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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF LEADERSHIP:

DEVELOPING A SHARED SCHOOL VISION

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By
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Norman, Oklahoma
2004

UMI Number: 3143538

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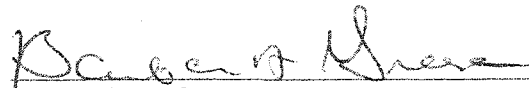
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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF LEADERSHIP:
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A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE

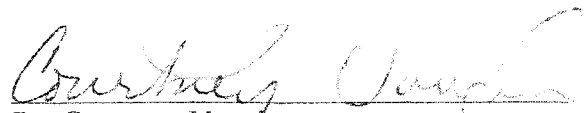DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

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Dr. Mary John O'Hair

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When sociologist James Coleman (1990) addressed the issue of social capital, he stated, "...for individuals do not act independently, goals are not independently arrived at, and interests are not wholly selfish (p. 301)." I found those words to be a concise and accurate portrayal of my experiences through the process of completing this dissertation.

I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Mary John O'Hair, for her steadfast belief in the importance of the topic of shared vision and my ability to provide a meaningful contribution to the literature. Her visionary guidance and direction were invaluable. Thanks to the other members of my dissertation committee, who selflessly shared their plethora of intelligence and wisdom during the process. Special thanks to Dr. Gregg Garn for always making time to help me stay focused and motivated, Dr. Courtney A. Vaughn for her candid methodological expertise seasoned with humor and practicality, Dr. Barbara Greene for her availability, energy, and interest in the topic, and Dr. Irene Karpiak for her reverence of the human experience and the penetrating questions designed to better illuminate the journey of those in my study.

Special thanks to my family for their support and confidence throughout the dissertation process. I am indebted to my parents, Joann and Anthony Averso, for their sacrifices and tenacious commitment to my formal education. I am grateful to my wife, Melissa, for her steadfast support and willingness to adopt additional supporting roles during the process, and to my children, Megan and Stephen, for their understanding and patience.

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF LEADERSHIP:

DEVELOPING A SHARED SCHOOL VISION

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The purpose of this research was to examine how school administrators currently lead the development of a shared school vision. In examining the challenges surrounding the creation of a shared vision, several issues became evident. Firstly, while school leaders understand the need for a school vision, they do not know how to develop and sustain a shared vision. Secondly, school leaders need to focus the development of a shared vision in light of multiple expectations on them and their schools, increasing diversity of their communities, and a variety of voluntary and involuntary initiatives. Thirdly, for a school's vision to be truly shared, school leaders need to know how to involve multiple stakeholder perspectives in its development and share leadership in its successful execution. Finally, school leaders are challenged to intentionally restructure and re-culture their schools to diminish isolation and foster meaningful collaborative venues aimed at school improvement.

Utilizing a phenomenological inquiry, interviews of the lived experiences and perceptions of seven elementary school principals developing a shared vision are described. The findings detail the principals' leadership behaviors, which corroborate support for structures associated with professional learning communities.

Identified principal behaviors supported empowering the vision, modeling support for the vision, building vision coherence, and monitoring vision. This study seeks to

examine these behaviors from the perceptions of the interviewed principals' lived

experiences, and to offer improved understanding about the research question, "What

aspects of school leadership contribute to the development of a shared school vision?"

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background and Problem Statement

In a climate of increasing local, state and federal pressures to improve student

achievement in America's schools, educational research is taking center stage to identify

and inform replication of factors associated with school improvement, including

increasing student achievement. In January 2002, American President George W. Bush

announced *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB, 2004)- his framework for bipartisan education

reform to address his concern that "too many of our neediest children are being left

behind," despite the nearly $200 billion in Federal spending since passage of the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The four pillars of the *No Child Left*

Behind (NCLB) legislation include: stronger accountability, more local freedom, choices

for parents and use of proven methods.

Research in and out of the educational field continues to reiterate the importance

of vision in the success of organizations. Shared vision is a research-based practice of

high-achieving schools (O'Hair, McLaughlin & Reitzug, 2000; Senge, 1990;

Sergiovanni,2000). As schools develop models to meet the legislated mandates of

NCLB, school vision will be affected by how accountability, local freedom, parental

choice and use of proven methods will be practiced. More research is needed to

determine what type of vision is needed to guide and inspire change in organizations, and

the conditions where a vision in most important (Yukl, 2002). While many school

communities would support the importance of school vision, too few schools have a

shared vision. While understanding the values, hopes and aspirations of people in the organization is essential to finding a vision that will engage them, Yukl (2002) contends gaining such insight can be difficult because people may be unable or unwilling to explain what is really important to them. The traditional bureaucratic nature of schools is being challenged so as to bring about the necessary conditions to move towards a shared vision that demonstrates increases in student achievement, among other things.

To be sure, schools represent a culture of change. The context of schools is changing continuously, and the school leader is charged with guiding the development of a vision that is responsive to the changes. Essential school conditions in the areas of school culture, structures, and professional development must be examined before a school vision can be crafted that represents the ideal future of the school. Newmann and Wehlage (1995) found development of a shared vision aimed at improving student achievement is firmly linked to effective work habits and conditions:

> The most successful schools were those that used restructuring tools to help them function as professional communities. That is, they found a way to channel staff and students' efforts toward a clear, commonly shared purpose for student learning; they created opportunities for teachers to collaborate and help one another achieve the purpose; and teachers in these schools took collective-not just individual-responsibility for student learning. Schools with strong professional communities were better able to offer authentic pedagogy and were more effective in promoting student achievement (p. 3).

At issue in schools today is the ambiguity school administrators face in responding to what school should look like; a key component of school vision. Murphy

and Lewis (1999) suggest three different views of school that continue to bear down on school administrators trying to navigate and accommodate these expectations while avoiding a weakened, bland, fragmented organization. One view is the prescriptive approach to schooling that supports state and national standards that emphasize uniformity in the school organization and student expectations. Within this view, the school leader is charged primarily with interpreting and administering externally-developed standards as they apply to the context he/she represents. A second view proposes local control, whereby school operations and what should be taught is determined by the school/district through involvement of school community stakeholders, particularly teachers and parents. In this view, the school leader assumes the role of how to best execute the desires of the local school community. A third view would hold that the school should be seen as a market-driven system, with the school's purpose to meet the demands of its consumers – after all, it is their tax dollars paying for the school. In this view the school administrator assumes a managerial role of giving the consumer what he wants, regardless of what research and successful practices may dictate. Adopting a research-based approach to school improvement assists in navigating these ambiguous and varied views of school organization. As an administrator assumes leadership in the development of a shared vision for the school, he must provide coherent focus by scanning and screening the newest and most relevant findings in the research base underlying improved practice. In order to move towards a shared school vision, there must be an informed school community who understands high-quality research and practice-based information, and the school leadership is accountable to consistently and

continuously communicate the new knowledge base and coordinate discourse about how it fits into their school context.

Yet another problem seen in the development of school vision is that it is typically seen as a function of the head of the school or district. A review of vision research revealed a leader-focused phenomenon, and in a school context the school leader (most often the principal) is typically ascribed responsibility for the development of school vision (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Manasse, 1985; Rutherford, 1985; Shieve & Shoenheit, 1987). Greenbaum and Gonzalez (1987) state that effective school leaders have "clear visions of what they want their schools to become and are able to translate these visions into district goals and expectations for their schools..." (p. 204). Current leadership literature frequently characterizes the leader as "the vision holder, the keeper of the dream, or the person who has a vision of the organization's purpose" (Bennis & Nanus, 1990). Sashkin (1988) sees the goal of visionary leadership is to transform organizational cultures. He believes visionary leaders have three essential qualities: their personality (including their cognitive skills), their ability to develop an organizational vision, and their ability to articulate the vision. A potential concern of the vision being created and promoted by one or even a few people can be seen in the literature about the charismatic leader. Sociologist Max Weber theorized that a charismatic leader emerges when they are able to offer a vision that successfully solves some crisis, thereby making the vision appear attainable and securing a group of followers who perceive the leader as extraordinary (Yukl, 2002). This initial theory of the charismatic leadership has been further developed into neocharismatic leadership by researchers Conger and Kanungo (1998) who purport that a leader's

behavior and skill, as well as aspects of the context within which they are leading, forms follower attribution of charismatic qualities to a leader. Conger and Kanungo (1998) indicate that charisma is more likely to be attributed to leaders who 1) advocate a vision that is innovative, yet perceived as reasonable and doable by the followers; 2) act in unconventional ways that appear to be successful in achieving a vision, thereby suggesting some superior expertise; 3) take personal risks, thereby generating trust by appearing less motivated by self-interest and interest in followers; 4) appear confident, thereby generating enthusiasm and commitment from followers that yield organizational successes; and 5) articulate visioning and persuasive appeals without seeking the formal input of followers, thereby appearing to have expert power. The fallacies of a school vision that emerges exclusively from a single charismatic leader can be seen in the following negative consequences associated with charismatic leadership (Yukl, 2002):

- Being in awe of the leader reduces good suggestions by followers

- Desire for leader acceptance inhibits criticism by followers

- Adoration by followers creates delusions of infallibility

- Excessive confidence and optimism blind the leader to real dangers

- Denial of problems and failures reduces organizational learning

- Risky, grandiose projects are more likely to fail

- Taking complete credit for successes alienates some key followers

- Impulsive, non-traditional behavior creates enemies as well as believers

- Dependence on the leader inhibits development of competent successors

- Failure to develop successors creates an eventual leadership crisis.

(p. 251)

Yukl (2002) states, "Unless institutionalized, the changes made by a charismatic leader (or the new organization established by the leader) will not persist" (p. 253). Sustained, systemic school improvement is not served by a charismatic leader phenomenon, rather by a cultural vision that is sustained by having been developed by many of the stakeholders and leaders within a school organization through an inclusive process that informs the evolving vision, even if the leader should leave.

To institutionalize vision and the changes associated with realizing the vision, Lambert (1998) views leadership as a collective learning process whereby leadership capacity is developed in light of two critical dimensions of participation – breadth and skillfulness (Lambert, 1998). Breadth of participation corresponds to how many people are involved in the work of leadership, while skillfulness of leadership refers to leadership participants' "understanding of and demonstrated proficiency in the dispositions knowledge and skills of leadership" (Lambert, 1998, p 12). Lambert's summarizes conditions in schools with different levels of leadership capacity, thereby highlighting the circumstances that confound effective school improvement. She demonstrates how certain leadership styles impact school conditions that affect realization of a shared school vision, including flow of information, staff roles, staff relations, norms, innovations in teaching and learning and student achievement (Lambert, 1998). Generally, authoritative administration yields limited information flow, codependent relationships, lack of innovations in teaching and learning and poor or short-term improvement in student achievement. Laissez-faire administration is characterized by fragmented information flow, individualism, undefined roles, spotty innovations and overall static student achievement. Administration trained in skillful leadership, but

lacking broad participation, demonstrate limited information flow, polarized staff with pockets of strong resistance, pockets of innovation, and static to slightly improved student achievement. Lambert's ideal is a school with broad-based and skillful leadership, characterized by accessible data used to drive decision making, collaborative and broad involvement in varied roles and responsibilities, routine reflective practice and innovation, and high student achievement (Lambert, 1998).

School leaders face school structures that complicate, if not serve as a confounding obstacle to, the essential conditions that would support a shared school vision. While research would support the need for a normatively collective, purposeful, achievement-oriented institution held in high regard by a school community's stakeholders (Glickman,1990), the reality is that the heritage of our bureaucratic, traditional school structures results in the isolation that negatively impacts realization of a shared school vision and the commensurate conditions that would support it (Fullan, 1996; Wasley, 1991). Among these isolating school structures are its physical organization, individual teaching autonomy, restricted dialogue and access to information (Glickman, 1993).

The school physical organization of a collection of disconnected, separated classrooms where a group of students are assigned to a teacher reduces the opportunity for teachers to share their work with one another and to feel a sense of collective responsibility for all students. The structural issue of inadequate time for planning and inquiry and discourse around information compromises the ability of teachers to make their best, informed decisions about teaching and learning. Generally, the amount of time

teachers have to teach their students is controlled and inflexible (O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug, 2000).

The historical tradition of the one-room schoolhouse led by a teacher who then embodied a powerful, autonomous role for making decisions about teaching and learning appears even today in the isolated physical structure of schools. "The one-room schoolhouse is repeated every few yards, all the way down the hall" (Glickman, 1993, p. 19). Teachers continue to enter their classrooms, close their door and operate autonomously with the students in their classroom.

The lack of professional dialogue remains a significant impediment to the successful development of strategies to improve schools and make progress towards a shared school vision. This condition is, in part, due to the history of teachers having little to no say in decisions about teaching and learning across classrooms, grade levels and departments. This reality was particularly evident in the era of legislative reforms in education seen in the 1980s. Schools were fraught with a barrage of top-down decisions by people external to classrooms and schools, from central offices to politicians (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 1992). As schools moved into the 1990s, a data-driven decision-making emphasis on which to base decision about teaching and learning took center stage. Unfortunately, traditional structures continue to experience difficulty in enabling access to school information and data, often exacerbated by little or poor quality access to technology and communication methods that would facilitate the analysis of such data and subsequent discourse about the implications of what the data reveals. As NCLB takes center stage beginning the 21st century, the expectation that different results will occur with essentially similar confounding conditions for schools is doubtful. NCLB

takes apparently good concepts (more local freedom, more parental choice, more attention to proven methods, and accountability) but does not fundamentally invest in reforming those structures that make such concepts a reality.

The task of school leaders is to creatively impede the perpetuation of these traditions of isolation that have resulted in good school people trying to do good work (often with fatigue and discouragement) feeling trapped in a system they cannot impact to better serve the needs of themselves and their students (McNeil, 1988; Sizer, 1984). Furthermore, these traditions weaken any effort to improve schools and increase student achievement. Recent research is challenging these traditions and finding that re-culturing and restructuring these paralyzing school conditions can breathe new life into school visions that would improve schools and increase student achievement (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002; Lambert, 1998; Senge, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1991).

Schools represent a context. The culture within the school dictates how or if the context will be altered to meet the many changes it involuntarily faces and move towards a shared vision. Traditionally, context has been viewed as a set of constraints under which we operate. While schools face great challenges in their contextual traits, recent research would suggest that they may be overestimating the importance of such traits as excuses for not meeting their school visions, and underestimating their power to impact situation and context (Gladwell, 2000). Gladwell (2000) makes the point that studies of juvenile delinquency and high school drop out rates show that "a child is better off in a good neighborhood and a troubled family, than a troubled neighborhood and a good family" (pp 167-8). Another study that reinforces the idea that context matters more than individual background can be seen in the results of the Programme for

International Student Assessment (PISA) study involving 265,000 15-year olds in 32

countries who were given independent performance assessments in reading, math and

science.

