaborative, and I kept reaching out to

her… when I went in for the second time, it was like she took exactly what I said,

but made it her own. She could see it impacting… her lessons… She's [not] just

trying this out 'cause I'm in here...she has got this… When we were doing our

evaluation conference, instead of holding back tears like she did when she was

angry with me, she cried, and she said, "I knew when we had a Coke in the

summer, I was saying, 'You're gonna leave. Why are you gonna leave us?' and

you hadn't even come." And she said, "I just want you to know that when you

leave, I want to go with you."

By packaging her instructional feedback in a way that did not sacrifice relationships for

capacity, Sharon connected with her faculty in ways that developed trusting relationships

capable of transforming them as individual professionals and as a team.

Sharon used her packaging strategy with numerous programs, practices, and

political mandates from outside the school. She explained how she was able to align

these new requirements under existing schoolwide goals and initiatives, so teachers

would view them not as fundamental changes, but incremental tweaks to the way they

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were already doing things. For example, the district's Response to Intervention (RtI) initiative was presented as a logical development of an existing Professional Learning Community (PLC) model, where teachers were already accustomed to asking, "What do we do if students don't succeed?" By understanding how such initiatives fit into the work they were already doing with their students, Sharon's teachers found such changes were much easier to accept and adopt. A cohesive vision of Outstanding Elementary as a safe place for continuous improvements and high expectations developed as Sharon balanced quality relationships with each carefully packaged procedure, program, initiative, and evaluation. Her results—the highest rated elementary school for teacher morale—revealed the school's culture had evolved to support high expectations without sacrificing positive climate. When asked to describe a moment that she knew the culture had shifted, Sharon replied, "Donuts for Dads."

The Moment I Knew: Donuts for Dads

Donuts for Dads was not always a good day for students at Outstanding Elementary. There was a time, not so long ago, when the event meant students would be sorted as they arrived; students who had a father able to attend were directed down one hall, the rest were sent down another to wait until the bell rang. Often low turn out resulted in hundreds of children pouring out from their school buses or in from their neighborhood treks and into supervised holding areas, while a small minority of children enjoyed a donut and juice and the company of their father or father-figure. For the majority of children, many of whom were hungry for both the nourishment of a breakfast and the attention of a male adult, it was a terrible day.

Sharon was appalled by the very notion of such a day happening at her school. When planning the event with her PTA leaders, she explained that she expected every *child to receive a donut. She also wanted to actively encourage greater participation by men from the community. At first, the response of teachers and PTA members was skeptical. They just didn't believe it could be done. But that morning, a school with 696 students welcomed 400 fathers and father-figures to its Donuts for Dads. Sharon watched, sweaty and tearful, as each child excitedly handled a sticky sweet Krispy Kreme donut, beaming with the pride at the fathers gathered there just for them, knowing they were a part of something special, that they were special.*

The Role of Culture: Culture IS the Priority

When asked about the role of culture for leaders during an era of continuous reforms, Sharon responded, "It IS the priority. Collaboration, communication, teamwork, a sense of community, and safety—all of those things are my priority." Assembling these important cultural pieces, Sharon explained, creates an environment where there are no limits on what can be accomplished. She observed, "My goal is to make [our school] so inviting, so warm, such… high level of expectations, that there's no ceiling on better." Sharon noted that such a culture requires everyone working together toward the same purposes, each bringing their own unique experiences and talents to the table. In describing how diversity adds richness to the cultural landscape, she shared, "We don't say we don't see race or differences, but that we do, and we see them on purpose, and we embrace them."

For someone who described herself as an expert at school culture, Sharon mused at the task of describing an existing school culture, such as the one at Outstanding

Elementary. The challenge, she marveled, is that so much of culture is experienced as a feeling. "You can tell about things that happened here, but it's hard to package or try to communicate to others how you feel," Sharon reflected. The essence of a positive school culture may not be something she has ever tried to capture in the written word. Nonetheless, Sharon has made it an essential goal in her vision for Outstanding Elementary's future.

> My kids will one day grow up and be parents, and they will measure every school that their children attend to this one. That's what I want to create. I want them to always know that this is the standard of excellence. This is awesomeness. This is how you should feel about going to school every day.

For Sharon, a vision of schools that are Kid Focused and Data Driven means children internalize the ideals of excellence now and in the future. Her ability to communicate and realize her vision for schools proved so powerful she was asked to take on a new challenge in EPS. After two years as the principal at Outstanding Elementary, Sharon was hired to replace the long-time head principal at Superior Middle School.

During our final interview, we visited about the change, both in terms of opportunities for her and what it meant for Outstanding. Her new position would not require her change agent role in the same way, but judging by the now-familiar twinkle in her eye, she had plans for making her new school another beacon of excellence. As far as Outstanding was concerned, Sharon felt good about the way she was leaving it. A friend and colleague had been named her successor; it would be in good hands. For the faculty, though, the turnover in leadership at Outstanding was tough. Like the teacher who cried in Sharon's office, knowing she would leave like the others, they had been fearful of

trusting someone who might not stick around. So Sharon took time to visit with her faculty, in an authentic and vulnerable way. She shared, "I begged them. My first conversation with them, the morning after I was named, was that 'I'm going to ask you to stay.'" Sharon believed they were now ready to carry on what they had started together. "Those were all my people… and were on board and circling the wagons, you know, for that protection… of the school, and I wanted that to stay." She smiled, noting that when she left, Outstanding experienced its lowest turnover in many, many years. They were committed to continuing their work of building a school worthy of its name. "Outstanding needs something different than it needed two years ago when I came," Sharon concluded. She had promised, "I won't leave until my work is done," and now, she felt like it was.

Carrie Divine: Principal of Amazing Elementary

Like many buildings in Excellence Public Schools, Amazing Elementary was recently renovated to update its facilities and make room for a growing population. A few years ago, the building was expanded by the addition of its Early Childhood wing. As I approached the front entrance, I noticed the completion of another remodeling project, this one intended to increase security. Glass partitions were installed in a horseshoe shape around the broad space set aside for administrative and related offices, creating a distinct fishbowl effect in the school's lobby. After entering the office doors, I was greeted warmly, offered a beverage, and then directed to have a seat until Principal Carrie Divine was available for our meeting. I selected one of several upholstered chairs arranged around a wooden coffee table across from her office door, and while I waited, I

observed the end of the day activity swirling about the main office. Its cheerful and

trendy décor matched the vibe of the space. Three secretaries adeptly fielded a multitude

of questions, remaining friendly and calm. At one point, they clarified a dismissal

procedure for a teacher, who then hurried down a hall. Gradually, the continuous ring of

telephones quieted, and the secretaries directed a student to join me in the waiting area

until her aunt could arrive to pick her up. We smiled shyly at one another.

Carrie Divine swept into the office with an energy to match its colorful

atmosphere. At not much over five feet tall, she packed a lot of enthusiasm into her

petite stature. "Hello! Welcome! Welcome! Come on in. How are you? Can I get you

anything? Did my secretaries offer you a drink?" Following into her large office, I

replied that they had indeed, and lifted my half-finished Coke as proof. While I settled

into a comfortable chair opposite Carrie's large desk, she excused herself to use the

restroom. I glanced around the room, noting stacks of shipping boxes filled with a

variety of brightly colored child-friendly charms in the process of being sorted into clear

plastic boxes by type: hands, hearts, smiley faces, and more. An adjacent bookshelf was

lined with princess-themed gifts, many encrusted with rhinestones or feathers or with

animal-themed patterns. Pictures, similar to those found in the society pages of our local

paper, showing Carrie in small groups, often cheek-to-cheek with friends at upscale

social gatherings, also dotted the shelves. Returning from her break, Carrie kicked her

four inch heels under the round table positioned near the doorway of her office, and

placed a newly opened can of soda on her desk. "So, where do we start?" she asked in

her effervescent voice.

Professional Background: Getting to the Principal Position

Carrie began our interview by describing how her career in education unfolded. After graduating from the University of Oklahoma, she was hired by Rachel Rogers to teach first grade in a nearby school. She looped up to second grade with that class, and began working on her Master's degree in School Administration. Five years later, Carrie interviewed for an assistant principal's position in the district, but was not selected. She reported that soon thereafter, she received an out-of-the-blue phone call from Rachel, encouraging her to apply in Excellence. Rachel's career had since taken her to Excellence, where she was a building principal with an opening for an administrative internship. Carrie was ready for a change, so she agreed to the interview. Instead of the internship, however, she was hired as an assistant principal for another elementary school in the district. She worked at that school for four years, and when the opening at Amazing Elementary came available, she applied and was selected. Our interviews covered the course of her second and third years at the helm. By this time, stakeholders at Amazing had a genuine sense of who she was and had fallen under her sparkly spell.

Princess Divine Wears Purple Glitter Lip Gloss

As Carrie walked the school, the positive climate revealed by her site's Gallup surveys was evident in her interactions with students, faculty, and staff. Children lit up when she visted their classrooms, an event which did not appear to be an unusual occurrence to them. Their eyes widened and they bobbed about her, holding out apple halves or letter stamps or whatever project they were working on at the moment. To them, Carrie exemplified all the drama of a celebrity, but one who knew her fans well. She addressed her students by name, and made comments that indicated intimate

knowledge of their current academic or social progress. One kindergarten student

embraced her with a big hug, addressing her as "Princess Divine." Teachers would

direct, "Class, let's show Mrs. Divine how well we can ___," and their students rushed

about to follow directions as quickly as they could. Even older students stood a little

taller when she walked past their lines in the hallway. As she headed back to her office,

closing the loop on her visits, a young boy caught her in the hall. Through winded gasps

and pink cheeks, he reported important news, "Mrs. Divine! Mrs. Divine! I found

something of yours!" His chubby little fingers uncurled and he proudly held up a small

plastic tube for her review. With a twinkle in her eye, Carrie pocketed the used, purple

glitter lip gloss. She looked down at him as she asked, "Why, thank you, Tommy! But

how did you know it was mine?" He pulled his shoulders back and replied, "Well I

found it on the playground, and when I saw it, I just knew it had to be yours."

Changes in Education: Carrie's Observations

When asked to share her observations of changes in education, Carrie began her

list with something that had already shifted prior to her promotion to the role. She

indicated a relief that the job had moved from an emphasis of detail-oriented

management tasks to one of being a big-picture leader, since that suited her style better.

Other changes in education described by Carrie included "all of the reforms that the state

has pushed down upon us." Leaning in with the drama of a playful conspirator, she

observed, "This talk is getting political, here!" Topping the list of her politically-driven

push-down reforms was the CCSS. Carrie summed up her response to the state's

aggressive implementation and then quick about-face regarding the CCSS, "We approach

things here as, 'A standard is a standard.'" Other changes from the state department that

Carrie listed were the new Teacher Leadership Evaluation (TLE) and the new A-F School

Report Card system. Of all the mandates, however, the educational change of greatest

import to Carrie was Response to Intervention (RtI). This new way of using data to

evaluate student growth, she noted, represented much more than just another educational

mandate to the teachers at Amazing Elementary School.

Changes at Amazing Elementary

Transitioning from a discussion of broad educational reforms, Carrie described

two areas that represented fundamental changes specifically for Amazing: new leadership

and RtI. She described her appointment as the new principal at Amazing as a "huge

change" for her teachers. For Carrie, the process of getting to know her staff and their

getting to know her took a couple years. She described a sort of courtship, where she

spent the entire first year focused on building relationships with people. Rachel Rogers

once told her, "If you make them fall in love with you, everything will fall into place."

Carrie noted that in the two years since being named principal, only four individuals

"didn't respond" to her leadership style and chose to leave. She never forgot her

mentor's advice, sharing, "If you build up trust, and make the teachers fall in love with

you, then they're gonna go wherever you want 'em to go." In her case, Carrie wanted her

faculty to go into the direction of RtI implementation.

Next to Carrie's arrival, the second greatest change for the faculty at Amazing

was RtI. Carrie's new school represented the final pocket of resistance to this district

initiative, the only elementary site in EPS yet to implement the mandated reform. Carrie

explained, "When I got [here], they had been very fearful of [RtI]. They would not do

it… They were actually the last school in [Excllence]… So that's a huge change that

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we've had on top of everything else this year." While she understood RtI would have to come to Amazing at some point, Carrie was able to invoke the support of key central administrators in further delaying its implementation in her building. She requested, "Let me get to know these people before I start changing things." That bought Carrie her critical first year to establish relationships and build trust. Because of this, she reported, "[My teachers] were able to develop a trust in me that I would make it okay. I would protect them and stand up for their concerns." By the time her second year began, they were ready for RtI. Teachers at Amazing gave universal screenings, provided research-based interventions, monitored student progress weekly, recorded their results on Excel spreadsheets, and met to analyze results. As Carrie summed it up, "Honestly, I mean, if you're looking at the Gallup scores… we really did pretty good [considering] the fact that I just rocked their worlds."

Addressing Change Capacity

According to Carrie, enhancing change capacity at Amazing meant building quality relationships with her staff. She commented, "They're my priorities… and they know they are." Carrie worked hard at taking care of her faculty, revealing, "I live, breathe, and eat work… but I [needed to take] that time to truly get to know these people, get to know their families…" Knowing her teachers required dedicated time for relationship-building conversations. Carrie explained, "I try to find just that little connection with them, with every single person." These efforts helped her determine the best ways to make them feel supported and appreciated.

In addition to feeling connected, Carrie noted that having fun at work is important for positive relationships and climate. "We work hard all the time, but we do try to sneak

in some fun," she noted. On National Have Fun at Work Day, for example, she sent a secretary to purchase 100 frozen treats for the faculty and staff, and announced over the intercom, "Teachers, I want you to take a little extra time to have some fun. I've stocked the [office] freezer [with] ice cream sandwiches. Come up and have a little fun with us." Carrie encouraged community and social fun in other ways, too. The faculty instituted monthly Bunco Nights and attended a group Paint Your Art Out event. The school had not had a Christmas party in four or five years prior to Carrie's arrival. Her first year 30 teachers attended; and in her second year, the event hosted 56 people, all celebrating a special time together.

Leading a Cultural Exchange

Although the Memorial Day weekend had kicked off the start of the summer season just one day prior, the weather on May 27, 2014, was a mild 67 degrees. Dressed comfortably in casual attire, teachers and administrators from Excellence Public Schools milled around the common area of the 9th grade center at Main Street High School. Without the buzz of freshman students to fill its volume, the space felt vast and empty. Instead, volunteers for the district's bi-annual summer workshop greeted educators from behind a long row of sign-in tables. Signs posted throughout the facility's two floors pointed visitors to classroom locations, and a handful of volunteers monitored halls to guide participants to their rooms. Up the main stair case and to the right, a wide hallway overlooked the common area before leading to a cluster of additional classrooms. Through the first door on the right, administrators from across Excellence were taking their seats in a sunny classroom. The sign on the door read, "Do you have to travel to a foreign country to put culture in your school?" Inside, Carrie

Divine and her co-presenter were making final preparations for their breakout session

designed for district principals on positive school culture.

As time for the session approached, the few empty seats were filled. Building

principals, many from the district's elementary level, chatted and laughed with one

another. Carrie distributed copies of the session hand-outs: power point note pages, a

calendar of unfamiliar holidays, and several pages with ideas for ways to use

recognition, relationships, resources, rewards, and rituals to improve school culture.

With her bubbly humor, she introduced herself and her colleague and explained to the

audience that they were invited to join the presenters on a journey through some ideas

for creating a positive school climate. The first stop on the journey was "Putting on the

Ritz" in Paris with Recognition. Carrie and her co-presenter described eleven different

suggestions for administrators to consider for improving recognition in their buildings:

Heaps of praise, notes, award nominations, targeted applause, creative and fun award

certificates, hero bulletin boards, compliment corners, positive profiles, appreciation

digital chalkboards, and stickers were all described.

The second stop on the presentation's journey was "Getting Wild about

Relationships" in Rio. This time fifteen suggestions were made to attending principals,

and Carrie took the lead in presenting. Throughout her talk, Carrie emphasized the

importance of getting to know your faculty and staff and of enjoying shared time

together. Some ideas, such as questionnaires, ice breakers, team building, a scavenger

hunt, and in-house-open house, were presented as ways to help teachers get to know one

another better and to bond in purposeful community. Other ideas, such as lounge chat,

soup for a group, and Bunco promoted social time.

The third destination was "Let the River Flow" with Resources on the Rhine.

Carrie's co-presenter shared eight ideas about how to use ingenuity to provide teachers

with important resources. Some of her suggested items included colored copy paper,

professional books, subscriptions, and professional development opportunities. The

fourth destination was "Shopping for Rewards" on Rodeo Drive. Food played a

prominent role in this part of the presentation, chocolate in particular. In addition,

drawings for teachers based on attendance, timeliness with reports, etc. were mentioned.

The final destination noted, "When in Rome" follow the Rituals. Once again,

Carrie took the lead, sharing eleven different ideas for district principals to add to their

schools. She shared about the value of having your own "special" holidays, such as

Thunder Up Thursday, that are celebrated by faculty and staff at your school each year.

For those who might struggle with coming up with these, she shared a National

Celebrations Calendar, full of fun ideas to make a part of any school's repertoire.

Administrators were given a few minutes to scan the dates for any that appealed to them.

National Swap Ideas Day (September 9), International Eat an Apple Day (September 21),

National Donut Day (November 5), National High Five Day (April 17), and National

Let's Laugh Day (May 19) were a few of those shared among the group.

Carrie wrapped up the session by sharing the positive feedback she got from

teachers when her school celebrated National Have Fun at Work Day (January 28) by

enjoying ice cream sandwiches. As they filed out of the session, the district

administrators spoke in animated voices about their favorite ideas from the presentation.

Each one, it seemed, had something they couldn't wait to try the following school year

with their own faculties. The five Rs of positive climate were on their way to influencing

schools across Excellence.

Challenges to Change: Keeping Everyone Happy

Every strength can also be a weakness. Carrie described how her sensitivity to

the current condition of her teachers also made her vulnerable to being hurt whenever she

received criticism in the form of anonymous surveys. She explained, " [I am] always

taking the temperature of [my staff], at all times." Being able to read people is such an

important skill to Carrie, she worked with her assistants to develop the ability in them as

well. But increasing her sensitivity to her staff has a downside:

> When I go back to that survey, [and] I can't pinpoint who [that one miserable
>
> person] is, that is hard for me. Cause I want every single person to love walking
>
> in this door every day. And when they're anonymous like that, and when
>
> everyone seems so happy, and I can't figure out who it is…it's driving me nuts.

An almost-obsession with keeping her stakeholders happy meant Carrie spent long hours

planning, preparing, reflecting, and repeating the cycle all over again. Another side-

effect of being closely connected with her staff was the struggle Carrie had when difficult

conversations were needed. She described needing to distance herself from teachers she

knew would not have their temporary contracts renewed. "I have had my assistant do

that evaluation," she explained, "I've steered a little bit clear so I could have that

conversation, 'cause [otherwise] I knew I wouldn't be able to do it. It's gut-wrenching for

me… because I'm so invested."