> The socio-economic composition of a school's student population is an even
>
> stronger predictor than individual home background. PISA shows, for example,
>
> that two students with the same family characteristics going to different schools –
>
> one with a higher and one with a lower socio-economic profile – could expect to
>
> be further apart in reading literacy than two students from different backgrounds
>
> going to the same school (OECD, 2000).

These studies support that context is changeable, even a potential change agent. The key

appears to be in identifying in what context your school vision would more likely

flourish, and then deliberately impacting the context by naming the desired condition as a

value and creating mechanisms that cause that value to develop (Fullan, 2003).

Michael Barber (2002) summarizes the evolution of educational reform strategies

over the last four decades in a matrix (see Figure 1 & Table 1).

Figure 1. Educational Reform Strategies (Barber, 2002)

Knowledge poor

1980s Uninformed Prescription	1970s Uniformed professional judgment

National Prescription _____|_____ *Professional judgment*

1990s Informed Prescription	2000s Informed professional judgment

Knowledge rich
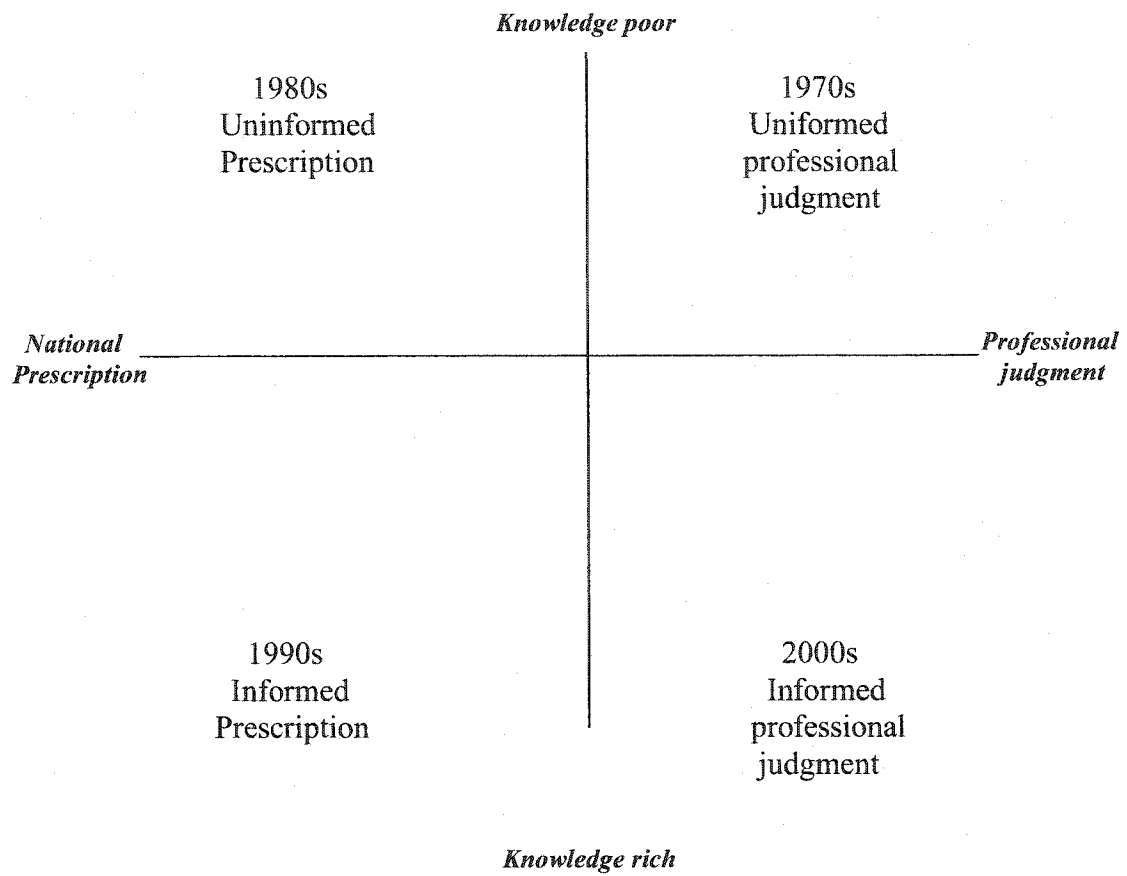
Barber's summary essentially describes cultural changes in the realm of school reform. In essence, the evolution has brought our school cultures to a point where they are challenged to draw on their professional judgment in light of a commitment to current and ongoing research and proven successful strategies as applied to their contexts.

We now call on the "will" of educators to implement the "way" to increase student success and achievement as they move towards their school vision. The reality is that current conditions and structures of schools do not support with time or money the serious professional development necessary for educators to truly understand and implement informed prescriptions, nor have continued inquiry and discourse that taps the collective energy of collaborating educators towards a shared school vision. It is in the re-culturing and restructuring of traditional, bureaucratic schools that such hope could spur achievement. In one study of more than seven thousand women and men from eighteen to seventy, it was found that only 40 percent had both the will and the way – the two basic ingredients of hope. About 20 percent felt they could find the means to attain their goals but did not have the will. Another 20 percent said they had the energy to pursue their goals but could not think of ways to achieve them. The rest, another 20 percent, had neither the energy or the way to achieve their goals (Goleman, 1991). This study would suggest that 60 percent of workers may lack the energy or methods to get extraordinary things done in organizations, that is, move productively towards the organizational vision. The implications are clear for school organizations; structures must support the school and its community in understanding effective methods to increase student achievement as well as ways to capture their energy. The prescriptions associated with

methods to increase student achievement abound. But what is happening in practice in our schools and classrooms?

McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) conducted a detailed study of 16 high schools, and revealed three patterns of teaching practice: 1) enacting traditions of practice, 2) lowering expectations and standards, and 3) innovating to engage learners (p.19). It was only the third pattern which increased success with lower performing students. When they looked at professional learning communities (teachers working together), they found there was little of it happening. When strong teacher communities did exist they found them to be of two types:

1) traditional communities in which the teachers interacted to reinforce each others' ineffective practices thereby increasing the gap between low and high performers, and

2) teacher learning communities, in which teacher collaborate to reinvent practice in order to reach all students (p 62.)

This study points up how the structures to support quality professional development and ongoing support can address the "way" if the cultural vision is to reach all students.

Moral Purpose and Social Capital

Capturing the "will" of teachers to collaborate and reinvent practice rather than reinforce traditional ineffective practices requires an examination of two important concepts. The concepts of moral purpose and social capital seem to inform the challenges and possibilities of developing a school culture motivated by a vision of increasing student achievement for all students.

Moral purpose, defined as making a difference in the lives of students, is a critical motivator for addressing the sustained task of reforming and improving schools. If people believe they are doing something worthwhile of a higher order they may be willing to put in the extra sacrifices and effort (Fullan, 2003). The informed prescription and accountability schemes of the 1990s and the bloodless test scores at the aggregate level have usurped and repressed the development of the very passion and purpose of communities of teachers, even suppressing deeper deliberations about questions of intention, purpose and responsibility:

> My premise is that this culture, and we as members of it, have yielded to easily to what is doable and practical…In the process we have sacrificed the pursuit of what is in our hearts. We find ourselves giving in to our doubts, and settling for what we know how to do, or can learn to do, instead of pursuing what matters most to us and living with the adventure and anxiety that this requires (Block, 2002, p. 1).

Moral purpose challenges us to think creatively about how to best reach our students, calling on our professional judgment and energies to control and use prescriptive knowledge, rather letting it control and use us:

> …the positive vision that makes the current angst worthwhile…by making the vision more tangible, reminding people of the values they are fighting for, and showing them how the future might look. By answering, in every possible way, the "why" question, you increase people's willingness to endure the hardships that come with the journey to a better place (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, pp. 120-21).

Social capital plays an important role in the success of schools and shared vision. since it links individual to group action. Social capital refers to those social structures within schools and their communities and how they work to facilitate the certain actions of individuals who are within the structure (Coleman, 1990). Coleman (1990) delineates several forms of social capital including:

- reciprocal obligations and expectations of one another held by members of the social group. This is predicated on a level of trust between members of the group that assures obligations will be repaid;

- potential for information that inheres in social relations. Information is important in providing a basis for action;

- existence of effective norms and sanctions that may encourage some sets of behaviors;

- being empowered to act on behalf of others for the perceived good of all.

Social capital embodies a context that values trust, norms and networks for the good of all in the organization. Creating a context that builds social capital results in high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagements and collective well-being (Putnam, 1993). In short, a good context for democratic community during and after the school experience. Coleman (1990) does identify three factors he views as impacting the building of social capital: closure in the relationship of those in the organization (that is, various relational ties among and between the various stakeholders), stability (those in the organization generally stay a part of the group and there is not a great deal of

mobility), and norms that reinforce the importance of every member to the group as a whole. Let's consider the concept of social capital in light of the reality of America's public schools.

When looking at the accountability movements for America's public schools, we observe a highly competitive, individualistic ideology. Examples of teachers or schools fabricating assessment results due to the incessant pressures to perform under substandard conditions is but one example of the competitive pressure to produce test scores. Structures in schools often serve to isolate rather than build relationships within the school and beyond, negatively impacting the closure called for when building social capital.

The mobility of students found in many of our schools, particularly those for the economically disadvantaged, negatively impact the stability needed to build social capital. Additionally, the turnover rate of teachers and the frequent movement of administrators and faculties in and out of schools affect the social capital of those schools.

In addition to this cultural reality is the reality that educational institutions are characterized by dominant, middle-class values with which many students are unfamiliar. Such students have a great deal of difficulty navigating such a predisposed system to get the support they need to reach the 'success for all' purported in school visions and supported through social capital (Stanton-Salzar, 1997).

The benefits associated with moral purpose and social capital are aligned with the vision of what school should be for all students. They together promote hope, a strong sense of obligation, shared expectations and trust – all of which are accomplished by

building quality relationships and the resultant collaboration to empower school vision

As school leadership embarks on the transformational leadership that guides the school toward reconsideration of its work, a systemic effort and commitment to professional development is a necessary focus. For decades, research has confirmed that one of the key factors in maintaining a motivated and engaged workforce is to provide job-embedded opportunities to refine their contribution to the work at hand, including new roles and new practices (Murphy & Lewis, 1999). These ongoing professional development opportunities are critical to developing an informed and responsive shared vision. School personnel must continuously improve their knowledge base about what research and successful practices are increasing student success and overall school improvement. Currently, this commitment is token at best. Most often, formal professional development is offered in a handful of days per school year, is provided to all faculty and staff regardless of its relevance to their roles or responsibilities in their work, and is fragmented or disconnected from the benefit of regularly the practices so as to deepen understanding and address issues over time that develop as it is incorporated. Murphy and Lewis (1999) report that these internal issues are coupled with external realities:

> The "institutional system" outside the school barely recognizes this reality
> [need for professional development]. The pressures are, if anything, in the
> opposite direction. Parental demands that teachers not take "time off," the lack of
> availability of substitute teachers, the increasing complexity of school
> organizations and schedules, and the demands for constant response to externally

designed standards and programs mitigate against serious professional development" (p xxv).

Problem Statement Summary

As school vision is considered, problems associated with its development, implementation and sustenance must be considered. Firstly, few organizations, including schools, have a commonly understood, shared vision (Glickman, 1993). The reasons can range from not knowing how to develop a vision for their organizations to confusing vision with related terms, such as goals and mission statements. Secondly, the strength of a school vision is empowered through a cohesive focus supported by school community stakeholders. The deluge of ambiguous expectations of school leaders can often confound visionary focus as they attempt to assuage the various influential stakeholders, embracing multiple school improvement initiatives resulting in a shallow, incoherent overextension of the capacity of school faculty to effect change. Thirdly, as recently as the 1990s, vision was still being represented as something developed by a leader based on his/her beliefs, and then sold to stakeholders. This view of vision is further exacerbated if a charismatic leader perpetuates the centrality of the vision to his/her belief system and organizational stakeholders affirm its superiority and discount that they might have something to offer to the organizational vision and the beliefs that ground it. A leader-based vision, versus a shared vision, faces serious challenges to sustainability. Fourthly, organizational structures and conditions impact the viability of a vision. The typical isolated, bureaucratic structures found in schools often work against collaborative development of focused school improvement articulated in a coherent, shared vision. Restructuring efforts to improve teaching and learning practices often meet with strong resistance from

those who would perpetuate ineffective traditional teaching and learning practices, as well as inconsistent expectations. Such resistance is often empowered by a belief that school context is a fixed circumstance, rather than one that can be impacted through restructuring traditional practices. Fifthly, educating educators through research-based professional development is an important component of successful school restructuring. Such professional development continues to be rare and is not broadly understood by school stakeholders to improve student achievement, thereby negatively impacting realization of school vision. Lastly, vision and school culture have a symbiotic relationship. Attempts to improve schools have been diluted by a relentless, narrow focus on prescriptions designed to raise student achievement scores of mandated tests. The professional judgment and moral sense of purpose needed for school improvement to flourish is receiving less emphasis. Additionally, the moral purpose and commensurate judgments to drive school improvement must be supported by attending to the components of social capital that build the necessary trust and relationships that underpin shared vision. Ultimately, the will and the way to solve these problems reside within the power and influence of school leadership, guided by a meaningful shared vision of a better school.

Research Question

Operating from the research-based premise that a shared school vision positively impacts student achievement, this study seeks to examine the experiences of school principals engaged in the development, implementation and sustenance of a shared vision. It bears mentioning that as the study unfolded, a differentiation between the term "leader" and "leadership" required clarification. "Leader" referred specifically to the

principal of a school, while "leadership" referred to anyone within the school community who exerted influence over, or led, school improvement efforts in the school. Specifically, the study investigated perceptions of principals with regard to the research question: "What aspects of school leadership contribute to the development of shared school vision?"

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

To frame an understanding of the lived experiences of principals leading the development of a shared vision, some basic understandings of vision and visionary leadership, as seen in literature, are essential. This will be followed by a more specialized examination of historical movements in education that have impacted how schools define their visions today. Finally, the review of literature will conclude with a summary of research of conditions that assist in the realization of vision and what visionary leaders do to support the conditions in support of the shared vision.

Vision

What exactly is vision? The literature provides many definitions on a broad spectrum of specificity. Taken from the generic perspective, Manasse (1985) purports vision to be "the development, transmission, and implementation of a desirable future" (p. 150). Shieve and Schoenheit (1987) state "A vision is a blueprint of a desired state. It is an image of a preferred condition that we work to achieve in the future" (p. 94). Kouzes and Posner (2002) contend that "vision...means an ideal and unique image of the future for the common good" (p. 125). Hickman and Silva (1984) describe vision as a "journey from the known to the unknown...creating a future from a montage of facts, hopes, dreams, and opportunities" (p. 151). Kotter (1990) reveals the potentially sustainable nature of vision when he says that vision "is specific enough to provide real guidance to people, yet vague enough to encourage initiative and remain relevant under a variety of conditions" (p. 36). Nanus (1992) views vision as a mental model and exposes the uncertainty inherent in vision when he portends:

It [vision] deals with a world that exists only in the imagination, a world

built upon plausible speculation, fabricated from what we hope are reasonable

assumptions about the future, and heavily influenced by our own judgments of

what is possible and worthwhile. A vision portrays a fictitious world that cannot

be observed or verified in advance and that, in fact, may never become a reality. It

is a world whose very existence requires an act of faith (pp. 25-26)

Additionally, Sashkin (1988) sees vision as embodying at least three elements in order to

have substantial impact on an organization, namely change, a goal, and a central focus on

both the people being served by the organization and the people serving them.

Visionary Leadership

Research on leadership effectiveness indicates that effective leaders have an

ability to clarify and communicate organizational vision and subsequently empower

others to most fully realize the vision (Bennis and Nanus, 1990; Hickman and Silva,

1984). In one study of fifteen hundred senior leaders from twenty different countries

(including Japan, the United States, Western Europe, and Latin America) the personal

behavior trait most frequently mentioned as desirable in a CEO was having a strong sense

of vision for the future (Korn/Ferry and Columbia Graduate School of Business, 1989).

Bennis and Nanus (1990) in examining the lives of ninety leaders found that attention

through vision was one of their key strategies.

According to Westley and Mintzberg (1989), visionary leadership is dynamic and involves a three-stage continuum: (1) An image of the desired future for the organization [vision] is (2) communicated [shared], which serves to (3)empower followers so that they can enact the vision.

Sashkin (1988) sees the goal of visionary leadership is to transform organizational cultures. He believes a visionary leader has three essential traits: (1) the personality of the leader, including his/her cognitive skills, (2) the ability to develop an organizational vision, and (3) the ability to articulate the vision. He goes on to state that visionary leaders actualize the essential components through skills involving the ability to express the vision, the capacity to explain the vision, the potential to extend the vision to other activities, and the skill to expand the vision in a multitude of ways.

Grady and LeSourd (1990) identify five dominant qualities of a leader with vision. These qualities include the leader (1) being guided and motivated by personal values and convictions, (2) demonstrating intense commitment to the achievement of goals they determine important for the organization, (3) establishing a sense of purpose and direction among all members of the organization, (4) being innovative, and (5) consistently attesting to a future that represents something better.

Historical Perspectives on School Vision and Visionary Leadership

To facilitate an understanding of the concept of vision within today's school context, it is necessary to examine some historical perspectives that have shaped the direction of schools today.

While beginning as elite institutions for the affluent in the United States, schools were eventually structured as public institutions that could be assessed by the masses during the Industrial Revolution and thereby fill a great need for workers in industry. Toffler (1970) elaborates on this vision by connecting education of the masses to an industrial machine needed to produce adult workers. In accordance with the style of factories, schools paralleled the structural bureaucracies of industry. Bureaucracies are created to impose order and efficiency (Rich, 1992). Models that focused on discrete units of production worked well for the industries of the 1800s. As the early 1900s dawned, the industrial influence was seen in the adoption of measurements of accountability in schools. The measurements became the aim of school and included accountability in the areas of efficiency, systems models, and competitiveness (Rich, 1992). The nineteenth century administrator was chosen for adherence to the roles of schools to prepare good American citizens prepared for an economic system of capitalism, as well as an efficient, scientific pursuit of duty (Beck & Murphy, 1993). Before this school mindset could evolve enough to introduce the human element of organizational theory, the allegiance to empirical data and quantifiable conclusions were seen to be the necessary path to making education a scientific, rational, and predictable profession (Beck & Murphy, 1993).

This compartmentalizing pattern extended into the domain of roles and responsibilities in business and ultimately schools. It firmly established the idea of a hierarchical management structure that flowed from the top management "thinkers" down to the workers or "doers" (Senge, 1990). Job roles were discrete and therefore efficient enough to locate any faulty unit needing replacement while simultaneously distinguishing

the powerful from the powerless (Resnick, 1992). Productivity was seen exclusively as a function of the numbers of units produced.

Following World War II, a change began to emerge based on the work of W. Edwards Deming's idea of total quality management. Classical top-down decision-making gave way to the idea of teams of employees being brought together to solve problems (Peters and Waterman, 1982). Which decisions employee expertise would be sought remained with the managers, however, the foundation was laid for a new management structure that would change the way employees and managers related and worker involvement, in general (Senge, 1990).

As America headed into the tumultuous 1960s, issues of human rights, equity, and equality began to use managers to examine the workplace and employee conditions, and this commensurately bred changes in schools and other social institutions viewed as fertile ground for extending political agendas (Reitman, 1992). Reitman (1992) expounds on this reality when he states:

> Practically everyone has come to believe that the schooling process is somehow vastly more significant as a utilitarian agency for good or evil than was thought to be the case a mere thirty-five years ago. Virtually all Americans, whether left or right on the ideological spectrum, have been convinced that formal schooling has a messianic role to play in rebuilding of this society. The left imagines that the institution's redemptive role is to foster one or another version of social democracy, while the right wants the schools to bring back the economic, political, and social norms of the eighteenth or nineteenth century, dressed up in cosmopolitan style of the computerized late twentieth century. (p. 59)

While the American school system based on the American industrial practices has not been easily changed, the realities of our modern world have given rise to challenging the exclusive productivity/efficiency emphasis of schools in favor of a more balanced and humanistic emphasis that connect people to their workplaces and broader world (Sharples, 1984). The limiting nature of highly structured schools creates barriers against creative and imaginative educators (Sergiovanni, 1991). Pat responses to decision-making in organizations attempts to substitute the need for human beings to think and decide (Noddings, 1992). Hodgkinson's (1991) "organizational malevolence" comes to fruition when narrow focus leads to decisions that are void of personal convictions (p. 123).

It would appear that the evidence suggests the time has come to redefine education in terms of professional educational values, rather than rely solely on a parallel match to the concepts and values found in business. While there is safety in adopting a managerial approach, it does not deal with the complexity of values schools face (Sharples, 1984). The reform movements since *A Nation At Risk* (1983) have sought to envision professional educational values that can withstand the complexities of situations found in America's schools. Starratt (1995) summarily comments that leadership in education continues to be the most effective when it "involves all stakeholders" and "the shift in educational policy formation and implementation…is toward inclusion of human factors, expressly moral in nature, previously neglected" (p. 186). Many models of visionary leadership begin with the underpinning belief that a meaningful bond must be established between the leader and the led from which a trustful foundation for subsequent collective action is empowered (Bass, 1985, 1996; Conger & Kanungo, 1992;

House, 1977; Sashkin, 1988). How this trust through relationship is fostered is seen in the concept of social capital.

Social Capital

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, classical economic theorists, such as Adam Smith, and political philosophers, such as Thomas Hobbes, impacted the way social and economic life is viewed. They advocated the idea that social systems are made up of the combined actions of individuals who individually act to achieve goals that are independently arrived at (Coleman, 1990). This thinking has maintained a following even today since the social changes that accompanied modern society have increasingly enabled individuals to have more power to act independently to achieve individual goals. In response to the societal changes that reinforce and perpetuate this individualistic mindset into modern society, sociologist James Coleman (1990) retorts the concept as fictitious:

> Despite these changes the fiction is just that-for individuals do not act
>
> independently, goals are not independently arrived at, and interest are not wholly
>
> selfish (p. 301).

In partial response to the inadequacy of the individualistic bias, the concept of social capital evolved, some would even say as a counterpoint theory to human capital (Lin, 2001).

The origins of the recognition of social capital are deeply rooted in theorists who emphasized the relation between pluralistic associational life and American democracy. Conceptual cousins of social capital include James Madison's references to "factions" in *The Federalist* and Alexis de Tocqueville's observations on the value of pluralistic life of

America as he contrasted it with his aristocratic traditions of Europe of the 1830's (Garson, 1978).

In essence, social capital attributes value to social networks and how the social contacts within these networks can actually yield increased productivity in people, individually and collectively (Putnam, 2000). Robert Putnam (2000) has probably done the most to get the concept of social capital in the discourse of mainstream society through his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, where he states social capital refers to "connections among individuals-social networks and norms or reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 19). James Coleman (2000) further expounds on this definition when he states:

> Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety
>
> of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some
>
> aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors...within
>
> the structure...Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making
>
> possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be
>
> possible (p. 16).

It is interesting to note that social capital can be a two-edged sword. Putnam (2000) posits that social capital can take the form of "bridging" or "bonding," whereby bridging serves both the individual and the public good and bonding promotes serving the individual and meeting the needs of a socially exclusive grouping.

Coleman (1990) describes four forms of social capital, including:

- Reciprocal capital – refers to the give and take that exists most strongly in
  organizations with high levels of trust. While a member's relative position in the

organization influences the power with which they can participate in the give and take, the practice over time can be expand one's resources at any given time.

- Information capital – refers to how information can be important in providing a basis for action. The more broadly shared is information, the greater the understanding among members of the organization who can contribute to actions that help the organization as a whole.

- Norms capital – refers to the social expectations that can encourage or discourage certain behaviors so as to reinforce the norms of the organization and enhancing focus on the vision.

Authority capital – refers to social capital that becomes available when individuals transfer their rights of control to another individual. If many members transfers their rights of authority to one individual to solve problems for the good of all, it can be an important kind of social capital.

Understanding the forms social capital can take in establishing a trustful culture, what determines the collective actions that should be embraced with the power of the trustful relations?

Moral Purpose

Leavitt (1987) equated visionary leaders with pathfinders who are "less concerned with prestige and glory than causing a movement towards some larger purpose..." (p. 61). In examining the framework for leadership purported by Michael Fullan (2001), he requires that five leadership behaviors be in place to successfully lead change. These five components arguably fuel the inspiration, motivation and energy needed for a school community to reach for their vision. These components include:

- Moral Purpose

- Understanding Change

- Relationships

- Knowledge Building

- Coherence Making

Fullan (2001)

While all of the components of Fullan's leadership framework have a place in the sustenance of school vision, moral purpose embodies the vision of a school or district providing purpose, meaning, and significance to the work of the school (Fullan, 2001). It should be noted that the development of moral purpose is contextual. Whether the vision originates with a school leader's personal vision that is ultimately sold to the school community or it is one that is collaboratively developed by all stakeholders from the beginning, the purpose, meaning and significance of the vision represents the school from which it evolves (SEDL, 1993). In considering the personal nature of a school's vision, Manasse (1985) states "this personalized approach to leadership may, in fact, run counter to some of the programmatic efforts to create 'effective schools' based on a set list of characteristics..." (p. 152). The educational community must possess a vision that reflects local needs and values. Chance (1992) concisely summarizes this reality when he states:

> Every school is different and any attempt at imposing one single vision
> on all schools is doomed to failure. All schools are not, and cannot ever
> be, identical. An attempt to create sameness in education is part of the
> problem, not part of the solution (pp. 39-39).

Senge (2000) sees the shared vision process as accommodating three purposes: relief, hope and action. The purpose of relief occurs when allowing people, individually and collectively, to have venues to discuss their problems and concerns. The purpose of hope occurs when allowing people to generate ideas about their highest aspirations for their children and community. Lastly, the purpose of action occurs when allowing opportunities for people to share in the recreation of their school, with mutual, trustful support between the stakeholders (Senge, 2000). These purposes imply a broad-based, collaborative effort between informed school community stakeholders. In such a context, school leaders provide their school community with opportunities to collaborate on research-based information supporting school improvement structures and strategies that address their concerns, empower their hopes and inform their actions in realizing the shared vision.

Social capital and moral purpose permeate the five levels of Sergiovanni's Leadership Forces Hierarchy (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Sergiovanni's Leadership Forces Hierarchy

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                  ╱ │ ╲
                 ╱  │  ╲
                ╱ Culture╲
               ╱    5     ╲
              ╱───────────╲
             ╱  Symbolic   ╲
            ╱      4        ╲
           ╱───────────────╲
          ╱   Educational    ╲
         ╱        3           ╲
        ╱─────────────────────╲
       ╱       Human           ╲
      ╱          2              ╲
     ╱─────────────────────────╲
    ╱        Technical          ╲
   ╱            1                ╲
  ╱───────────────────────────────╲
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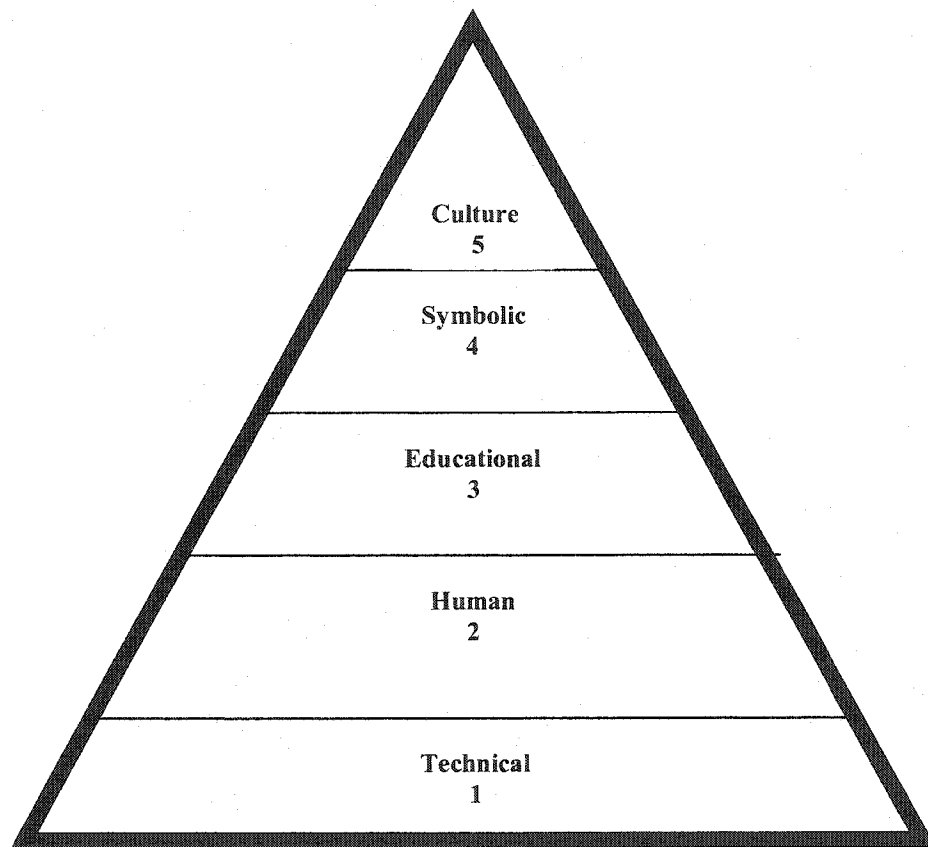
In crafting vision, the reality that change will impact the vision is a constant. Sergiovanni

(1984, 1987) has developed a model which identifies five leadership forces as necessary

for the creation of schools where excellence and effectiveness is the norm. He defines a

force as "the strength or energy brought to bear on a situation to start or stop motion or

change. Leadership forces can...bring about or preserve changes needed to improve

schooling" (Sergiovanni,1984, p. 6). The five forces are organized hierarchically.