Strategies that Work: Taking it Slow and Easy

Two words could describe the process Carrie used to bring change to Amazing: slow and easy. "I'm very patient with the change," she noted, "and I think that patience with change is why [my teachers] are so content." Carrie's strategic implementation of RtI exemplified how this approach worked for her school. As mentioned previously, her first priority was to develop trusting relationships with her faculty. With quality relationships in place, Carrie found, it was easier to lead her staff into new territory with RtI. She observed, "We're friends… and when you have these relationships… they trust me, and they know I'm not gonna lead them in the wrong place. And so they do. They're like, 'Okay, where are we going?'"

If RtI was a destination along the school's journey of continuous improvement, a consistent collaboration time was the vehicle needed to get there. Prior to Carrie's leadership, the only scheduled time for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) occurred when teachers met once a month during their lunch periods. While understandable for early adoption of PLCs, this structure fell short of the expectation for PLCs as a foundational component of the district's vision. When asked how she made the change from informal monthly to hour-long weekly PLC meetings, Carrie responded, "Honestly? I blamed the district for it. I said, 'You know what? This is something we have to do.'… We had a little grumbling, but this year it's second nature to them." After she established job-embedded collaboration time, Carrie was able to divide up new knowledge and skills into mini-trainings while honoring an important teacher value at her site—not "pushing past their contract time." She conceded that Amazing's collaboration piece was not yet where she wanted it to be; but, she added, "We have this foundation to

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get there." Carrie admitted that she probably "coddles" her teachers, but her strategy of scaffolded support—gradually releasing responsibility to teachers only after they are comfortable with the process—has proven effective. Her message to teachers? "We're gonna do it in little, small increments, and I'm gonna hold your hand, and we're gonna do it together."

Spot On: RtI Meeting at Amazing

Groups of teachers filed into the small, crowded conference room hidden away in a back office at Amazing Elementary. Some brought their lunches, zip lock baggies of veggies or potato chips to accompany their sandwiches and diet sodas. All of them arrived carrying large, white, three-ringed binders. After friendly banter and quick introductions, Carrie handed the teachers a typed list of students from their classes and laid out the objectives for their brief time together. She explained that the goal for this 30 minute meeting would be to set up their RtI binders to organize materials for working with these students. In her sing-song voice, Carrie announced, "Some of you will love me…." as her teachers looked over their sheets. She had analyzed the results from the school's universal screening a couple weeks ago, and typed up for each teacher the names of their students who hadn't met district cut scores. Carrie had even taken the time to sort students into two columns: some students were listed under a title of "at risk" while others were listed under "some risk." In the center of the table, nestled by a basket of various chocolate candies, packages of 3/4 inch red and yellow dot stickers were stacked. Next to them were sheets of white card stock, perforated for placement into the slots of file tabs. For each student listed, teachers were to set up a pocketed binder divider to store his or her materials. They used the white card stock tabs to label each

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divider with a student name, placing the appropriate colored sticker, red for "at risk"

and yellow for "some risk", on the corner of the divider tab. While they worked,

teachers laughed and shared stories about their students. One teacher commented, "I

remember these from last year. You guys set them up for every kid… even typed up the

tabs with their names!" Her colleague across the narrow table reached for a yellow

sticker and, recognizing the monumental work such a project must have entailed, added,

"Man! We're spoilt!" For the final step, teachers slid an 8.5 by 5 inch progress

monitoring book into the pocket.

Throughout the day, every thirty minutes or so, groups of four or five teachers

cycled through the little conference room. Conversations among teachers building their

RtI notebooks were playful, carefree, and occasionally punctuated by questions from

Carrie. "How did you feel about that?" and "That doesn't put you over the edge?"

Their answers were always positive. Before dismissing each team back to their classes,

Carrie pulled up a teacher's Excel spreadsheet on the conference room SmartBoard.

Like the typed lists, each spreadsheet had been customized for her teachers. Tabs along

the bottom identified individual worksheets for every child on their lists, and the

appropriate graphs were prepped and ready for data from weekly progress monitoring.

She explained that they would gather in the computer lab for their next RtI meeting,

where she would walk them through how to type up each student's intervention plan in

two or three easy steps. She encouraged teachers to think about what interventions they

might want to try, and pulled up a file on the school's shared drive that contained banks

of interventions, organized by specific skill. She wrapped up by reminding them not to

worry about creating their plans, because they would be doing it together. One teacher

exclaimed, "You're the best principal ever!" Carrie laughed and replied, "You ask, we

deliver!"

The Role of Culture: Culture is Everything

When asked how she viewed role of culture in leadership during an era of

continuous reforms, Carrie was emphatic. "School culture is everything," she insisted.

When asked to explain further what that meant, Carrie paused and replied, "I have two

really good mentors, and I have seen that their leadership styles work." Unlike other

principals, who may be more directive or authoritative, Carrie added, "I kind of molded

the good from each of them." She described how her natural ability to read people

helped her to take a temperature check of her staff and make adjustments when the

climate was tense or unhappy. Carrie observed that she was comfortable delegating,

which allowed her to distribute leadership and involve her teachers. She also noted the

powerful impact replacing two of her secretaries had on the climate of the office and

throughout the school. "My [previous] front office, there was no way they would've

offered you a beverage. They wouldn't have done anything," she shared, "And when you

walked in here, it should've been—I hope it was warm." Carrie described how

fundamental relationships were to creating a warm environment, crucial to a positive

school climate. For her, that meant being authentic and transparent with her teachers.

"I'm really lucky that I have a boss that lets me be me with them," she shared.

A Positive Test Result

State-mandated testing was around the corner. Like elementary schools across Oklahoma, the teachers and students at Amazing wrapped up their final preparations for the high-stakes testing season. In an attempt to harness the school's nervous energy, and redirect it into a more constructive form, Carrie decided to suggest some kind of fun, encouraging message from her faculty to the students. "Hey everybody," her staff email read, "No pressure at all, but if you wanna chat about helping with a testing video, come to the media center tomorrow at 3:30. Let's see who shows up and if we have any ideas." The following afternoon, 20 individuals were there, ready to plan a high-spirited way to build up students' confidence about testing. But as life happens, the days after their planning session quickly slipped past, and the time needed for creating a video had come and gone. Suddenly, Carrie realized there was only one more day before testing, and no progress had been made. Gathering her video volunteers, she announced the decision to forget the video. Everyone was pulling an incredible amount of weight, she explained, and she didn't want anyone to feel pressured having to scramble at the last minute. Then one of her teachers spoke up, asking, "Why can't we just do an assembly? It'll be a live video." Carrie hesitated for the tiniest moment. This was big. Prior to her arrival at Amazing, the school hadn't had an assembly in nearly five years. "Okay," she responded, "I've got to be honest here. I'm kinda drowning. So, are you guys okay just taking this and running with it?" The team assured her they had things under control.

The following day, Carrie was out of the building at a district-required administrative meeting. Throughout the day she received various text messages and emails from her teachers and secretaries about details of the assembly. Rachel Rogers,

now her supervisor as director of elementary education, excused her from the last hour of

the meeting, so Carrie was able to make it back to Amazing in time for the festivities.

Before a crowd of over 600 seated students, a four part assembly was about to

begin. The curtains parted and a talented fifth grade student stepped out onto the stage.

Her rousing rendition of The School is on Fire *got everyone singing and cheering along*

with her. Next, a group of teachers performed a skit on what to do and not to do during

testing week. The faculty really got into their roles, and some "naughty" teachers talked

about staying up late the night before and eating junk food and Mt. Dew for breakfast.

The students laughed and learned as the skit played out and those teachers heard tips for

being ready to do their best on a test. Next, it was Carrie's turn to address the crowd.

She had been given a slot in the assembly to say a few encouraging words. In her usual

style, she told the boys and girls, "If you just do your best, that would make me happy."

While she spoke, two students from every class quietly joined their teachers at the

perimeter of the assembly space. People started looking around, wanting to know what

was happening. Carrie paused, "Hey guys. Focus on me up here, please. Now as I was

saying, it's gonna make me happy…" Just then, the song Happy *began playing and all*

those students and teachers who had gotten up danced their way to the stage to lead the

entire assembly in singing and dancing. Finally, everyone was seated and Carrie smiled

out at her adoring audience. She had one more surprise up her sleeve. With a twinkle in

her eye, she gave the signal, and all the PreK students stood. With fake microphones in

hand, they faced the group of students and sang, "Let it go… let the stress go… the test

doesn't bother me anyway." Before dismissing the crowd, Carrie reminded the boys and

girls that their teachers had prepared them well, and as long as they followed the tips

from the assembly, they had nothing to worry about on their tests. They were ready! As she headed back to her office at the end of the day, Carrie reflected on what had taken place. In a little over a year, they had created an environment where her teachers were now actively promoting positive culture at Amazing. That did, indeed, made her very happy.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In reviewing the literature available to leaders during an era of continuous reforms, I came to appreciate the potential analytical application of Fullan's work. As an authority on leadership and change in public K-12 schools, Fullan's model, *Forces for Leaders of Change,* organizes the complexities of the vast body of change and leadership literature in a cohesive and relevant manner. The individual forces in his framework are free from a rigid sequential structure, can be skipped as the situation may require, and contain a symbiotic and dynamic relationship reflective of the real and complex work of school principals struggling to lead during an era of continuous reforms. Therefore, I determined to consider the case of my present study, two effective elementary school principals leading during an era of continuous reforms, through the lens of Fullan's *Forces for Leaders of Change*.

Engage Moral Purpose

Condensing decades of research, Fullan (2006) observed, "Change… all boils down to one word: motivation." The component of his practical model for leaders that

most directly addressed key principles of motivation was Fullan's force *Engage Moral Purpose*. This practice encouraged school leaders to define the purposes of education in terms of economic opportunities, health and well-being, and closing the achievement gap for students. Built on a foundation of change literature regarding the disruption of a status quo and the leadership literature on the trait of integrity, the force of *Engage Moral Purpose* represented one area of stark variation among the data. On the one hand, Sharon's leadership at Outstanding Elementary revealed deliberate and sustained efforts to engage the moral purpose of her faculty. From her initial summer gathering for class placements, to the *Greatest Love of All* slideshow of struggling students, to the assemblies celebrating student and teacher accomplishments, she emphasized a moral purpose focused on creating success for students now and in their future. Through our conversations, it became clear that Sharon viewed the idea of "sending the elevator back down" as a powerful metaphor, one that drove her own professional efforts as well as her approach to engaging the moral purpose of her team. Her "Kid Focused, Data Driven" motto described a belief that high standards of academic achievement, coupled with quality authentic relationships, meant a bright future for the children of Outstanding Elementary.

In contrast, the evidence revealed that Carrie's strategy for motivation at Amazing Elementary was much less driven by Fullan's *Moral Purpose*. Despite the fact that over the last decade the free and reduced population at Amazing had more than doubled (from 14% to 31%) and its population of students from minority subgroups jumped from 24% to 41%, larger societal issues such as disparity in economic opportunities or gaps in achievement among populations were not mentioned in the data. Like Sharon, Carrie

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also emphasized the role of relationships; however, with few exceptions the data centered on her relationships with teachers. Carrie did enjoy positive relationships with students and other staff—as illustrated during her building walk-through—but her priority was the strategic cultivation of quality relationships with her teachers. During our interviews, and also at her district administrators' breakout session, Carrie referenced an important book in the development of her leadership style—*If You Don't Feed the Teachers, They'll Eat the Students* by Neila Connors. Analysis of the data from interviews, communications, and observations of Carrie's interactions with faculty and staff at Amazing revealed her fundamental belief that caring for her teachers will ultimately translate into student success. However, while she expressed confidence that her teachers "know how to teach," she did not mention a moral purpose describing *why* they teach. The distinction between her approach and Fullan's *Engage Moral Purpose* can be seen in her implementation of RtI at Amazing. Carrie described leading this fundamental change for her faculty exclusively in terms of how she eased her teachers' feelings of anxiety about the shift, making no reference to the moral purpose implications that RtI could have in supporting their struggling students. Likewise, observations during RtI meetings revealed very little conversation about specific students and their needs. The focus was on providing teachers a highly supportive environment for tackling the procedural logistics of RtI implementation. Instead of engaging a moral purpose, Carrie's approach to motivation relied on leveraging her relationships with faculty. As she stated, "If you build up trust, and make the teachers fall in love with you, then they're gonna go wherever you want 'em to go."

Develop Evaluative Cultures

Develop Evaluative Cultures is another force in Fullan's model. It relies heavily on the concept of internal accountability among a group, a level of collective analysis and reflection that flows logically from engaging teachers in a common moral purpose. Fullan defines efforts to develop evaluative cultures as attempts to deepen the meaning of the work of public schools, create assessments for learning, and conduct action research beyond accountability. Of all the forces in Fullan's model, *Develop Evaluative Cultures* was the most difficult to find evidence of in the present cases. While aspirations of evaluative cultures are promoted throughout the district's espoused vision statements, in practice, schools in the present study had not yet achieved the level or quality of evaluative culture defined by Fullan. Progress, however, was being made.

Sharon planted the seeds of this practice at Outstanding Elementary. Her "Kid Focused, Data Driven" approach certainly reminded faculty of the deeper meaning found in their work, an impetus for continuous growth and improved learning. She fostered a culture that aspired to excellence in all ways and celebrated accomplishments toward this collective goal. Sharon also began a dialogue with her teachers about using data to measure student progress, and she introduced her teachers to the types of data and analytical skills needed to accomplish site improvement objectives. Sharon even supported faculty efforts to conduct action research by allowing one team to pilot a leveling program across the grade level. Still, despite the isolated pockets of evaluative culture beginning to take root, Sharon's brief two years at the helm of Outstanding were insufficient time for teachers to deepen these emerging capacities to the systematic level of formative assessment and reflection described by Fullan's model.

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At Amazing, the presence of Fullan's *Evaluative Culture* was even more elusive. Quite simply, the data reveal Carrie was not interested in creating additional pressure on her teachers by promoting a culture that pushed for internally-driven continuous improvement. During our interview, she explained why she was not worried about accountability. Carrie expressed confidence that her teachers "know how to teach," adding, however, that she hoped her "light and airy" approach to schoolwide high-stakes test preparation "didn't backfire." As it turned out, despite Amazing's drop in the OSDE's reported grade from an A- to a B, Carrie maintained the criteria for effective leadership in this study—she accomplished the organizational objectives of high levels of academic achievement and positive school climate—without a hint of evaluative culture.

Focus on Leadership for Change

Fullan's force *Focus on Leadership for Change* refers to the ways in which principals use distributed leadership to increase active engagement among stakeholders and, thereby, improve the sustainability of change initiatives. Much more than the ability to delegate tasks, Fullan's vision of distributed leadership includes the ability to develop leadership capacity in others (Fullan, 2009). At Outstanding Elementary, Sharon described how key players were essential to her long-term plan for making the school extraordinary. Two years later, when she was hired as an EPS middle school principal, she deliberately did not take these individuals with her to the new site. They would have followed her; in fact, they predicted her inevitable departure and requested to go with her. Instead, Sharon purposefully left them behind, asking them to continue leading the important work they had begun together.

At Amazing Elementary, evidence for a *Focus on Leadership for Change* emphasized the engagement of faculty and staff in a process of improving school climate. As Carrie described in the scenario of the state testing assembly, teachers began to carry the torch of positive school climate. Increased participation at school events, such as the annual Christmas party, and the establishment of new traditions such as monthly Bunco nights, revealed a renewed interest among faculty members in spending time enjoying the company of colleagues beyond the regular work day. While not quite the leadership development envisioned by Fullan, these steps, none-the-less, represent meaningful progress in the area of active engagement.

Focus on Coherence.

Of all Fullan's forces, *Focus on Coherence,* was one of the most prevalent in the data. Fullan (2009) noted, "Creating coherence is a never-ending proposition that involves alignment, connecting the dots, and being clear about how the big picture fits together" (p. 14). During our conversations, Sharon was clear that the idea of coherence was important to her vision of leadership, both in how she organized her thinking about the needs of Outstanding Elementary and in how she presented to her staff the changes intended to meet these needs. She explained that all reform mandates were introduced within the framework of existing goals for her school. Like an effective teacher, adept at making any student response have some element of connection to the learning at hand, Sharon described packaging district initiatives under site improvement goals for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. RtI, for example, was explained as simply further developing a component of PLCs, allowing teachers to building on familiar structures and practices. At Amazing, Carrie also described building on her teachers'

experience with PLCs to form a foundation for implementing RtI. By making

connections with familiar structures and existing knowledge, both principals in the

present study described a focus on coherence as key when leading change initiatives.

Build Capacity.

Fullan's force *Build Capacity* describes a principal's efforts to develop new

knowledge and skills, resources, shared identity, and a motivation to work together.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of building capacity at either of the schools in the present

case study is found in the commitment to use Professional Learning Communities as a

vehicle for ongoing professional growth among teams. PLCs emphasize the notion that

everyone is responsible for student learning across the team. During PLC and RtI

meetings at Outstanding Elementary, teachers were provided professional development

by curriculum specialists and intervention experts on topics such as on the effective use

of data. Likewise, teachers at Amazing Elementary were given resources during their

team meetings, such as the materials and references Carrie provided her teams during

their RtI meeting. Finally, as they evaluated universal screening, regular benchmark, and

progress monitoring data as a team, teachers at both schools appeared to realize their

interdependence as an asset toward achieving common goals for student learning.

Develop Learning Cultures

Whether grounded in external accountability, such as educational reform

mandates, or internal accountability from within schools, the notion of continuous

improvement in public education is here to stay. Both school leaders in the present study

described a reality of ongoing growth and learning. Fullan described his *Develop*

Learning Cultures force as an effort for school leaders to promote learning from one

another, collective commitments to improve, and embedded learning in the doing.

Although Excellence Public Schools has maintained a commitment to Professional

Learning Communities for nearly a decade, in practice, PLCs looked very different from

site to site. Prior to Carrie's arrival at Amazing, monthly lunchtime meetings among

grade level teams constituted the extent of PLC implementation. Citing required district

expectations, Carrie bent her "slow changes" rule by scheduling weekly hour-long PLC

meetings to facilitate job-embedded learning. Her teachers adjusted, and she reported

that they had begun using the time for responding to key questions about and making

collective commitments to student learning. Carrie noted, "It's not that collaboration

piece that we want, but we have to have that foundation to get there."

The faculty at Outstanding Elementary were already accustomed to weekly PLC

meetings when Sharon took the helm. However, during her tenure at the school, teachers

began using the job-embedded meetings to develop and refine their criteria for quality

data to guide and inform curricular and instructional decisions. By comparing their data

in more transparent ways to one another and schools with similar demographics, they also

strengthened their commitments to one another to improve as they learned by doing.

Understand the Change Process

In his force *Understanding the Change Process*, Fullan lists four qualities that

school leaders during an era of continuous reforms must develop in their followers:

energy, ideas, commitment, and ownership. So how do school leaders engage followers'

energy, ideas, commitment and ownership to establish the conditions for continuous

improvement? As noted in my interviews with Sharon, Fullan (2006) maintained,

"Shared vision and ownership are the outcome of a quality change process more than a precondition" (p. 10). At Outstanding, Sharon had to first set the stage and act out her vision of high levels of academic achievement and positive school climate before teachers, students, staff, and families could see it, too. Each week she modeled this vision during schoolwide assemblies; once a month, she took it to an even higher level when parents and families joined in on the school's STYLE celebrations. Putting on a uniform sends a powerful message about identity and responsibility; for teachers at Outstanding, the super hero cape became a uniform that communicated a commitment to one another and the purposes of the school. As an enduring symbol of the school's culture, it allowed others to see what mattered at Outstanding Elementary.