By way of definition, the foundational level, *technical leadership*, is essentially

concerned with management or "the role of management engineer emphasizing such

concepts as planning and time management, contingency leadership theories, and

organizational structures" (Sergiovanni, 1987, p. 33). Systems management by good

technical leaders is often seen as the most important school administrator role by

communities and board of education, and this exclusive view is shared by many school

leaders, as well (Chance, 1992). Level 2, *human leadership,* emphasizes how leaders

relate to and motivate others in their organization. Human leaders improve others' skills,

develop follower loyalty, improve morale, and provide supportive structures

(Sergiovanni, 1987). *Educational leadership,* Level 3, corresponds to educational

expertise. Educational leaders bring "expert professional knowledge and bearing as they

relate to teaching effectiveness, educational program development, and clinical

supervision" (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 6). Such domains as supervision, professional

development, diagnosis of educational and organizational problems, and counseling

students and teachers are included in this area. Sergiovanni views these first three forces

of leadership to represent those necessary for "competent schooling" (Sergiovanni, 1987,

p. 7).

In scaling the hierarchy to levels four and five, one enters into the final two

domains Sergiovanni advocates take quality schools to excellence—symbolic and

cultural leadership. It is also in these remaining two domains that vision is a critical

attribute. *Symbolic leadership,* Level 4, represents an emphasis and expression of what is

important to schools. Leaders at this level address "sentiments, expectations,

commitments, and faith itself" (Sergiovanni, 1987, p. 56) as essentials of purpose and

direction in a school. The symbolic leader is able to express their vision through words,

symbols and examples, assisting their people in elevating the importance of their work

through a recognition of the underpinning values guiding it (Chance, 1992). *Cultural*

leadership is seen in the articulation of a common school mission and purpose by

defining, identifying and supporting the values and beliefs of various stakeholders, such

as teachers, students, staff, parents and community (Chance, 1992). Cultural leaders

understand that "cultural life in the schools is a constructed reality and school principals

can play a key role in building this reality" (Sergiovanni, 1987, p. 59). Chance (1992)

summarizes the components of this constructed reality or culture include norms, a shared

past, common expectations and meanings, and a drive towards the school's vision. These

final two leadership forces influence behavior, thought and action in the school, without

which "schools can never achieve a vision of a better future" (Chance, 1992, p. 35).

Standards for School Vision

While the development of a school vision occurs within a unique context

(Burbach, 1987; Gilmore, 1988), research supports certain school improvement

components associated with high student achievement, regardless of context. The

historical perspectives presented, as well as the potential for meaningful collective action

through attention to social capital and moral purpose, form the basis for inquiring into

what conditions would support the school improvement inherent in shared school vision.

Additionally, given that visionary leadership is a prominent characteristic of high-

performing administrators and schools (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Guthrie & Reed,

1986; O'Hair, McLaughlin & Reitzug, 2000), what do visionary school leaders do to

foster the identified conditions supporting the shared vision?

In 2001, the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) , composed of

selected individuals representing the American Association of School Administrators

(AASA), American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE),

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), Council of Chief

State School Officers (CCSSO), National Association of Elementary School Principals

(NAESP), National Association of Secondary School Administrators (NASSP), National

Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA), and University Council

for Educational Adminstration (UCEA) revised standards for Advanced Programs in

Educational Leadership and presented them to the Specialty Areas Study Board (SASB)

of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). These new

ELCC standards for school administrators were adapted from Interstate School Leaders

Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), AASA and NCATE standards for the superintendent and

central office administrators. Therefore, the ELCC standards represent the latest

collaboration of professional associations to establish the critical elements when

evaluating the quality of preparation programs for school leaders (Wilmore, 2002). The

first six standards are directed at specific practices of principals, while the seventh

standard calls for those six to be part of the university field experience for principals. The

standards are as follows:

1. Facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and

    stewardship of a school or district vision of learning that is shared

    and supported by the school community.

2. Advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional

    program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

3. Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources

    for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

4. Collaborating with families and community members, responding to

diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community

resources.

5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social,

   economic, legal, and cultural context.

7. Substantial, sustained, standards-based experiences in real settings

   that are planned and guided cooperatively by university and school district

   personnel for graduate credit. (Wilmore, 2002)

In examining the first standard, the value of vision is clearly articulated in five

key principal behaviors: development of the vision, articulation of the vision,

implementation of the vision, stewardship of the vision and community involvement in

the vision. Table 1 represents specific practices in each of these important components of

school vision, as supported by current literature and theories.

Understanding the school leadership standards that support a school vision,

several conditions are implied to assure success. In order for visionary school leaders to

demonstrate, formulate, develop, and design the components of the vision standard,

structural conditions are needed which will require their supportive leadership.

When in 1983 *A Nation at Risk* warned Americans that its educational system was

becoming susceptible to mediocrity and therefore presenting a national threat to security,

a call to "restructure" the schools was decried. Various structural reforms from shared

decision-making to portfolio assessment offered favorable links to improved student

performance. What became evident, however, was that it was not the specific techniques,

practices or structures that would improve the quality of education, rather "the more basic

human and social resources in a school, especially on the commitment and competence (the will and skill) of educators, and students' efforts to learn." (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 1). In essence, effective use of restructuring tools to enhance student learning depends more on how well they organize or develop the beliefs, values and skills of educators. An examination of how the tools of restructuring can improve authentic achievement for all students is predicated on a shared vision of schools providing high quality intellectual work. This vision is extended through an extensive examination of research conducted by Fred Newmann and Gary Wehlage (1995). They researched more than 1,500 schools throughout the United States in search of those common threads that increased student achievement regardless of demographic factors. The common threads represent a vision or a blueprint of a desired state of schools that consistently contribute to high student achievement. Based on the research, schools must collectively determine the goals and expectations that tie back to their high-achieving vision. Figure 3 illustrates what Newmann and Wehlage refer to as "circles of support" (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p 2).

Figure 3. Circles of Support – The Context for Successful School Restructuring
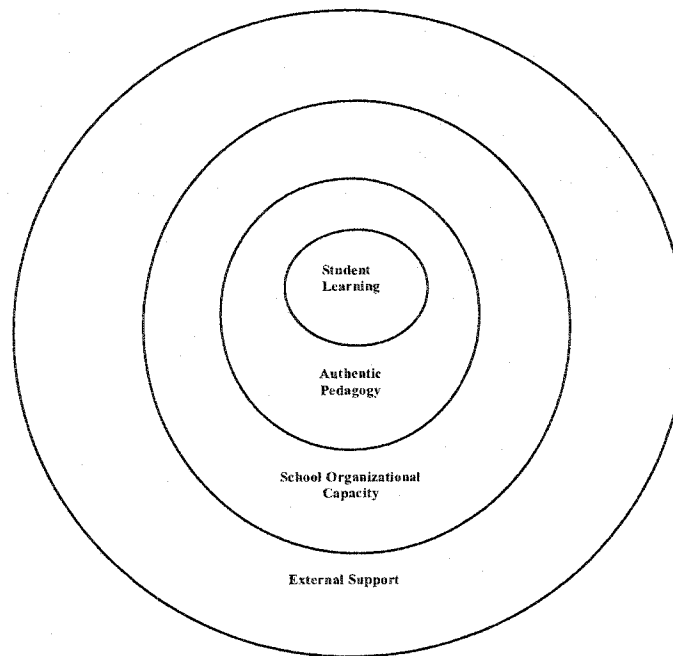
The school learning circle is a structure that begins with teachers in schools agreeing on a vision of high quality intellectual work. Once this vision is articulated, it must be shared with all stakeholders and all subsequent core activities of the school must be oriented towards the vision of student learning. The Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools developed a particular vision of high quality student learning called authentic student achievement and stands for "intellectual accomplishments that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful, such as those undertaken by successful adults" (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 25).

Authentic pedagogy is the conceptual framework for high quality student learning. Authentic pedagogy defined authentic academic achievement through three criteria critical to significant intellectual accomplishment: construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and the value of achievement beyond school. *Construction of knowledge* refers to how students organize, synthesize, interpret, explain and evaluate

- 38 -

information. As they assimilate prior knowledge, they should hone their skills through guided practice in producing original conversation and writing and/or other real products (e.g., built creations, musical and artistic performances). In this area, the mere reproduction of prior knowledge does not constitute authentic academic achievement. It must involve thoughtful use or application of knowledge found in authentic adult accomplishment. *Disciplined inquiry* is complex, cognitive work because it integrates three important intellectual activities: use of an established knowledge base, in-depth understanding of problems, and elaboration of ideas and findings both orally and in writing. An abiding belief that all students are capable of engaging in these forms of cognitive work in tenable when adapted to the students' levels of development. *Value beyond school* refers to work done that goes beyond demonstration of learner competence to actually impacting others through communicating ideas and/or producing products. Researchers found that when teachers taught authentically, their students consistently outperformed those taught in more conventional ways (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). These findings suggest that students who think carefully about subjects, study them in-depth, and connect them to their personal experiences also are more likely to remember the facts and definitions call for on standardized tests (O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug, 2000).

The third circle of support is called school organizational capacity. Despite competent individual professionals working in a school, research shows that student achievement gains and other benefits are influenced by organizational characteristics (Newmann and Wehlage, 1995). The research findings of Newmann and Wehlage (1995) that organizational capacity is requires that couples competent teachers with a clear,

shared purpose for all students' learning, collaboration to achieve that purpose, and teachers taking collective responsibility for student learning was clearly the precursor for the professional learning communities aforementioned which contribute to enhanced student achievement

The fourth circle of support refers to external support for student learning and organizational capacity. As seen in the professional learning community context, external support of school community stakeholders can be best garnered when they are clear on the school vision and understand the ways they can support its achievement (Eaker, DuFour and Dufour, 2002).

What are the components of a professional learning community context that build the supports of organizational capacity and external expertise Newmann and Wehlage's (1995) research suggests will lead to an improvement focus on authentic student learning?

The interpretive framework of the professional learning community addresses research-based conditions associated with improved student achievement (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995), as well as supports the research-based school leader behaviors and practices called for in the ELCC vision standard. Professional learning communities represent a cultural shift from the traditional schooling model. According to Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002), the professional learning community culture includes the following elements: 1) explicit mission, vision, values and goals; 2) collaboration; 3) focus on learning; 4) leadership; 5) focused school improvement plans; 6) celebration; and 7) persistence. They concisely summarize the cultural shift between the traditional school perspective and the professional learning community perspective in Table 2.

Visionary leadership orchestrates the structures that support the development of professional learning communities. That is, supportive conditions are intentionally developed by the leadership of the school, and the subsequent empowerment and actions to improve the teaching and learning in the school are the outcome.

Leading the Vision through Shared Leadership

An multi-dimensional support for the professional learning community is shared leadership. Empowered by the social capital and moral purpose, the professional learning community school leader creates the structures to build the leadership capacity, that is, involve the school community meaningfully, skillfully and broadly. As leadership capacity is built, sharing leadership will ultimately involve allowing other leaders to emerge in the school community who will share in making informed decisions that will affect the teaching and learning in the school. Such shared governance requires parameters and support. Building leadership capacity, sharing leadership and shared governance in the school context all impact vision, as well as the behaviors and representative practices of visionary leaders.

Building Leadership Capacity for Shared Leadership

In considering the tremendous effort necessary to nurture a vision for school improvement, many school leaders turn to building leadership capacity. Leadership capacity is "broad-based, skillful involvement in the work of leadership" (Lambert, 1998, p 3). When considering the importance of a sustained vision for a school, leadership cannot be ascribed exclusively to a person, a role or a discrete set of individual behaviors. In many schools, the energy and commitment surrounding a school vision can be derailed when there is a change in key personnel, such as the principal, superintendent or board

member(s). To prevent key personalities from being the energy that feeds a school vision, the concept of building leadership capacity in a school supports greater skillful involvement of many voices in the school community. Critical conditions to establish leadership capacity include:

> The school would need a significant number of skillful teacher-leaders who understand the shared vision of the school and the full scope of the work underway, and who are able to carry them out. School staff would need to be committed to the central work of self-renewing schools. This work involves reflection, inquiry, conversations and focused action—professional behaviors that are an integral part of daily work. (Lambert, 1998, pp 3-4)

To clarify the vision of a school that possesses leadership capacity represented by highly skillful, broad-based participation of stakeholders, Linda Lambert (1998) characterizes four school scenarios of leadership capacity that vary based on the extent of participation and leadership skillfulness:

School 1: Low participation, Low Skillfulness in Leadership.

In School 1, the school leader's style is characterized by an autocratic administration style, typified by a limited (primarily one-way) flow of information from the principal to the subordinates. The culture is represented by rigidly defined roles and norms of compliance. Due to the lack of professional development in the skills of leadership as well as the limited accessibility of information, innovations in teaching and learning are lacking. The resulting student achievement is found to be poor or only showing short-term improvement.

School 2: High Participation, Low Skillfulness in Leadership.

The school leader's style in School 2 is laissez-faire. The effect of this type of administration is that teachers are permitted to approach teaching and learning from their own perspectives, whether effective or ineffective. This affords teachers a great deal of control (leadership) over the practices that occur within their own classrooms, but the development of their skills of leadership are not a priority since the intent is to allow for norms of individualism in teaching and learning methods. This typically non-confrontational professional environment results in undefined roles and responsibilities, fragmentation of school improvement efforts and a general lack of coherence of information and programs. Because the environment is permissive, those teachers who are motivated to individually pursue research-based practices can be found to develop excellent classrooms and yield spotty innovations. Likewise, those teachers who are motivated to maintain a traditional classroom that ignores best practices can be found to have classrooms with lower student achievement and few, if any, innovations. With this mixed effect, overall student achievement tends to remain static in such a school.

School 3: Low Participation, High Skillfulness.

In School 3 you find a select group of teachers having access to information and professional development in leadership. These designated teachers act efficiently, while others continue to serve in very traditional roles. Because of the narrow way that professional development in leadership is provided, staffs in such school tend to be polarized due to the imbalance in expertise, and sometimes the perceived favoritism of the designated leaders. Even beyond polarization of staff, these schools can be seen to have pockets of strong resistance to change and leadership in response to the inequitable

history of professional development investments made. As with School 2, pockets of strong innovation and excellent classrooms can exist for those who have received the benefit of access to information and professional development. Schools like this tend to see student achievement somewhere between static and showing slight improvement.

School 4: High Participation, High Skillfulness.

This school represents the model for the benefits of leadership capacity building. It is characterized by broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership. Information is readily accessible and therefore used to inform decisions and practice throughout the school. The roles and responsibilities delineated in this school reflect broad involvement and collaboration, promoting reflective practices and innovation as the norm. These characteristics are found to contribute most to high student achievement.

When considering the implications for a school leader in developing leadership capacity, the principal has the authority to coordinate and provide venues for inquiry and discourse (including plans and schedules that create common time for dialogue and reflection), make data and information accessible to the school community, support the belief that everyone has a potential and right to work as a leader (including the commensurate redistribution of some of his/her own power and authority to allow that to happen), and provide training in the skills of leadership.

Shared Governance

It logically follows that if leadership capacity is going to be built and leadership shared, leaders will need supporting structures to guide the decision-making of those involved. Some American schools have had experience with shared governance structures as ways to enhance informed decision-making based on the work of Carl

Glickman (Allen, Rogers, Hensley, Glanton, & Livingston, 1999). These schools have found that a decision-making leadership team is an effective structure for addressing teaching and learning decisions in their schools. This structure is guided by each school's collaboratively developed written decision-making plan, often referred to as a charter. The charter delineates how the team will operate in making its decisions about teaching and learning, including:

1. its purpose and the scope of the decisions it can make;

2. a specific delineation of the participants on the decision-making team, where a majority of the team is made up of teachers, the principal is a standing member, and there are elected representatives from stakeholder groups within the school community;

3. selection criteria, job descriptions, roles and responsibilities are specified;

4. a commitment to a regular meeting schedule and voting procedures;

5. provision for concerns to be brought before the committee as well as a procedure for revision/amendment of the charter.

   (Glickman, 1993; Allen, et al., 1999):

The charter is a critical structural support for shared governance in a school.

The schools pursuing Glickman's model of shared governance have found there are three key traits school leaders can monitor in assessing their movement towards a vision of shared governance in their schools. These traits include:

1) Those serving in leadership positions are selected through a well-understood democratic process

2) Shared governance actions are aligned with the covenant of teaching and learning and informed by action research, and

3) There is an ongoing flow of accurate communication between those serving on leadership groups and their colleagues

(Allen, et al., 1999).

Schools operate within a context, and therefore a school leader's vision is often influenced by the context. Burbach (1987) feels visionary leaders must be able to see the larger social patterns within which the organization is operating. Gilmore (1988) goes further to say that as the vision is crafted, it "must be balanced with a brutally realistic understanding of what is possible within the constraints of the situation" (p 171). By way of illustration of these broad vision statements, as schools embark on implementation of shared governance, they will necessarily evolve on a continuum based on their contexts.

The school leader is integrally involved in all activities that promote shared governance and the resulting actions designed to improve teaching and learning. He/she possesses the accountability role of 'keeper of the vision' – assuring that all teaching, learning and leadership activities yield behaviors that tie directly back to the core beliefs associated with the school vision. (Lambert, 1998, pp. 8-9). This role has also been characterized as coherence building (Fullan, 2001). Building coherence not only operates within the individual pieces of vision, such as shared governance, but also more broadly in coordinating the efforts of the school community to assure all of the pieces are in concert towards the agreed on vision and associated beliefs and purposes. Batsis (1987) emphasizes that the goals and objectives are not the vision, rather the vision is the more

comprehensive view that allows one to see how they fit into a broader structure of the organization. Fullan (2001) insightfully identifies the visionary leaders role in the ever-changing organizational context when he states, "Leaders in a culture of change deliberately establish innovative conditions and processes in the first place...and then guide them after that" (p 115). Building leadership capacity and structures in support of shared governance represent innovative, visionary elements of the school improvement process.

Summary

In summary, the review of the literature indicates that leadership has a role to play in creating the foundations and supporting the frameworks that lead to shared vision and, ultimately, improved student achievement. Leaders promote and sustain a focus on student learning by leading the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a shared vision.

The research suggests that social capital and moral purpose are important foundations that fertilize the frameworks associated with a shared vision for high student achievement. Social capital accentuates the requisite broad stakeholder involvement, responsive knowledge bases, and trust needed for skillful development and sustenance of a shared vision. Of the various forms social capital can take, there is a practical reality that its intentional under-girding of trust allows for a fluid tapestry of leadership that extends across the spectrum, from decisions involving all stakeholders to decisions in the hands of the principal alone. Alongside the trustful environment nurtured with attention to social capital, is the overarching belief that the work of promoting high achievement for all students is a calling of high moral purpose. When individual, isolated, competitive

agendas become subservient to a moral drive of purpose and collective responsibility for the high calling of excellence for all students, the stage is set for research-based frameworks to operate where high student achievement appears to flourish.

A review of research associated with high student achievement reveals that there are several considerations shown to be highly correlated with visions of effective schools. These include building leadership capacity, sharing leadership, promoting authentic pedagogy, and supporting and deepening conditions supportive of professional learning communities. All of the considerations are predicated on leadership. School leaders must be willing to empower others through broad and skillful involvement in meaningful school improvement if the benefits of building leadership capacity are to be realized. School leaders must be willing to share their power and authority if the benefits of shared leadership are to be realized. School leaders have the power to remove barriers and intentionally support the necessary conditions to enable authentic pedagogy if deep learning and high achievement for all students is to be realized. And finally, school leaders have the power to create and sustain structures inherent in professional learning communities associated with improved student achievement for all students. As Newmann and Wehlage (1995) concluded. "The most successful schools were those that used restructuring tools to help them function as professional communities....Schools with strong professional communities were better able to offer authentic pedagogy and were more effective in promoting student achievement" (p. 3). Leaders of professional learning communities "...turn aspirations and vision in to reality. Not only do they act, they are unwilling to tolerate inaction...engagement and experience are the most effective teachers" (DuFour, 2003, p. 78). It's all about leadership!

Chapter 5 of this study will illuminate the experiences of seven elementary principals who developed a shared vision in their schools. Their lived experiences as they lead the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a shared school vision are contextually varied, yet echo consistent themes across all of their experiences. Their voices and perspectives will share how they use their positional and earned power and authority as principal to affect the foundations and frameworks that mark each of their school community's journey towards becoming a high-achieving school.

CHAPTER III

Historical Context of the Study

There appears to be general consensus among educational experts that the advent

of the publication *A Nation at Risk* (1983) initiated efforts to systemically reform the

contemporary educational system in the United States. As research and discourse have

expanded our knowledge base of how to approach school change, it appears that the on-

going reform since *A Nation at Risk* has evolved through various stages (Murphy, 1990;

Sergiovanni & Moore, 1989), and continues to evolve and refocus today.

Murphy (1990) refers to three stages or waves of educational reform seen in the

1980s. The first wave sought policy changes, the second wave sought restructuring of

schools and the third wave sought to build cohesive, student-focused changes in the

delivery of education. It was logical that these waves would ultimately lead to the

recognition of the school leader's role in school reform. While the need for strong school

leadership began with discussion that was critical of how prospective administrators were

being trained (Achilles, 1984; Peterson & Finn, 1985), the ultimate findings of those

studying education reform was that successful reform depended on effective school

leadership (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Edmonds, 1979; Sweeney, 1982).

Furthermore, educational studies found that a major component of what made school

leaders effective in school improvement was an ability to carry out the goals and

objectives that move schools towards their visions (Guthrie & Reed, 1986; Leithwood &

Montgomery, 1982; Manasse, 1985). Schools were fraught with a barrage of top-down

decisions by people external to classrooms and schools, from central offices to

politicians (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 1992).

Democratic Communities and Networks

As schools moved into the 1990s, the absence of capacity building strategies and

resources on how to reach standards and goals of the 1980s gave way to a data-driven

emphasis in making decisions about teaching and learning. Research and inquiry of best

practices created knowledge-rich bases to respond to the school improvement

prescriptions of the 1980s (Fullan, 2003). The 1990s also saw a proliferation of

constructivist theorists and their research suggesting schools could increase student

achievement through the development of professional learning communities; that is,

linking meaningful learning for school staffs with experience and context (Eaker, DuFour

& DuFour, 2002; Hord 1997; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995;

Senge, 1990). In a climate of increasing local, state and federal pressures to improve

student achievement in America's schools, educational research is taking center stage to

identify and inform replication of factors associated with school improvement, including

increasing student achievement. In January 2002, American President George W. Bush

announced *No Child Left Behind (NCLB),* his framework for bipartisan education reform

to address his concern that "too many of our neediest children are being left behind,"

despite the nearly $200 billion in Federal spending since passage of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act of 1965 (NCLB, 2004). The four pillars of the NCLB

legislation include: stronger accountability, more local freedom, choices for parents and

use of proven methods. How to move from the bureaucratic, top-down reform

prescriptions of the 1980s to the creation and sustenance of professional learning

communities which empower knowledge-rich creativity and ownership of the teaching

force and its leaders as a basis for essential school reform remains elusive in reality

(Darling-Hammond, 1996; Fullan, 2000; Hord 1997; Senge, 1990). Nevertheless,

structures and leadership considerations in schools attempting to create and sustain the

concept of the professional learning community are at the forefront of educational

research and continue into the 2000s as a basis for essential school reform (Louis &

Kruse, 1995; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1992).

One example of the efforts to further research in the creation and sustenance of

professional learning communities had its beginnings in Oklahoma in 1995. The

Oklahoma Networks for Excellence in Education (O.N.E.) focused on the development of

democratic school communities – one conceptual forerunner of professional learning

communities. Their vision was the development of democratic schools and communities

where educators work collaboratively with each other and non-educators to facilitate

student learning for democratic citizenship (Center for School Renewal and Democratic

Citizenship, 1995). The collaboration would take the form of a school renewal network

partnering the University of Oklahoma with 25 elementary, middle, and high schools

serving over 15,000 students in twelve school districts. School renewal networks consist

of educators from a number of schools who come together because of a shared desire to

learn and improve and who are connected to each other via a fluid organizational

structure that facilitates their interaction across schools (Lieberman, 1996). Networks are

based on research that suggests you cannot improve student learning without improving

teacher learning (Fullan, 1995). Research indicates successful schools and organizations

continually renew themselves by learning from their practice; they become learning

organizations (Robbins & Finley, 1996; Senge, 1999). O.N.E.'s vision was fueled by research of over 1,500 schools that reported students learn more in collaboratively organized schools than in conventional schools, as well as demonstrated a narrower achievement gap between students of lower socioeconomic status and students of higher socioeconomic status (Lee & Smith, 1994). Results from the work of O.N.E. indicated that in network schools student achievement had improved, greater trust and collaboration developed among teachers, and significant overall school growth. Through grants from the Danforth Foundation and Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the network began the process of developing democratic school communities who are grounded in democratic ideals appropriately articulated to others through the acronym "IDEALS". O'Hair, McLaughlin and Reitzug (2000) described practices of democratic schools through a framework known as the *IDEALS: Inquiry, Discourse, Equity, Authenticity (in teaching and learning), (shared) Leadership, and Service.* Through *Inquiry*, community members analyzed their practices as well as reviewed data and analyzed these data to find strengths and weaknesses and to determine which students required additional support. From the inquiry of the data and school practices, the community engaged in *Discourse* which provided voice for all stakeholders in deciding on needs of diverse groups within the school and community and courses of action to address their needs. Including the voices and ideas from all stakeholders and considering differing perspectives brought issues of *Equity* to the forefront during the discourse and decision making. Allowing for participatory roles in decision making and with a focus on *Authentic* teaching, learning and assessment, deepened participation and learning occurred. Sharing information, ideas, engaging in authentic practices, and learning

through inquiry and discourse built the *Leadership* capacity (Lambert, 1998) of the

members of the school community. Serving the common good through this work and

reciprocating with valued interaction and *Service* provided a network of support within

the school community and outreach to the greater community. Schools that practiced the

IDEALS had principals, teachers, parents and community members who shared leadership

and nurtured the development of themselves and others, thus providing a powerful

breeding ground for student learning. Therefore, research focused on how school leaders

and teachers collaborated to create and foster a network of supportive structures (Fullan,

2001; Lambert, 1995; Reitzug, 1994) and improved student learning (Hord, 1997; Louis,

Kruse, & Marks, 1996; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

OK-ACTS: Oklahoma Achievement through Collaboration and Technology Support

In order to sustain and deepen the work beyond initial grants, O.N.E. became

institutionalized at the University of Oklahoma as the K20 Center for Educational and

Community Renewal, a recognized university-wide educational research and outreach

center with participating faculty and students across eight colleges. In 2001, the K20

Center received a matching fund, school leadership grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates

Foundation. Using the funds, the K20 Center embarked on a three year journey to expose

800 K-12 administrators to the IDEALS and the complementary, research-based "Ten .

Practices of High-Achieving Schools" (see Appendix A) to deepen their practical

understanding of ways schools enact the IDEALS for school improvement, as well as

how to use technology as a tool to facilitate their implementation of the practices.