For Carrie, establishing the conditions for continuous improvement meant first and foremost taking care of her teachers' well-being. Her strategy was based on the idea that if the teachers were nurtured, they would nurture their students. While the data did not reveal that Carrie's leadership presently targeted academic achievement in ways common in other elementary schools in EPS, there is evidence to conclude that she was aware of a possible need to focus more in this area in the future. In addition, the data show teachers were getting onboard with her leadership and direction. Carrie's teacher-directed assembly, for example, demonstrates engagement of teachers' energy, ideas, commitment, and ownership. Her motto, "If you make them fall in love with you, everything will fall into place," certainly has potential application for improving academic achievement. By developing trust in her leadership, and in the fact that she will go through any changes with them side-by-side, teachers could be directed toward

elevating teaching and learning at Amazing. How this might unfold is yet unclear, although the goodwill to follow Carrie down that path is undeniable.

Summary

Using Fullan's *Forces for Leaders of Change* as a theoretical framework provided critical structure to guide the analysis of data from my case study. The overwhelmingly complex and interconnected ideas of change, leadership, and culture would have proven otherwise unmanageable given the nature of bounded rationality, a term coined by Herbert Simon to describe the limited human capacity for absorbing information (Bryant, 2004). Fullan's framework, however, served as a lens through which I could narrow the comprehensive scope of information and focus on relevant details from participants' descriptions of leading during an era of continuous reforms.

First, as I considered the force *Engage Moral Purpose*, the data revealed participants in the study held strikingly distinct beliefs about motivation. Evidence of this force in action was found at one school but not the other. Second, I found it difficult to confirm evidence of Fullan's *Develop Evaluative Cultures* at either school. A hint of what may unfold in time, the data showed Sharon had planted the seeds for Outstanding Elementary to grow into a school with potentially deep levels of internal accountability. Third, analysis of the data for a *Focus on Leadership for Change* revealed that both principals in the present study worked to actively engage their faculties in the collective efforts of their schools. At Amazing Elementary, Carrie's approach toward distributed leadership primarily focused on developing an active interest in teacher-led community-building events. At Outstanding Elementary, Sharon focused on developing leadership

capacity in her faculty that could sustain the work of continuous improvement beyond her brief two-year tenure. Fullan's fourth force, *Focus on Coherence*, was the most prevalent in the data. Both participants described it as a critical strategy for leading initiatives in their buildings, one that integrated changes into the existing norms and processes. The fifth and sixth forces, *Build Capacity* and *Develop Learning Cultures,* were both addressed by the districtwide initiative of Professional Learning Communities. While the level of implementation at sites varied, the purposes, structures, and expectations were constant, resulting in a consistent and systematic way for both study participants to develop their faculties' knowledge and skills and collective commitments to work and learn together. The final force I used in the analysis of the data was *Understand the Change Process.* The data revealed that efforts by the principals in the study to engage their followers' energy, ideas, commitment, and ownership required time. Sharon considered ownership as an outcome of a quality change process; Carrie considered it more of a result of developing a sense of trust and belonging. Thus, Fullan's framework was helpful for organizing the complex and dynamic ideas of change and leadership in my data. While not every force was essential to participants, and the application of each force may look different at their unique sites, both of the effective elementary principals in this study described using strategies detailed in Fullan's model.

An area where application of Fullan's framework for data analysis in the present study fell short was its usefulness for considering qualities of school culture. The purpose of this study was to explore how effective elementary school principals described the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms. To that end, Fullan's model was well-supported in two of three areas: change and leadership.

However, *Forces for Leaders of Change* did less to provide analytical structures needed to uncover the deeper meaning in participants' descriptions of the explicit role of school culture. As discussed in the assumptions section of this research, culture can be defined in many ways. Certainly, as pervasive as the endless indicators of culture are, these elements are found in Fullan's *Forces for Leaders of Change*. Given the scope for analysis in the present study, however, a more precise definition for school culture was needed. Research by Marzano et al. (2005) indicating that magnitude of change has a significant impact on the perceived effectiveness of school leaders in the responsibility of culture led to the adoption of simpler definition. In their Balanced Leadership Framework, principals were encouraged to promote the following: well-being, cohesion, cooperation, purpose, and vision. Although Fullan's *Engage Moral Purpose* is closely aligned with this definition, elements of cohesion and cooperation are more deeply embedded in the collaborative language of *Build Capacity*. The element of well-being is not directly addressed at all by Fullan's framework, although it would be impossible to encourage energy, ideas, and commitment through ownership, as described by *Understand the Change Process,* without the well-being of faculty. In sum, the results of my analysis proved that, overall, Fullan's framework was helpful for structuring evidence in the data regarding change and leadership—culture less so.

In Chapter 6, I present the primary findings that resulted from my data analysis, along with other realities outside the parameters of Fullan's framework. In addition, I discuss conclusions about what these findings mean. Finally, I share recommendations for future research, practice, and policy and then wrap up my final thoughts.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how effective elementary principals described the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms. My preliminary research on actual success rates for leading during times of fundamental change was disheartening. In theory, school principals have a plethora of advice founded on a large body of research, and there is no shortage of organizational consulting firms ready to sell their latest models for how to get it right. The reality is that effective leadership in an era of continuous reforms is messy, hard work. However, by spending time engaging two effective principals in an ongoing dialogue about their work leading elementary schools, I found recurrent themes embedded in their stories.

Guiding my inquiry with the principals in this case study were four overarching research questions. To begin, I asked, "How do effective elementary principals describe the experience of leading in an era of continuous reforms?" To flesh out the impact of

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change on effective leadership, I then asked, "How do they describe the impact change has on their ability to meet organizational objectives?" Most importantly, to better understand what a review of the literature indicated was the heart of the matter—the role of culture—I proposed the third research question, "How do they view the role of culture in their efforts to lead in an era of continuous reform?" Finally, my fourth research question asked, "What other realities were revealed in this study?" After reading several hundred pages of research on leadership and change, I was surprised by the simple reality emphasized by my participants' data: positive school culture was their answer to nearly all my questions.

In keeping with the open-ended, naturalistic methodology of my research, I never shared with participants the operational definition for positive school culture that I adopted. That definition, with its elements of well-being, cohesion, cooperation, purpose, and vision, primarily served me in developing a potential hypothesis. Instead, I allowed the effective elementary principals in my study to define school culture for themselves and share their views on its role in leadership, positive or negative, during an era of continuous reforms. As it turned out, my study participants viewed the role of school culture in a positive light; remarkably, their descriptions of what that meant bore a number of similarities to my operational definition. I created Table 6.1 to illustrate these comparisons in their own words.

Table 6.1

Describing Positive School Culture

Marzano et al. (2005)	Sharon	Carrie
Well-being	Positive climate: "warm" Well-being: "safety"	Positive climate: "warm" Well-being: "what they need"
Cohesion	"Sense of Community" "Sincere relationships" Communication: "arm in arm"	Community: "family" Relationships: "connection" Communication: "hold your hand"
Cooperation	"Collaboration" "Teamwork"	Distributed leadership: "running with it"
Purpose	Motivate with a higher purpose: "I know that their heart is what's going to make them do what's right for kids."	Motivate by leveraging relationships: "If… the teachers fall in love with you, then they're gonna go wherever you want 'em to go."
Vision	"My goal is to make [our school] so inviting, so warm, such… high level of expectations, that there's no ceiling on better."	"I want every single person to love walking in this door every day."

After analyzing the data about how study participants described the role of school culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms, I found that for these effective elementary principals, positive school culture was the priority.

Finding #1: Participants described positive culture as the priority.

Schein (1993) made the argument, "The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture" (p. 370). Somehow, this statement seemed

oversimplified or unrealistic given the complexities involved in the everyday work of school principals. Yet my research revealed that, unequivocally, the effective principals described positive school culture as their highest priority.

Research Question #1. In responding to research question one, participants acknowledged, yes, the onslaught of continuous educational reforms had increased the demands placed on them as leaders. Even Sharon, who described herself as a "strong" leader, admitted, "It is very challenging and stressful to be in education where there's so much accountability…the target is continuously moving, and there's so much pressure from the outside [by] non-educators." However, both participants explained that their role as a leader required framing the particular challenges created by mandated reforms as part of their ongoing work toward continuous improvement. *How* they accomplished this work had everything to do with creating and managing culture.

Research Question #2. In response to research question two, participants described how they addressed change when working toward organizational objectives. As suggested by the research of Marzano et al. (2005), the effective principals in the present study started by recognizing the magnitude of change that educational reforms represented to their faculties. Sharon observed that she had "probably the most stress[ed] third grade teachers ever because of the reading sufficiency law that…could force kids to be retained." Likewise, Carrie noted the Reading Sufficiency Act had made state-mandated testing "so high stakes this year." Third grade teachers, however, were not the only ones impacted by change. Carrie described the reluctance of her entire faculty to adopt RtI, saying, "When I got to Amazing, they had been very fearful of Response to Intervention. They would not do it." By understanding that continuous educational

reforms represented fundamental changes to their faculties, and therefore posed a threat to their emotional and psychological well-being, the principals in this study were better prepared to adequately address the needs of their teams. One strategy both leaders reported using was a *Focus on Coherence*. By aligning new mandates with established practices, study participants described framing these reforms as part of their schools' existing cultures in order to reduce the magnitude of change—and related stress levels— for their teachers. Another way participants addressed the well-being of their faculties was in their communication about why and how changes were happening at their schools. Both effective principals were purposeful about expressing support for their teachers in forging a pathway through the change "together" with their faculties.

Research Question #3. In response to research question three, about the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms, both principals were emphatic and without hesitation. "Culture IS the priority," Sharon declared, "Collaboration, communication, teamwork, a sense of community, and safety—all of those things are my priority." She noted that a positive culture requires everyone working together toward the same purposes, each bringing their own unique experiences and talents to the table. Evidence from Carrie's interviews showed that she concurred. "School culture is everything," she announced. For her, school culture required the ability to foster a warm climate, promote the well-being of her faculty, build transparent and authentic relationships, distribute leadership to engage her teachers, and make efforts to emphasize fun community-building.

For both administrators, an important element of school culture was a positive climate, or feelings of belonging and hope. To them, this meant having warm and helpful

secretaries at work in the front office; both principals replaced existing secretaries when given the opportunity. Another similarity in their approaches to positive climate included their willingness to lighten up and have fun with their teams. Both administrators celebrated student accomplishments with playful backpack tags or charms, and both recognized the value of a good old-fashioned assembly for raising spirits and uniting students and faculty alike in a common vision. They wore feather boas and homemade superhero capes, and despite all the well-documented stress found in the role of elementary school principal, these ladies smiled a lot. They loved what they did, and it showed. For the schools in this case study, positive climate started in the principal's office.

Research Question #4: Other Realities

The fourth research question guiding my inquiry was simple: "What other realities were revealed in this study?" Given the open-natured inquiry in this study's design, it was important to consider contrary evidence and findings outside of the parameters of its theoretical framework (Yin, 2009). By considering the data carefully and openly, I was rewarded with several unintended and unexpected findings.

Finding #2: Participants described distinct approaches to leadership.

While this finding passes the common sense test, it was striking how powerfully the evidence supported the simple fact that no "one-size-fits-all" model of effective leadership works in every scenario. Consider this: organizational objectives in EPS defined effective leadership as high levels of academic achievement and positive school climate. What principals at each school described doing to accomplish these objectives

was as unique as the people in their buildings. There were similarities in their leadership approaches, but there were remarkable distinctions, too.

Perhaps the most significant differences came from evidence of their fundamental beliefs about motivation. Sharon held a more inclusive view; faculty, students, families, and community members were valuable partners in the process of realizing an extraordinary vision for their school. Her approach to motivation emphasized engaging their minds and hearts in a common moral purpose, one that required the talents of everyone working together. The data highlighted this, particularly in how Sharon responded about leaving them when accepting her new position. All her efforts were geared toward leaving Outstanding better than she found it, with competent leadership distributed throughout the organization to continue the work they had started together. In contrast, at her core, Carrie viewed herself as a maternal caregiver. The evidence revealed how Carrie communicated with her faculty in a pattern reminiscent of my Catholic grandmother, a master of emotional manipulation, yet genuinely kind, benevolent, and absolutely adored. Carrie's efforts were geared toward earning the affection of her faculty. In her naturally maternal way, she seemingly chopped up challenges into little bite-sized pieces for her staff to digest slowly. Carrie went out of her way to care for her teachers' emotional and psychological needs, reducing their stress and providing fun distractions that also developed a sense of community.

Another way of viewing the distinction in leadership described by the two effective principals in this case study is to consider their approaches to change in terms of the relationship/results orientation described in the leadership behavior literature review. With some of the lowest test scores, and a toxic culture known throughout the district,

Outstanding Elementary needed some big changes. Consequently, Sharon described

being given a broad directive to make sweeping improvements. While creating a more

positive school climate for faculty and staff was part of the job, she could not avoid tough

conversations with her faculty about improving instructional effectiveness. Sharon's

approach was to embrace her role as a change agent. While she viewed the building of

trusting relationships with her stakeholders as essential, that was only part of the

equation. "Kid Focused, Data Driven." These words encapsulated her driving belief that

improving instructional effectiveness (results) and building quality relationships,

together, make a meaningful difference in the future opportunities of students. Given the

challenge of her assignment, it is unlikely that even the superintendent could have

anticipated Sharon's school would be ranked #1 for positive school climate by her

teachers. On the other hand, Carrie was not hired to fix a problem; rather, her job was to

continue the work that was started before her. Amazing Elementary had enjoyed

satisfactory test scores and equally non-problematic school culture for nearly a decade

under Carrie's predecessor. As such, Carrie focused her leadership efforts almost

exclusively on positive school climate, trusting that her teachers' track record would

continue to produce an expected level of academic achievement. Thus, when it came to

leading during an era of continuous reforms, Carrie described her approach at Amazing

Elementary as serving as a buffer to change for her staff. In particular, the data revealed

her systematic influence on the instructional effectiveness of the faculty was largely

indirect. Using a hands-off approach, she focused instead on building rapport with her

teachers. A motto of, "If you make them fall in love with you" summarized her emphasis

on relationships and guided her leadership efforts.

The point of this finding is that both leaders were effective at meeting organizational objectives, despite their different approaches. They described two factors that seemed to play an important role in why their different leadership styles were effective. The first factor was the distinct reality of each school's existing culture and performance when the principals assumed leadership. For example, Sharon's approach to transforming the poor culture and performance she inherited at Outstanding Elementary was necessarily different from Carrie's approach to continuing the satisfactory culture and performance that she took over at Amazing Elementary. The second factor participants described included the unique expectations of district leadership, teachers, and other stakeholders for each school. Teachers at Outstanding Elementary were aware of the changes Sharon would bring to their school; her reputation preceded her. Their expectations about her leadership meant the difference for many between whether they stayed or moved on. Carrie enjoyed insight into the expectations of the teachers at Amazing before her arrival as its principal. As an administrator in another EPS elementary school prior to her appointment at Amazing, Carrie was aware that teachers at the school were reluctant to implement changes, even district-required initiatives. In addition to teachers, district leadership's expectations also played a role in the effectiveness of participants' distinct leadership approaches. When district leadership communicated explicitly with Sharon and Carrie about expectations and allowances for change at their respective sites, the principals understood these conversations to more precisely define what the organizational objectives of high levels of academic achievement and positive school climate meant for their schools. In sum, participants

described these factors as forming the idea of "fit" and lead to the third finding in this study—that having the right leadership fit is important to positive school climate.

Finding #3: Participants described the importance of fit.

Although not a case parameter for the present study, both participants were relatively new to their schools. When the study began, the principals were each in their second year as leaders of their respective sites; yet, on a Gallup poll of climate, their teachers ranked the climate of these schools among the very best in the district. Understanding their perspectives about how this happened was important, given that a review of the literature did not indicate it was likely to occur. Research on the destructive impact of high-stakes accountability policies, in particular those where parent-trigger laws allowed school principals to be fired and replaced based on low academic achievement, revealed that change in leadership had not created positive school climate (Lu, 2013). Both participants in the present study described their appointment as the new principal as the most significant change experienced at their schools, a circumstance with great potential to upset the climate. How, then, were they able to promote such positive climates, as demonstrated by their Gallup poll ratings? Based on my conversations with the effective principals in this study, I believe the idea of "fit" may explain why: despite being new, principals in the present study understood where their schools were, the expectations about where they were headed, and how their unique strengths and weaknesses best could get them there.

The data revealed that as principals new to their sites, one of the first considerations they both made regarding initial leadership decisions was the impact of their predecessors on the existing culture and expectations. Using the True Colors label

of "orange," a term that describes a person who is playful, outgoing, flexible, and independent, Carrie explained, "The principal before me is very orange,… and I am just as orange as they get, too. And so [district leadership] put me in a building where the staff is used to an orange leader, which is great." After pausing for a moment to reflect, she added, "I mean, they do a really good job of that in Excellence, I think, of placing principals where they go." Likewise, Sharon shared an awareness of leadership approaches at Outstanding prior to her arrival and a recognition of the purposeful decisions of district leadership in selecting her to replace them.

> I had applied here a few times, but I wasn't a fit for some of the schools that were open…or with the administrative teams that were in place at the time. And so…based on the needs of Outstanding—I was the third principal in three years here, a retiree and then one who was moved because of the fact that it wasn't a fit—I was asked to come here and…that's how I ended up in Excellence.

What each of the principals in this case study described as making her a good fit for her school was unique, reflecting an important alignment between the leaders' character and strengths with the needs and expectations of their schools. Sharon, for example, was recruited for the explicit goal of improving both the school culture and academic achievement at Outstanding Elementary. Her ability to meet district expectations came from her confidence and a willingness to make a departure from previous leadership in addressing challenges. Her charisma, focus, and enthusiasm matched the needs of Outstanding. On the other hand, Amazing Elementary had much less need for improvement in the area of academic achievement, and its school culture was not particularly problematic to district leadership. What made Carrie a good fit as a new

principal for Amazing was her ability to adeptly read and naturally accommodate her teachers' expectations: fun and outgoing leadership that understood their need to take change slowly. By describing how they met the needs and expectations of their respective schools, principals in the study revealed how being a good fit overcame potential barriers of being new and allowed them to foster some of the most positive climates in EPS.

Finding #4: Participants described influences by district culture.

The power of the district's central office to influence culture at individual elementary school sites was something I underestimated. I envisioned elementary principals standing at the helm of their vessels, guiding them through stormy seas and directing them to safe harbor to dock for rest and restocking. I came to realize that these captains served as part of a greater fleet and were each carefully selected as a fit for their respective crews. Yes, they exercised incredible power that went largely unchallenged during their time at sea; still, they received their orders from others. Their journeys were essentially mapped out by higher-ups well in advance, including the required stops along the way and the expected results. To whom and how these orders have historically been delivered and monitored have created what the data revealed as a district culture of traditionalism. For the purpose of this study, I define traditionalism as a way of operating that promotes a bias toward the people and processes that have historically proven successful while ignoring evidence of problems that challenge this bias. The principals in the present study described being influenced, both positively and negatively, by a culture of traditionalism in EPS.