Participants were head principals and head superintendents from across the state of

Oklahoma. The Gates grant initiative was called Oklahoma Achievement through

Collaboration and Technology Support (OK-ACTS). It served as the Phase I leadership component of an ongoing proliferation of K20 Center initiatives to support schools in developing networks aimed at school improvement through collaboration and using technology as a tool. To complete Phase I, participants were required to attend a two-day leadership seminar and become active collaborators in smaller "clusters" of other head school administrators, led by a coach trained in the IDEALS and 10 Practices of High-Achieving Schools and who was a current Oklahoma school administrator. The Gates grant required participants to take an online technology assessment called the TAGLIT ("Taking a Good Look at Instructional Technology") which would provide them important data specific to their school sites from which to drive decisions about technology planning, technology professional development of their teachers, and use of the technology to improve teaching and learning. Another OK-ACTS requirement of participants was the development of a site or district action plan. The action plan required the participants to pick one of the Ten Practices of High-Achieving Schools and to develop an action plan for how they would deepen the implementation of the practice using technology as a tool to facilitate the process. The action plan addressed three required narrative sections: supporting evidence, obstacles and action plans. The clusters would meet with their coaches at two additional meetings held in conjunction with state school administrator partner conferences and discuss the TAGLIT data and action planning process. Participants attending Phase I professional development activities, completing the TAGLIT, and submitting an action plan were called "Phase I Completers." The next challenge was how to sustain the school improvement efforts begun through the collaboration and technology integration of OK-ACTS Phase I.

Oklahoma Educational Technology Trust: Grants-to-Schools

Fortunately, one of the matching fund partners for the Gates grant, the Oklahoma

Educational Technology Trust (OETT), was receiving proposals for monies the trust

targeted for increasing student achievement using technology in Oklahoma public

schools. OK-ACTS submitted a proposal to create a "grants-to-schools" experience,

whereby OK-ACTS Phase I Completers could deepen their application of school

improvement research-based strategies gained in OK-ACTS. The competitive grants

would require a school to collaboratively create a visionary proposal for how it would use

$79,000 with teachers and students at its school site/district to purchase technology

equipment and receive OK-ACTS-provided professional development to advance the

implementation of three of the Ten Practices of High-Achieving Schools. The three

practices selected would take the form of three action plans with the same narrative

format used when they developed their action plan in Phase I. Understanding the

importance of a shared vision in establishing a common purpose at the school site, the

grant recipients were asked to include Practice 1 of the Ten Practices of High-Achieving

Schools as one of their three practices. Practice 1 emphasizes the importance of a shared

vision and states that high-achieving schools have a shared set of goals, commitments,

and practices enacted throughout the school. Common goals in a school serve as a basis

for decision-making (i.e., "How does that decision fit with what we believe in?") and

give individuals an enhanced sense of purpose. They make individuals part of a bigger

cause – a cause beyond one's self. Shared vision, as observed in shared values and

common purposes, is translated into what actually happens in the classroom through the

development of core learning principles (Glickman, 1993). Core learning principles focus on teaching and learning and what teaching and learning should look like in the classroom, and consequently guide decisions about student learning and school practices (Glickman, 1993; Sergiovanni & Moore, 1989). The applicants were encouraged to consider the contextual needs of their sites in selecting the remaining two practices that would be targeted through the grant. The proposal was funded for three years, with an annual award of twenty-one school grants worth $79,000 each, while simultaneously giving rise to Phase II of the K20 Center initiatives to support schools in improving student achievement using research-based practices and technology as a tool.

Summary

This chapter establishes an important background foundation for understanding both the participants and their commensurate data used in the study. Their shared experience in participating in the OK-ACTS and OETT Grants-to-Schools professional development opportunities provide added insights and perspectives into interviews examined in the study to describe their experiences in developing a shared school vision in their respective schools.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This study seeks to examine what leadership aspects contribute to the

development of a shared school vision based on the perceptions of the lived experiences

of seven elementary school principals. To provide a more seamless flow to this study, the

researcher has chosen to have the reader now move into the findings portion of the study.

The methodology employed for this study, therefore, is detailed in Appendix B. It is felt

that this approach will enable the reader to best capture the developing essence of the

lived experiences and perceptions of the interviewed principals. The methodology

section found in Appendix B will provide the reader with an explanation of the

phenomenological design method used in this study, how and why the methodology was

used, sampling procedures, data collection procedures, the interview instrument used

with the participants, and trustworthiness assurances.

The principals shared that they did not receive training in how to craft a school

vision, and yet the research continues to emphasize a shared vision grounded in core

beliefs is a critical, essential component to the success of organizations, including

schools. The research further supports that it is the role of leadership to orchestrate the

establishment and sustenance of a shared vision. Knowing the 'what'—that leadership

contributes to the success of the organization through a shared vision--- the 'how'

becomes of particular interest. Although one of the six ELCC standards has focused on

school leaders developing a shared vision, many school administrators have not had the

development of a shared vision as part of their traditional administrator preparation

programs, and none of the principals interviewed. This is compounded by the fact that in

states, like Oklahoma, there is no required administrator evaluation based on a systemic, statewide set of research-based standards, such as the ELCC standards. This often results in fragmented accountability and responsibility for the development of a shared school vision, if any at all. Furthermore, NCATE accreditation by some universities remains elusive because of their continuing inadequate attention to the ELCC standards with prospective administrators. Even if the traditional administrator preparation program did address school vision adequately, in 2002-2003 66% of Oklahoma's prospective school administrators chose to be certified by taking a competency exam for principal certification and were not required and did not go through a formal university preparation program (Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation, Assessment Annual Report 2002-03). For these reasons, these findings of the lived experiences of current school leaders who are leading the ongoing development of a shared school vision in their schools is relevant to understanding and refining the process.

Using a phenomenological methodology within qualitative inquiry, a semi-structured interview (See Appendix C) was chosen as the primary source of data for sharing the lived experiences of the seven female elementary principals participating in the study.

This data was corroborated with action plan documents written by the same school principals about their work on establishing a shared school vision. The principals selected for interviews were given "exemplary" status based on high ratings received on a competitive grant they submitted that specified their plans for establishing a shared vision, as well as other practices associated with high student achievement. The seven highest elementary school ratings on these grants were awarded to the interviewed

principals by a panel of four reviewers, and were found exemplary when compared to forty-six other grants reviewed based on key grant component indicators (see Appendix D). Table 4 shares the demographic information of each of the schools, with confidentiality maintained through the use of pseudonyms for the schools. In the discussion of the findings that follow, confidentiality of the principals is maintained by using their schools names (e.g., Persimmon School is led by Principal Persimmon, etc.).

Overview of the Findings

The use of quotes throughout the findings is designed to create in the reader a richer understanding of the lived experiences of the principals studied. As Sandelowski (1994) summarizes:

> With the skillful use of quotes, writers can add to both the documentary and aesthetic value of the research report and, thereby, draw more attention to the voices of people who might otherwise have remained unheard. Quotes 'privilege' individuality and 'model...diversity within generality' (p. 480)

Quotes are used to "show the particular forms of general phenomena" and "facilitate understanding of their [research participants'] points of view" (Weiss, 1994, p. 191).

Through analyses of principal interviews, four themes pervaded all seven of the principals' oral and documented descriptions of their experiences developing a shared vision, including empowering vision, modeling support for the vision, building coherence for the vision, and monitoring the vision. As each of these major themes is elaborated upon, overlap across the themes is evident. This observation reveals the complexity and

interdependency of leadership aspects supporting the development and sustenance of a shared vision.

Theme 1: Leaders Empower Vision

Laying the Foundation

All of the principals expressed that they had a personal vision for their schools that served as a starting point for initiating conversations with school stakeholders about what the shared vision might include. While their personal visions were the starting point, the principals empowered the development of shared visions by providing opportunities for various school community stakeholders, including themselves, to become knowledgeable about the focus of the shared visions. This vision foundation preceded the articulation of vision, and served to provide an informed base from which to have the conversations that would ultimately lead to a shared vision. Avenues for developing the knowledge base included book studies, cross site visits, informational media, school-specific data, journal articles, external experts and professional development.

Principal Apple confessed:

I always knew that as an administrator and staff we should have a shared vision. The time factor and to be able to sit down together and make that happen – it was just easier to use the generic thing we all have; copy somebody else's vision and put it on a form and go from there.

However, the grant required an action plan that articulated the supporting evidence, obstacles and actions that her school would take to create a shared vision. She indicated that this requirement forced her to focus on what areas to work on to improve the school and how she would involve her school community in that process. Upon attending a

professional development activity discussing professional learning communities, she found a great resource that articulated exactly what she wanted her school to be and what she perceived her school community wanted based on her history with them. To build the knowledge base for developing the shared vision with her faculty, she chose a book study about professional learning communities as the catalyst:

> I found a book that represented what we wanted our school to be – a professional
>
> learning community. I bought the faculty the book and this was the book
>
> they were to read over the summer as a book study. It was after reading
>
> and discussing this book that our vision began to take shape; we wrote
>
> down our goals of what we wanted to be as a school.

Principal Redbud's school decided to adopt a comprehensive arts program as a way to empower their vision. Making the connection between the vision and the tenets of the arts program necessitated opportunities for the faculty to first learn and then apply their learning to redefining their shared vision. She states:

> You don't get there [vision] without people getting a bigger picture- they
>
> need a bigger picture to even talk about vision, I think. They need
>
> exposure to experts, exposure to research, exposure to deep conversations;
>
> you cannot form it without he bigger picture. There has to be an informed,
>
> intentional foundation laid before he discussion about vision.

One of the components of the new arts program that was appealing to the school staff was the exposure provided upon which to build their shared school vision. Principal Redbud clarified:

A major component of the arts program is having time to have a retreat in

the summer where you come together. The first summer is for training to

understand the eight essentials of the program and where you are as a

school. Then you plan your future professional development on the

identified needs. There is an underlying belief that retreat time is real

valuable time going back and focusing on your weaknesses and having the

time away from school demands to reflect.

Principal Redbud also spoke of a support system provided through fellows who have

expertise and are paid to help you with your training on the various essentials of the

program. She compared their experience with the arts program to another university-

based initiative that networked schools focused on school improvement. However, she

said the school network had provided money to their school and the freedom to use that

money to assess their own needs and decide how they would spend the money on

professional development relevant to their identified needs. She highlighted the

empowerment and elevated commitment by the teachers with that school network

initiative, and conceded that the arts program, by contrast, was more prescriptive in

nature resulting in sacrificing some of the level of commitment she had seen when her

teachers were in charge of their own learning in the school network. Nevertheless, the

beliefs about teaching and learning underpinning their vision were embodied in the

benefits of the arts program emphases, so they went forward on that basis.

Principal Redbud's school demonstrated that the vision can evolve and be

supported by innovative practices, so long as the underpinning beliefs remain informed

and shared by the school community. Principal Persimmon echoes the importance of the

shared vision being rooted in the history and support of the school community when she states:

> One thing we did as we were developing future directions for our vision, besides looking at and discussing test scores and student needs, was develop a power point on the history of the school's vision. We went back to when the school was built and looked at things historically to see where they had been, to see the growth, and to decide where they wanted to go next.

Principal Persimmon also spoke of how evolving visions involve change and the resistance to change that must be dealt with as improved practices are introduced to empower the vision. To facilitate this change process and build a foundation for the possibilities of new practices, she explained the importance of giving teachers opportunities to experience the new practices in non-threatening formats, when possible:

> When I think about things I do to develop the vision, I would say it boils down to educating the teachers and making it easy for them to try new things by tying it to something meaningful to them. When trying to show the teachers the possibilities of using technology per our vision, we did an activity where they learned the various media using pictures of their own families. That activity was the bridge – as they worked on their personal power points integrating various technology tools, they began to make connections to the classroom possibilities- I heard them saying 'I could have my students graph with this program' and 'My students could use this for the science fair instead of the poster boards,' etc.

Principal Hemlock revealed laying a vision foundation for the addition of

SMART Board technology with her staff by intentionally and strategically placing staff

familiar with the technology in small groups she created for the purpose of processing

technologies they might adopt. She shared:

> You see I already had people on my staff who had experience with the
>
> SMART boards from attending a technology seminar and another few who
>
> had seen them in action at a school. I had spread these people throughout
>
> the groups so when we were doing the discussions in their small group
>
> their experiences would come into play.

She explained that the SMART Boards would never have been entertained since the

teachers were already gravitating towards only what they were familiar with. She

defended the teachers as not having had the time to truly research the available

technologies that would impact their vision of improved reading and math, and used her

passion and her ability to provide knowledge building opportunities for an initial small

group as her tactic for laying the foundation for incorporating SMART Boards.

High Expectations

The principals explained that they saw it as their role to establish high

expectations for the vision with those who would be involved in its development, and

acknowledged that they often had to stretch and push the faculty and parents towards the

vision, when taking the easier path became attractive. The lack of time to do the things to

support the vision was a consistent obstacle in all of the schools. Learning new practices

requires change and change requires time. Principal Apple's leadership style addressed

the issues of time head on. She said:

We hear, 'We just don't have time!'-but, that was one of my obstacles and

they were bawking about how they were going to get everything done.

Even though you remind them about our purpose and goals- they say, 'We

don't have time.' I told them, 'Don't go there with me,' and told them the

times they do have. There is a point where you can work as a team and

there is a point too when you have to step up and say, 'This is our vision.'

I have had to say that. We had collaboration today-they are working on

aligning their objectives.

She went on to say that a lot of times teachers like the status quo because it is more

comfortable and does not require the time-intensive risk-taking associated with

innovative practices to reach the vision:

One of my strong leaders in this building is an older teacher and it has

been a challenge to convince her of the worth of developing a professional

learning community. Her ideas a lot of times have been, 'We have always

done it this way and it worked.' My response is, 'Do we have all the kids

90% on level per our school goals?' She says, 'We'll never have that.'

And I say, 'Why not? It can be done if we set our minds to it and find the

achievers and non-achievers and decide what we as a faculty are going to

do to help them reach that goal.

Principal Hemlock's school adopted SMART Board technology as a technology

tool to assist with their vision. Like Principal Apple, she recognized the allure of the

status quo where technology was concerned, and saw it as her role as leader to set a

higher expectation with her faculty. She shared:

I had a vision in my mind for the possibilities SMART Board technology

could have on our students' learning, but I had to push that with the

teachers. I had to be the mother hen and push them out of their comfort

zone of using the technology we already have and know how to do and to

take a risk; I wanted them to jump out there with me, and they did.

One of the things she perceived was the need the teachers had to be reassured that she

understood she was asking them to take a risk and would support them as they learned

from their successes and mistakes.

Focus on Student Learning

Permeating all of the themes of the study was an unrelenting focus on student

learning. Maintaining this focus was what the principals felt empowered the visions they

had collaboratively developed in their schools. Times of reflection were often the mode

by which the principals engaged and directed the school community on the focus of their

respective visions-student learning. Principal Persimmon used data as a springboard for

reflection focused on student learning. She stated:

We generated some data with a survey about technology use as it related

to student learning, since our vision was using technology to improve

student achievement. It had a lot of questions, 'Do you think our students

are learning math? Do you think our students know about technology?

Have our students increased their technology skills?' Parents, teachers,

and students in our elementary school and their ultimate feeder middle

school were invited to participate in this survey with their perspectives.

Principal Persimmon went on to say that their school was in the discussion stages of incorporating a student portfolio system to demonstrate student learning. Ultimately it was seen as an important assessment of where their school was in terms of its overall vision of improved student learning. She said:

> Instead of just testing, testing, testing, I think there are different ways to show the truer picture of the impact of our practices that support our focus on student learning. We talked in a faculty meeting today about the emotional side of the child – Are they liking school? Do they have a love for learning? How can we influence their love for learning?

Persimmon School's rich discussions about the student portfolios showed evidence of the need to look at student learning much more holistically.

Principal Tuliptree created structures for the discussions about student learning to occur both horizontally and vertically. In her attempt to build a sense of collective responsibility for student learning, she recognized the need for teachers to begin talking across grade levels, and regularly! She shared her innovative structure for this happening:

> I schedule monthly grade level meetings where we talk about instructional issues, assessments, and curriculum. We once hired rotating substitutes for grade levels to have an hour per grade level to look at student writing samples for their respective grade level. About ten days later we did the same thing, except we had vertical teams meet (K-5) and they brought their student samples and shared them across grade levels. It was very enlightening because it was so rare to have teachers across grade levels

meet together to look at student work and to understand where the kids are

coming from and where they are going and the expectations in between.

Principal Apple similarly empowered a focus on student learning across grade levels. The

first Tuesday of each month she has her 1-3 grade teachers meet with her, the counselor,

and specialty teachers. She leads the meeting without a formal agenda, but initiates

collaboration and interventions needed by asking the faculty what students they are

concerned about. Principal Apple cited these times as important for addressing issues that

affect the learning of their students. An understanding of the learning issues and histories

of the students deepen over time, and the presence of all grade level faculty at the

meeting helps to build a collective sense of responsibility for all students and contributes

to efficiently posing possible interventions, as well as ineffective interventions tried, for

future reference.

Principal Birch indicated that her context was unique in that their population was

either professional or extremely low income. She viewed the inclusion of technology in

their visions was one way to "equal the playing field for the students – to close the

achievement gap." She continued that the impact of the technology on their school vision

was using it as a tool to advance authentic pedagogy. She stated:

We have incorporated a television studio in our school. The students are

creating products and increasing motivation to read through broadcast

book talks. It provides an audience and a way to demonstrate their

learning.

The productions required them to use higher order skills and create products to share with

an audience.

The principals emphasized that the time set aside to focus on student learning and the commensurate practices that support their visions were successful because they were schedule regularly and shown support and importance through intentional scheduling, coverage of classes, etc. to make them happen.

Collaborative Structures

Successful collaborative structures create the opportunities for research-based practices of high-achieving schools to flourish! While collaboration often happens informally within a school community, the school leaders in this study used their authority to intentionally create formal structures of collaboration to empower their school visions. All of the principals viewed the isolation of their faculties and disconnectedness to their school communities as counterproductive to successfully supporting a focused, shared school vision. The key to their successful use of collaborative structures to combat isolation and fragmentation of their school visions was use of knowledge and information to spark informed decision-making aimed at school improvements, as well as meaningfully involving the input of the school stakeholders. While they recognized the strength of broad-based involvement of the school stakeholders in achieving their visions, they conceded that it was their leadership authority in crafting and setting an expectation of progress within the collaborative structures that moved their schools from discussion to action. Principal Redbud clarified this when she stated:

> I did not change anything the first year as principal; I just observed. We
>
> became involved with a university-based support network of schools
>
> pursuing school improvement strategies. I think you need an outside

support system. Adults won't just buy in because you are the authority

figure. You need a support system that sustains you and you have to go

back to the research and bring in the experts and let teachers look at their

own research and practices and give them lots of time to

reflect.

By involving her school in the university-based support network for school improvement,

Principal Redbud used her leadership authority to develop the school vision through

access to the network's benefits of exposure to research based practices associated with

high-achieving schools, experts on school improvement that would challenge their

practices, and opportunities for focused reflection within their school and with other

schools on how to impact student learning positively.

Principal Apple discussed how she set an expectation that grade level teachers

work on the same concepts at about the same time in order to gain the maximum benefits

of times she sets up for their collaboration as grade levels. She shared:

I don't care when they teach the concepts, but I want them teaching the

skills as a grade level at about the same time. They work in grade levels

and decide collaboratively what and when they are teaching concepts. This

contributes to collaboration if they are reflecting on the same concepts at

the same time.

In addition to these times of collaboration within grade levels, the principals made use of

formalized structures specifically charged with making decisions to impact the success of

their visions. Principal Tuliptree's school revisited their mission statement through a

formal process within Victoria Bernhardt's Continuous Improvement Continuum

(Bernhardt, 2002). She indicated that after revisiting their mission statement her teachers felt it was still accurate. However, the teachers still expressed they did not feel they were together when it came to the overall vision and commensurate supporting practices. Principal Tuliptree acted on their concerns:

> So I suggested we do a Shared Leadership Team (SLT) to spearhead the
>
> effort to define the vision of our school, and the goals to help us reach it.
>
> We include parents on the SLT, as well as representatives from various
>
> grade levels and expertise among the staff.

The use of teams to structure and facilitate collaboration towards their shared visions were common in all of the schools studied. What distinguished these teams was the specificity of their function and purpose, the inclusion of multiple perspectives, and mechanisms to assure information flow and feedback with their school communities to inform and share their work. Most importantly, the teams existed and supported the vision because the principals used their authority to create and support them.

Theme II: Leaders Model Support for Vision

All of the principals conceded that while they did not have complete approval for the shared vision, they did formally solicit and receive the commitment of a significant majority of stakeholders to the vision before lending their administrative support to the efforts needed to implement it. They modeled support for the vision by building the self-efficacy of their school community through regularly encouraging and affirming the professional expertise and judgment of the faculty in the decisions being made to support the vision and in persevering in spite of the inevitable obstacles they all encountered in developing the vision. They also modeled their own commitment to the vision by

personally participating in some aspect(s) of it implementation. Finally, their support was seen in their ongoing articulation and communication of the vision.

Consensus of Commitment

When it comes to commitment to the vision, the principals in this study had their own ideas of vision for their schools, but did not impose those on their faculties. Instead, they presented their visions and then allowed collaborative processes involving various school community stakeholders to redefine the visions until they were truly shared visions incorporating their various perspectives. The principals did insist that the visions align with the research base of best practices, and when it came to whether the faculty could support the vision, they used formal and informal ways to assure a consensus of commitment to the vision. They were not naïve enough to think they would have 100% enthusiastic support, however they did operate from the premise that if a healthy majority of their faculty were in favor of the vision, then everyone should support that vision. Principal Persimmon was interested in furthering the school vision by applying for a technology grant. Consistent with their broader vision, the grant would provide both equipment and professional development on how to use it effectively to improve student learning. She shares an obstacle she encountered and how she handled it:

> I surveyed my teachers by email to determine their level of support for the
>
> grant before we even applied for it. I was so pleased to receive back
>
> emails of support from 85% of them. So we decided to go for it. We still
>
> have a few teachers who do not feel it is developmentally appropriate to
>
> use technology with younger children. You can show them all the research
>
> and it has not made a difference for them. I read the leadership book *First*

Break All The Rules about what great managers do. I took that book's

advice when it said sometimes you just have to go on with the majority

support you have, because you will rarely have 100% buy in for anything.

Principal Hemlock also chose a survey of faculty as a mechanism for determining

commitment to further developing their vision through SMART Board technology. She

clarified the expectations up front before the survey was administered, including the

additional six days of professional development that would be required to learn how to

integrate the technology to improve student learning, as well as the intent to specifically

look at math and reading scores to gauge the impact of their use of the technology.

Her history of supportive leadership led to a surprising consensus of commitment:

Before we added SMARTboard technology as a part of our vision to

enhance student learning, I sent out a survey to the faculty and clarified

the professional development that would be needed if we went forward

with the technology. I wanted them to know there would be some

expectations on improving our math and reading scores using that

technology as a tool. Then I asked them, 'Are you committed? Should we

proceed?' Only a few expressed hesitancy because of the time factor, but

ultimately all of them said they were committed – which for a non-techy

school was just really awesome.

Ultimately, Hemlock School's commitment spread from the faculty to the students after

the SMART Boards began to be used. In regards to a recent school visit by the funders of

the technology grant, she recalled a time when the teachers had been demonstrating its

uses and had difficulty getting back to their start screen. The students helped the teachers

find their way and the collaborative ownership for the technology became evident. She also mentioned how the students were indirectly putting pressure on the teachers to utilize the new technology by regularly inquiring about when they were going to be using the SMART Board. Another form of student pressure on teachers to use the technology was seen in their enthusiastic discourse about the many ways they were involved with SMART Boards in other classes. Principal Hemlock commented that as a leader there are such times to back away and allow the interpersonal dynamics among the school community advance the vision.

Principal Persimmon relayed how the consensus of commitment to the vision was evidenced by the recent implementation of a district reading assessment. The top-down decision to require the teachers to use the assessment generated much discussion about its alignment with the school site vision. As the site leader, Principal Persimmon found herself in the position of navigating the vision between her district supervisors' mandate to use the assessment and her faculty who was accustomed to having more ownership and control over their teaching practices. The resulting action of Principal Persimmon included a letter sent to the central office voicing the concerns of her and her faculty in the manner in which the assessment's use was planned. The district was responsive to the professional handling of their concerns, and ultimately the faculty accepted the revised use of the assessments. Once resolved, a professional development strategy demonstrated the consensus of commitment among the faculty and Principal Persimmon to implement the reading assessment as part of their vision focus on student learning:

Recently we had a new reading assessment from the district-level that required training. All of the teachers had a group training, and then three

to four people on-site had received more intensive training and were here in the building to support the others. They opened their classrooms and offered to have anyone come in and watch them administer the new assessment or observe while they administered one. I told people I would cover their classes to make the training options successful.

Building Self-Efficacy

A consistent theme that lends credence to Michael Fullan's assertion that principals lead in a culture of change, is the reality that visions are deepened through innovative, informed changes in practices. Among the obstacles the principals shared in their interviews, was the fear and resistance to change their faculties experienced, and at times, they themselves experienced. To counter the prevailing insecurities that accompany the risks of doing business in new ways when deepening shared visions, the principals provided the supporting role of building the self-efficacy of their pioneering faculties. There were many ways the principals accomplished this endeavor, including building opportunities for their faculties to share leadership within the school community, verbalizing their support for their teachers by praising and trusting their expertise and attempts to embrace new practices, and demonstrating support for their efforts through professional development opportunities and creative management of time structures.

Principal Tuliptree's vehicles for building leadership capacity in support of her school's shared vision providing a venue for teachers to lead knowledge-building activities with their peers based on book study and formal professional development opportunities they attend and bring back to their peers. Principal Tuliptree shares:

Last year I took a Marzano book and had all the staff members discuss it

in small, cross grade level groups. Each person had to present a chapter to

their small group. It was an example of giving them some opportunities to

take some risks and be in front of a group of their peers as leaders. I look

for opportunities to send teachers to things and come back and present to

the staff. I saw such potential in this one teacher; she was poised and knew

what she was talking about, and it was nice to be able to give her an

opportunity to have that status in front of the staff. I try to encourage all of

my teachers by telling them how well they do at various things.

The principal noted that it was important to her to provide the opportunities to as many

people as possible, since it builds broader ownership for the vision they are developing at

the school.

The notion of building self-efficacy through shared leadership was also mentioned

by Principal Redbud. Her interview was punctuated by references to what she had learned

under her first principal, often referred to as her mentor. She commented:

My passion at my school, as principal, is to provide teachers the

opportunity to be a leader and grow personally; the same opportunities I

was afforded by my mentor principal. My mentor principal gave me such

a gift to give me a voice and develop me as a leader. Seeing what she was

able to accomplish with me made it a passion for me to replicate with my

faculty in support of realizing our school vision.

She elaborated by explaining a career move from her mentor's school to another school

in the state. Her five years of teaching experience had afforded her such leadership

opportunities, that she found herself chairing departments in her new district, over

seasoned teachers. She shared that the people in the new district were intelligent, but

lacked the leadership experiences she had been afforded. She sees a direct correlation

between her passion of providing leadership experiences for her faculty and the depth and

quality of practices supporting their school vision.

The principals spoke of the need the school community has to hear leaders

verbalize earned praise. In harmony with the praise is the need to feel the leader trusts

the professionalism of the faculty. Principal Persimmon commented that when she saw

leadership skills in her faculty, she went to the teacher and identified their specific

strengths and then asked them to serve as leaders on committees. Beyond the specific,

verbalized praise she then gave the teacher the authority to initiate meetings,

conversations and agendas for the committee(s) they led. This implies a level of trust in

the teacher's ability to lead. Principal Goldenrain explained the trust she had in her

teachers, saying:

> I tell my teachers that I trust them enough to give them the freedom to
>
> choose the tools they need to get the job done. In education we so often
>
> get on a bandwagon program about something and go overboard with it.
>
> Help your people to learn things as they need them, and not rely on
>
> something else completely to drive their teaching.

Principal Birch extended the issue of self-efficacy to her students. She commented on

how the stereotypes associated with her school being rural and relatively remote affected

maintaining the shared vision of a technologically adept and informed school community.

She indicated having to reinforce with her school community the vision of what

technology could do for the students, and helped build the students' vision that they could do whatever the urban kids could do technologically when given access to similar technology.

Finally, the principals built self-efficacy by providing supportive leadership as they take on the new practices and leadership roles that help to realize the vision. Principal Tuliptree's stated her trust in her teachers is empowered by a collegial relationship marked by her active support of their work.

> In my own leadership style I am pretty trusting of people, until they prove otherwise. So I expect when I ask someone to do something, they're going to do it and I am very up front about letting people take risks – I am not going to micromanage them. I want to make sure they know that I am here if they have questions or are unsure about something. They know I am not going to beat them over the head if something does not work. We will fix whatever and work on it together.

Principal Hemlock viewed the role of the principal to be responsive to the needs of the faculty as the vision is implemented. Besides obvious comments made by teachers, she placed value on observing and sensing when support was needed by her teachers. This was illustrated when her school first received new technology equipment and the support she provided to enhance their sense of self-efficacy to be successful with the changes it would require:

> When the technology arrived, the faculty anxiety was so high because the SMART Boards looked so intimidating. I also bought them laptops to go with projectors and looking at the total operating system they were like,

'You want me to do what?' It was very stressful when the equipment first arrived. I needed to get my people happy and confident, so I decided to get substitutes for them four or five at a time to go to a neighboring school district using the technology. Those teachers were so wonderful giving them chances to ask questions, try the technology and discuss applications with the teachers and students. After they had a chance to visit, it was a night and day difference – it gives me chills – the anxiety level and knowledge base changed dramatically!