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This finding revealed an impact by district culture on study participants as they worked to effectively lead their schools. The data confirmed that the truth about a hidden culture of traditionalism was a well-known reality among principals in Excellence. Recall the comment made by one administrator during a district meeting of school principals: "There is an influential group of people who still think of [Excellence] as a small community of 30,000 very like-minded people. These stakeholders have a sense of entitlement, of keeping things the way they like them." Carrie described evidence of traditionalism at Amazing, where a bias towards the people that have historically proven successful meant she enjoyed strong connections with influential individuals in the district. For her, a culture of traditionalism was helpful in being an effective leader. She described having the district's support in mentoring relationships, in taking her time with RtI implementation, and in allowing her to "be herself" with her faculty.

A district culture of traditionalism had a negative impact on the broader context surrounding study participants, however, when a tendency to ignore evidence of problems led to challenges. One problem, for example, was an exponential growth in the type and extent of student needs over the past decade. Excellence is, indeed, no longer a community of 30,000 like-minded people. Although district leadership has acknowledged growing demographic diversity—as when the superintendent recently presented such data to community stakeholders and district administrators—proactive steps to adequately address challenges created by increased diversity and poverty in EPS have been slow in coming. As a result, the gradual decline of both climate and/or academic performance in some schools had become an institutional reality.

Evidence of this decline was revealed in the way several schools required the recruitment of leaders, like Sharon, from outside the district's culture of traditionalism to turn things around. In describing how she came to be at Outstanding, Sharon shared the history of the school, including how over time, leadership "kind of letting things go the way that they were, even though right before their very eyes the demographics…were changing significantly…. and they just weren't sure what to do with that." Although a district culture of traditionalism persists, recent efforts by new district leadership to bring in leaders with a fresh perspective represented a cultural shift, an appreciation of the wisdom of Einstein's remark, "Problems cannot be solved with the same mind set that created them" (Chandler, 2014). Sharon described how being a cultural outsider helped her solve some of Outstanding's problems by breaking down barriers to meaningful progress. For example, she did not shy away from conversations about race or poverty. However, despite broad latitude to make needed changes at Outstanding from the district superintendent himself, Sharon had to overcome hidden expectations of a culture of traditionalism when working with certain teachers to improve instructional effectiveness.

Conclusions

After witnessing the destructive impact of continuous reforms on faculty morale and school climate in my own building and others throughout my district, I wanted to know what could be done about it. As a school administrator, I recognized the limitations of my ability to control the pressures facing our schools today. So what, I wondered, were other principals' experiences? What were they seeing at their schools, and what were they doing about it? If they were able to lead effectively despite relentless

educational reforms, how were they getting results without sacrificing what matters most in our public schools?

The first conclusion from the present research relates closely to this idea of "how." When asking questions about "how," Yin (2009) held that case studies are an effective methodology. This research considered the case of effective elementary school principals, asking how they described the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms. Based on the data from this study, I concluded that in an era of educational reforms, **elementary principals described school culture as a priority in effective leadership**. Like Schein (1993), they maintained that culture is the most important factor for leaders to consider.

The second conclusion from the present research also relates to the idea of "how." Over the course of this study, I found myself circling back over the broad and pervasive ideas at its core: change, leadership, culture. Take the question of change. Was it something that happened *to* schools? Was change a tidal wave of external accountability mandates from which effective leaders protected their teachers? Or was it something that happened *in* schools? Was it a process in which effective leaders engaged their teachers? Was change the setting, the antagonist, or the hero of the principal's story? The data revealed change is, in some ways, all of these. Another unwieldy idea from the present study was the vast concept of culture. Culture is incredibly pervasive and includes many dimensions. Yet time and again, my research showed culture to be one of those "you know it when you see it" enigmas. Wheatley (2006) described the "non-material forces in organizations—culture, values, vision, ethics" as a "quality of organizational life that can be observed in behavior yet doesn't exist anywhere independent of those behaviors"

(p. 54). After reflecting on the literature and my research, I came to reduce these larger

than life notions into the following conclusion: **when facing educational reforms,**

effective principals use school culture to achieve organizational objectives.

Therefore, if Change is the why, and Leadership represents the who, then Culture is most

certainly the how.

Considering the Problem

This study began with a problem: the tension between what school leaders know

to be best practices and what we actually do. During my initial exploratory research, I

learned that efforts to lead change initiatives may fail as often as 80-90% of the time

(Cope, 2003). This is a discouraging statistic for elementary school principals struggling

to lead during an era where continuous reforms are changing every dimension of public

education's K-12 curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The hypothesis I presented to

explain such a discrepancy between knowledge and practice was that principals struggled

to promote positive school culture while attending to the complex and comprehensive

demands of their jobs. This study has shown that my suggestion was only partially

correct. Just as the research predicted, both principals in the present case study had

complex and comprehensive demands placed on them by a wide range of roles and

responsibilities. The part of my hypothesis that missed the mark was that effective

leaders during an era of continuous reform use culture as a pathway—the HOW—to

accomplishing all other organizational objectives.

To further explain, Caesars' bridge across the Rhine serves as a metaphor. In 55

BCE, during Caesar's conquest of Gaul, marauding Germanic tribes continuously

harassed his soldiers and impeded his efforts. These tribes hid behind the security of the

Rhine River, which served as a natural boundary on Caesar's eastern front. Determined to show his enemies who they were dealing with, Caesar built a bridge across the mighty Rhine River. He could have crossed the river in boats, but in choosing HOW he led his men to overcome this challenge, he was making a point: We are Romans. We are focused on an important mission and neither you nor the environment is going to get in our way. With that, he unified the extraordinary efforts of 40,000 troops to use nearby forests to construct a bridge nearly 30 feet wide, 1,300 feet long, and over 30 feet deep in *ten days*. Such an engineering accomplishment in bridges was not surpassed for millennia. With great confidence and pride, Caesar's troops marched across the Rhine, where they discovered their enemy had largely retreated (O'Connor, 1994).

Like Caesar, the elementary school principals in the present study contended with the continuous harassment of opposing forces, often navigating in hostile environments. Educational reformers relentlessly attacked their teachers and the institution of public education; but these leaders, also charismatic and confident, had a plan that extended beyond any specific challenge. They understood that whatever the organizational objective may be, from raising student achievement to improving school climate, effective leaders recognize that it is about more than simply solving the immediate problem. Instead, the act of finding those solutions, *how we build the bridge together*, defines the culture of our schools.

Schein (1993) defined organizational culture as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a *group learned as it solved problems of external adaptation* [emphasis added] and internal integration that is taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel" (p. 373). How an organization faces challenges reveals a great

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deal about the values and beliefs that inform its culture. From studying this case, I

learned that elements of positive school culture—well-being, cohesion, cooperation,

purpose, and vision—are key for principals leading their teams through the difficult

landscape of public education in the era of continuous reforms. The good news is that

positive school culture is not simply one more item to check off a principal's impossible

lengthy to do list. The truth is much more powerful than that. Positive school culture

represents HOW we get things done; it is the bridge to overcoming obstacles—a way of

unifying extraordinary talents and efforts in pursuit of a common magnificent goal.

Recommendations

The purpose of exploring how effective elementary school principals described

the role of culture in leadership during an era of continuous reforms was to glean some

deeper understanding from their stories. Perhaps findings from the present research

cannot be generalized, but there are implications to be found, woven throughout the data.

Implications for Future Research

The most important recommendations this study has to offer for future research

on school leadership during an era of continuous reforms relate to sustainability and

focus. In making the distinction between culture and climate, Gruenert and Whitaker

(2015) explained the issue of sustainability: "Culture takes years to evolve, but climate

change is easy" (p. 10). In the present study, Gallup poll results indicated that principals

were able to achieve some of their district's most positive climates—based on feelings of

belonging and hope—in a relatively short time. Since feelings and perceptions are easily

changed, these results could prove temporary. While positive climate is certainly

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important, encompassing elements of well-being and cohesion, it represents only part of a school's positive culture, which is much more longstanding. However, over time, qualities of climate can become integrated in the values and beliefs of a school. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) caution, "Culture will take many years to reflect new beliefs that guide behaviors to the point where they are like second nature" (p. 16). As in the case of Outstanding Elementary, future research investigating the long-term impact of effective leadership after a building administrator has moved on would be helpful. Researchers could investigate how individuals at the school fared in light of new leadership. Were they able to sustain meaningful changes in positive climate while maintaining their focus on continuous improvement?

In an environment buffeted by the constant evolution of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, leaders of America's public schools struggle with the challenge of focusing their teams on what matters most. While programs and mandates and policies pound their ships, school leaders attempt to stay the course and navigate ever-changing seas. Although it was beyond the scope and purpose of the present study to draw any conclusions regarding the impact of engaging a moral purpose on academic achievement, it is noteworthy that the test scores at Outstanding increased very slightly over the course of Sharon's tenure, while those at Amazing declined. Again, both schools met the criteria for this case—positive school climate and high levels of academic achievement. In a similar way, Valentine (2006) addressed this issue about where educational leaders should focus their efforts:

The essential questions become (a) "Does a leader and a school work first to build

a collaborative culture and then student success evolves?" or (b) Does a process

of collaborative work focusing on student success produce both a collaborative

culture and student success?" (p. 5)

Future research at Amazing could investigate if early attempts to promote positive school

culture through an almost-exclusive emphasis on building quality relationships with

faculty could translate later into an administrator's successful ability to guide more

rigorous and targeted academic improvement efforts.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the present research focused exclusively

on the perspectives of the school principals involved in the study. While telling their

story was important to deepening the understanding of educational leadership during an

era of unprecedented changes, future research could broaden the scope of this case to

include the viewpoint of other stakeholders. How do they perceive the role of culture in

efforts to lead schools through challenging times? Future research could consider their

perspectives in conjunction with school leaders', adding another quality to the story.

Implications for Practice

The present study held several insights for elementary school principals leading

during an era of continuous reforms. First, it highlights the importance of building

trusting relationships with faculty and staff. As Covey (1996) noted, trust is critical for

leadership. Without trust, school principals will fail to accomplish organizational

objectives. With trust, school principals can unify their teams in efforts to take on

challenges into uncharted territory, accomplishing extraordinary goals together.

Second, this study illustrates the importance of patience. Relationships—pivotal to the success of the effective leaders in the case—do not develop overnight, and trust takes time to earn. Fullan (2001) has even suggested a time frame of approximately three years for elementary school principals leading fundamental changes. Thus, site and district level leadership, along with other school stakeholders, would do well to remember to be patient with the process of continuous improvement.

Finally, this research reveals the importance of focusing on a positive culture. For principals striving to lead effectively during an era of continuous reforms, the examples from the present study serve as a beacon of how positive culture can be the priority in today's schools. Competing demands from mandated reforms can be integrated into existing goals that are supported by the school culture. In addition, leaders can remind themselves that culture is created and strengthened when people work together to solve problems. Thus, the challenges found in continuous reforms can also serve as opportunities to improve school culture as individuals unite behind a common purpose to accomplish organizational objectives.

Implications for Policy

Finally, school leaders have a responsibility to actively engage policy makers in a dialogue about responsible and effective practices for improving public schools in America. As educators, we are the voice for the children who ultimately suffer from bad policy. Lawmakers and state leaders need to be reminded that public education was not established to create higher and higher test scores. The true mission of public education—its heart and its soul—is to improve the lives of children by preparing them with the tools and aptitudes for a successful future. It is time educational policymakers

listen to the voices of those impacted by wave after wave of punitive, ill-conceived, and destructive reforms: Enough.

Epilogue

I began this research with the idea of telling a story, searching for the words that define the experience of leading during an era of continuous reforms. In *Eat, Pray, Love,* Gilbert (2006) asked, "What is the word?... Every city has a single word that defines it, that identifies most people living there" (p. 103). Through my own struggle to be the best school leader I can be, and through my research into what effective principals are doing each day, I think I have found our word. HOPE. It is the one thing than defines us, and no amount of education reform can mandate it away. *Hope* is what called us to be educators in the first place, inspiring us to believe in the possibilities of a future not yet realized. *Hope* is what gives us the strength to get up each day and fight the good fight, for our teachers, our students, and ourselves. *Hope* comes from believing that for public education, the best is yet to come. The final chapter of this story remains to be written.

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APPENDIX A
Qualitative Interview Questions.
The Culture Connection: A Tale Of Elementary Principals
Leading During an era of continuous reforms.

Interviewee: _____   Date: _____   Time _____
Location: _____

Tell me about how you came to be a principal in this district.	
What kind of changes have you experienced as an administrator in the past year? Presently?	
What kind of changes has your school experienced in the past year? Presently?	
How do you address your school's capacity to change? *Probe – In what ways do you support new ways of thinking, learning, problem solving?*	
This study is looking at ways principals view the process of leading during an era of continuous reforms. Tell me a story that illustrates what this experience is like for you.	
What strategies have you found to be helpful in leading during an era of continuous reforms?	
What issues of leading during an era of continuous reforms continue to be a source of frustration?	
Is there anything you would like to add?	
How do you see the role of school culture in your efforts to lead? *Probe – In what ways do you provide for safety, community, collaboration, communication, and teamwork?*	

Stephanie Cline Tulp
1725 NW 185th Street
Edmond, OK 73012

Dr. XXXX XXXXXX
Superintendent
 Public Schools
1001 W. Danforth
, OK 79999

September 1, 2013

Dear Dr. Superintendent:

In fulfillment of the research component required of students in Oklahoma State University's Doctorate of Education, I am seeking your permission to gain access to two elementary principals of Public Schools. I have informally spoken with a number of principals, and several have indicated their willingness to participate.

This fall I would like to conduct research involving these two principals. The primary method of data collection will be tape-recorded interviews, supplemented with direct observation, documentation, archival records, physical artifacts and, as a school administrator myself, elements of participant-observation. Although elementary school students aged 4-12 may be present during the observations during the school day, they will not be interview subjects. A copy of my Institutional Review Board application packet is attached to lend further insight. If you desire, I can also provide a copy of the entire research proposal.

Upon receiving approval of the Institutional Review Board, the study will commence in the Spring semester of 2013. Data collection may extend into the following semester. Any necessary follow-up interviews will be conducted to ensure credibility; member checks of the transcribed interviews will ensure accurate representation of the subjects' words and ideas. Data gathering and analysis should be complete no later than December 2014.

There are no anticipated risks involved in the participation of this research.

If you are willing to allow me to proceed with this research, please indicate so with your signature below. If you require additional assurances, please contact me for further discussion.

Most Respectfully,

Stephanie Cline Tulp

APPENDIX C

Stephanie Cline Tulp
1725 NW 185th Street
Edmond, OK 73012

October 13, 2013

Dear Public School Principal:

This letter is to introduce myself and my research. I am a doctoral candidate at
Oklahoma State University, pursuing a doctorate in Education Administration. I am
currently serving the Public School district as one of two assistant principals at
Supersized Elementary. I started my career in Arizona as a special education teacher of
students in grades Kindergarten through eight. After the military moved my family to
Texas, I taught special education and fourth grade for another three years. Another move
to Oklahoma led me to the Public School district, where I taught a total of ten years at
Supersized Elementary and Wayside Elementary and served as the assistant principal at
Cozy Elementary for two years.

I am conducting a case study to understand the way elementary school principals view
the role culture plays in leading during an era of continuous reforms. I have been granted
access to conduct my research by the district superintendent, Dr. Superintendent.
Analysis of the collected data should prove insightful to elementary school principals.

I am seeking the assistance of elementary school principals within Public School district
to submit to a total of two (2) taped interviews, lasting approximately 45 minutes each.
In addition, I would like to spend enough time with the elementary principals at their
respective sites to better understand the context of their experiences leading during an era
of continuous reforms. The data collected from interviews and observations will be kept
strictly confidential. If you decide to participate in this research, your identity and
responses will not be revealed. If you are amenable to the participating in this study,
please respond to indicate when you are available to meet. I will make every effort to
accommodate your schedule and preferences for date and time.

Please email me at stephanie.tulp@okstate.edu or call (405) 833-1587.

Respectfully,

Stephanie Cline Tulp

APPENDIX D
ADULT CONSENT FORM: Oklahoma State University

PROJECT: The culture connection: A cautionary tale for educational leaders of change initiatives.

INVESTIGATOR: Stephanie C. Tulp, Doctoral Candidate, Oklahoma State University

PURPOSE:
This study involves researching practical implications of change theory and leadership literature. Specifically, it will examine transformations in school culture through the lens of social constructivist epistemology and a theoretical framework of Forces for Leaders of Change. Participants are being asked to share their insights to assist in this analysis. This study will evaluate the role of school culture and the complexity of the principal's role in effectively leading during an era of continuous reforms.

PROCEDURES:
You will be interviewed at least once but no more than two times. The questions and your responses will be audio recorded. Four of the interview questions will ask about the values and related behaviors at your site. Four of the questions will ask about the culture and organizational structures. This study is designed to last approximately 1 1/2 hours. The time will be divided into two, 45 minute interviews.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:
There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. Results of the interviews will be used solely for purpose of this study, and will in no way impact professional evaluations and/or treatment.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:
Benefits of participation include personal reflection on key issues affecting effective leadership of change initiatives and school culture. If you are interested, I will send you a copy of the results of the study when it is finished.

IMPORTANCE/SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY
Fullan (2009) created Forces for Leaders of Change with evidence found in empirical studies on effective leadership; however, he contends investigating educational change from the perspective of principals essential to further developing practical theory. The present study takes up Fullan's challenge to tell the story of principals leading during an era of continuous reforms. In so doing, this not only advances current theory and practice, it also provides the opportunity to discover the greater meaning embedded in their attempts to effectively lead change initiatives.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and/or will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

Confidentiality will be maintained except under specified conditions required by law. For example, current Oklahoma law requires that any ongoing child abuse (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, and neglect) of a minor must be reported to state officials. In addition, if an individual reports that he/she intends to harm him/herself or others, legal and professional standards require that the individual must be kept from harm, even if confidentiality must be broken. Finally, confidentiality could be broken if materials from this study were subpoenaed by a court of law.

COMPENSATION:
No compensation implied or expressed is being provided for participation in this study.

CONTACTS :
You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: Stephanie C. Tulp, M.Ed., Doctoral Candidate, School Administration, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) 726-4760. Also, my advisor, Bernita Krumm, Ph.D. can be reached at (816) 719-7832. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:
Your participation is voluntary, and there is no penalty for refusal to participate. You are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty.

 ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~CONSENT DOCUMENTATION~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I also understand and agree with the following statements:

I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

VITA

Stephanie K. Cline

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: THE ROLE OF CULTURE: EFFECTIVE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS
DESCRIBE LEADING IN AN ERA OF CONTINUOUS REFORMS

Major Field: School Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School
Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May,
2015.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in School Administration
at University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, OK in 2010.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Special Education at
Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ in 1995.

Experience:

2011-2015   Assistant Principal, Grades PreK-5
1998-2011   General Education Teacher, Grades 3-5
1996-1998   Special Education Teacher, Grades K-8

Professional Memberships:

Cooperative Council Oklahoma School Administration (CCOSA)
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)