Principal Hemlock suggested her supportive leadership was defined by responsive intervention, and positively impacted the teachers' confidence and willingness to take risks knowing they could depend on her support. Principal Goldenrain echoed the importance of encouraging the heart of her teachers:

When I first came here the teachers didn't have any self esteem or believe they were good teachers. I could not believe how good they were. I went around the first year telling them what a great job they were doing and they just beamed and did more and more and more. You have to nurture the person before you nurture the vision.

In conclusion, the principals built the self-efficacy of their teachers by building opportunities for their faculties to share leadership within the school community, demonstrating through word and deed their respect and support for their teachers' expertise and willingness to attempt innovative practices, and providing them support for their efforts through professional development opportunities and creative management of

time structures to deepen their understanding and expertise of practices associated with high student achievement.

Principal Communication and Actions

The principals all demonstrated support for the vision by communicating and acting in ways that they conveyed its importance to the school community. Sometimes these efforts were communicated through providing professional development opportunities supportive of the vision. Other times the principals found it within their roles to confront situations based on data and/or observations that reinforced the principals' commitment to assuring practices supportive of the vision. And still other times the principal modeled their support by their personally active role in contributing to the success of the vision.

The teachers regularly provided support for their teachers when it came to deepening their visions through a call for innovative practices. This typically took the form of professional development opportunities that ranged from exposure to relevant readings supportive of the new practices, to cross-classroom and cross-site visits, to bringing in external experts to provide support as they developed the new practices. The principals pursued multiple avenues in support of their visions, and readily recognized that there was no single magic bullet for creating the motivation to embrace the risks of changing practices with their faculties. In addition to paying for substitutes, stipends and technical support, the principals spoke of their role of being seen personally investing in the support of the vision. Principal Persimmon spoke of offering her teachers the chance to take one full professional day to visit other teachers' classrooms, and personally covering their classes. Principal Hemlock spoke of making herself the site SMART

Board tech person. She acknowledged the tough financial times the district had endured which resulted in the layoff of numerous district technology support staff. Therefore, she personally takes responsibility for maintaining the SMART Boards in working order to demonstrate to her faculty her support for their efforts incorporating them into their teaching and learning.

Principal Apple shared how she personally looked at student data on a regular basis. Sometimes the data was praiseworthy, and she did not hesitate to recognize good results with the teachers publicly and privately. Likewise, she has used the data as an opportunity to highlight and support the vision when she sees results that suggest practices are not in alignment. She shared:

> I had one teacher very upset because I was receiving quarterly reports on
>
> how her students were doing in math and reading, and she was not pushing
>
> the students on their math skills. So we talked about, 'What is our vision?'
>
> It is not an optional thing it is part of our program. It has to be something
>
> the principal and teacher have to go for, and not just leave it up to the
>
> child; that is what she was doing, not taking responsibility to intervene
>
> with low-achieving students.

She made the point that if she did not actively review the data and then communicate the importance of its implications in support of the vision, the teachers wouldn't either. Part of supporting the vision in her experience was modeling through her communication and actions what was important.

In another vein of communication and action on the part of the principal, Principal Redbud spoke of how her mentor principal influenced her handling of criticism at her

school. While she learned from her mentor that there was strength in diverse thinking, she also learned that how such diversity of thought was handled was typically through her communication approach. She said:

The teachers have seen me allow people who are negative to say something negative to the whole group and yet not respond in a disrespectful way. I try to model it. There is strength in diversity – those democratic ideals. Sometimes negative voices are your checks and balances – so you don't want to ignore what may lead you to reflections that get you where you need to be.

Furthermore, she conceded that her professional communication model and subsequent actions were seen and replicated by her faculty and staff. In this way, the continuance of candid and professional dialogue was broadly fostered and positively influenced their professional learning community culture.

Theme III: Leaders Build Vision Coherence

The shared vision in all of the schools was focused on some aspect of student learning. The leaders all expressed that they thought it was their role to help the school community to see the connections between the specific focus on student learning in their visions and the actual daily practices to support those visions. Principals recognized the plethora of programs and strategies being offered commercially and professionally to assist schools, but saw it as their role to encourage reflection that assured whatever practices were embraced aligned with their vision and core learning principles before it would be considered for inclusion in realizing them. As opportunities were collaboratively considered, the principals included various stakeholders in the process to

assure that multiple perspectives were being heard and to assure that the vision represented a collective commitment to the focus of the vision. Regular accessibility of information and opportunities for feedback, input and reflection were supported by the principals as structures for revisiting and refining the success of the focus of the vision. To assure the coherence of the vision, all of the principals had accountability structures in place. These structures were designed to keep stakeholders' attention on the focus of the vision through regular attention to those critical components of the vision.

Inclusion of Multiple Perspectives

The principals spoke of the varied expectations placed on their schools from all corners of their school community. These voices are often referred to in organizational research as stakeholders, and in schools they generally refer to anyone who has a fairly direct stake in the success of the school's vision. In the schools studied, these typically included the principal, faculty, staff, parents, students, and community members. To cope with the reality of their vested interest and influence, the leaders studied were seen to invite stakeholders to be part of the process of focusing its efforts. How often and who would be involved in providing input and feedback was often a function of the decision at hand. All of the leaders consistently were inclusive of the voices of stakeholders, believing that the best decisions for students would emerge from their multiple perspectives.

Principal Redbud explained how she included multiple perspectives to arrive at the core beliefs that would drive her school's vision. She also addressed how they keep them involved:

We clarified our values/beliefs by beginning with some discussions that related their own personal experiences in school. There was a whole groups of us – parents, students, faculty, staff – who kept gathering all this. We took all the input and sat in a room with big chalkboards and tried to group experiences under some sort of statement that would describe what they had been saying. It eventually became statements about the beliefs of all the representative groups. In support of our vision we have parents on our site goal committees. We have an end-of the-year inservice day bringing parents in on that day to show them our test scores at the same time everyone else gets to look at them. They are a big part of where we are and where we want to be. They have been valuable participants in those conversations.

And Principal Redbud concedes that the conversations are not always positive. She acknowledged the value of listening to criticism and more importantly, responding to it appropriately. She believes her school gets to the heart of many issues by listening to candid criticisms through every voice being allowed to be heard.

Principal Persimmon noted that including stakeholders can often pay big dividends. They involved parents in adding technology to the school vision. They solicited their input and provided them updates and feedback. Through this inclusiveness, a parent volunteered to assist running the television studio that was part of their new technology vision. She boasted that had they not involved parents in the vision, they might have been at a disadvantage in the success of their technology vision.

Principal Tuliptree felt that when it came to securing input from her staff, the strength for her school was in the time for reflection and multiple methods employed for soliciting their input:

I think the real strength in creating our share vision came from getting the entire staff involved and not doing it in one setting. I gave them time to think about it and they had opportunity to talk about it in small and large groups, as well as individually through my use of online surveys where they were not swayed by peer pressure.

She utilized online surveys regularly to gain input from teachers, parents and students on various issues impacting their school vision.

Principal Goldenrain discussed involving their community in the reading vision for her school. As a district they provided a breakfast for their top business and community leaders and asked for their help working with student reading. She commented on how many expressed hesitancy to get involved, because in the past they felt they were neither kept informed about the progress the child was making nor able to be with the same child over time. So they responded to the community's desire for meaningful relationship with the students and feedback to know their efforts were impacting the students' progress. They now have in place a communication sheet that facilitates communication between the mentor and the teacher. Included in the communication sheet are progress reports on the child's reading scores.

Alignment to the Vision

All of the principals commented on how they and their schools were bombarded regularly by ways to improve student achievement, often through formal programs that

characteristically dictated how teachers should practice. While the principals saw merit in many of the programs, they also saw the potential to fragment and blur the focus of their school's efforts by attempting to embrace too many of them. They saw their role as leader was to align all of the practices and programs the school would adopt to the shared vision. Principal Hemlock summarized her feelings about vision alignment, saying:

> Our school policies and programs have to match across the board. We
>
> have really had to weed out – there are so many initiatives out there;
>
> Schools Atuned, A+ Schools, Great Expectations, Literacy First, our
>
> OETT grant. You have all hese initiatives and you want to do them all, but
>
> you can't. When teachers come to me and say they want to go check out
>
> Schools Atuned or they ask why we are not doing A+ Schools, I say,
>
> 'Let's look at what we're doing now to meet our vision. Do we need to
>
> take on anything else and/or is that going to help us reach our vision?
>
> Let's just master what we have already chosen to work on.' I think part of
>
> my job as a leader is to help them weed out so we can stay focused –
>
> otherwise we are back to the Christmas Tree school analogy where we are
>
> doing everything and look good from a distance, but cannot do anything in
>
> depth. And then, are we making a difference? I don't think so.

Principal Hemlock's last statements implied her focus; that they make a difference for students in the various initiatives, practices and programs they choose to embrace. The principals supported the concept that their role was to help their school communities maintain focus and align their work to their visions. When contemplating the extension of their vision through a program, for example, Principal Redbud indicated that her support

depended on the extent to which it supported the vision. She said her school goes back to what they are about as a school and to all the work and progress that had been achieved previously to see if the new practices aligned with the core beliefs and vision they committed to collectively. She acknowledged her frustration that agendas outside of their local control can necessitate compromising the processes she would normally use to assure an alignment to their vision. She commented that she saw it as her role as leader to help the teachers make sense of those growing pressures, and to lead them in examining the bigger picture and ways to integrate and find connections.

Principal Tuliptree had a recent experience that demonstrated her leadership role in supporting the alignment of her school's vision with outside demands. Her district had chosen to adopt a new reading assessment program that required the teachers to do a lot more than they had been doing in the area of individualized reading assessment of students. The imposition of the district mandate without input from the teachers ignited major discussions about what her school believed about assessments, curriculum and instruction. The presence of parents at some of the discussions seemed to help the teachers get past their anger of what they were being asked to do, and to get to the heart of their feelings of being judged ineffective in their current reading practices. Principal Tuliptree understood the intent of the new assessments, yet felt the need to be an advocate for her teachers and students based on their site beliefs and vision. Using the structure of a Shared Leadership Team (SLT), a professional and problem-solving kind of discussion occurred and the principal opted to write a page-long memo to the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and district reading coordinator. The memo professionally stated what she and her faculty felt needed to happen with the new

demands, as well as shared what their beliefs were about assessment, curriculum and instruction that drove their site vision. Fortunately, the district level administrators responded favorably, stating that a lot of the things suggested were exactly some of the things they were thinking needed to happen. The principal's actions to support alignment of the district requirement with their site vision resulted in her staff feeling supported and like they did have some ownership in their practices. Principal Tuliptree said it really went back to looking at the initial requirements from the perspective of what they believed was good for kids from the lenses of their assessment, curriculum and instructional beliefs. She commented:

> We don't always have a vision statement for reference sitting on the table,
> but it's there and it's guiding how I support my teachers when issues are in
> line with our vision and beliefs. Part of the discussion was on focusing
> their concerns to where it did tie into the vision – not just, 'I don't have
> time for the new reading assessment plan,' rather delving into why they
> did not feel it was worth the time it would take.

Principal Tuliptree attempts to focus their concerns was, in essence, a demonstration of her active commitment to aligning their vision with outside initiatives. Like Principal Redbud, she felt her role was to help teachers flesh out and make sense of outside instructional requirements and to capitalize on whatever control they had locally to align them with the school vision.

Accountability Structures

As the principals spoke of the need to provide cohesion and focus to their schools visions and their related practices, they acknowledged that accountability structures were

one way they assured the cohesion was maintained by the faculty and staff. They commented on how they viewed it as human nature to take the path of least resistance when the ongoing expectation to improve teaching practices demands change and risk-taking. The alignment to the vision organizationally was seen to impact individual dealings with their faculties and staffs, and this was done through accountability structures created by the principals. Their accountability structures were marked by an active support for their people when they needed assistance. Principal Redbud shared:

> I believe there has to be pressure and support! Someone has to be
> accountable –Fullan and Sergiovanni say this too. A leader's job is to
> articulate the vision; somebody has got to do that. Teach them [faculty] to
> self-monitor, but be there for them at the same time. People do not want to
> do difficult things on their own; especially when it involves change and
> growth. It is easy for people to take the easy way out and it would not take
> long with staff turnover and different conversations with families to lose
> the vision. The leader position has GREAT impact.

She continued by describing one accountability structure she utilizes with her faculty to assure they are regularly focusing on the vision. The net effect of the individual accountability structures is the cohesiveness of their collective vision as a school. She described her accountability structure as follows:

> My teachers are required to reflect for me weekly in whatever areas we are
> growing in. It is always based on our site goals that drive our vision. There
> is a reflection sheet I give them that has areas where they can write
> reflections on what is concerning them. Our site goals are highlighted on

the sheet and they have to reflect where they are with each site goal. I then

give them feedback on their progress and concerns the day after they turn

them in to me.

In addition to the required ongoing reflection on their practices, as they relate to the

school vision, is the ongoing support she provides them through both feedback and a

commitment to assist them in addressing the concerns they express.

Principal Apple took a directive approach to developing accountability structures

with her faculty. She created collaboration times in their schedules, and had the

expectation that one outgrowth of that time to work together would be a formal

documentation of how their curriculum was aligning with the instructional targets

embodied in the state-mandated PASS skills. She illustrated how one of her teachers once

used the collaboration time to grade papers and realized then the tendency to lose the

meaningfulness of such collaborative times, if she did not put accountability structures in

place:

> The faculty were assigned to use their collaboration time to align their
>
> curriculum. I told them I wanted a pacing calendar set up in quarters of the
>
> school year and aligned to the state mandated PASS skills at each grade
>
> level. Some teachers said, 'If I cover the textbook, I will have covered the
>
> PASS skills.' I challenged them, 'Prove it to me!'

In the same way Principal Redbud provided her faculty reflective prompts to respond to

based on the school vision, Principal Apple set an expectation that her faculty would

document their plans to respond to student instructional needs by responding to four

questions:

The second and third Tuesdays of the month are collaboration times where

each teacher must respond to four questions: 1. Why do we exist? 2. What

kind of school do we hope to become? 3. What do we need to do to

become this kind of school? 4. What steps will we take and when will we

take them?

The questioning route provides an accountability structure from which to make the

teachers commit to plans to address student needs and communicate with each other how

they are addressing the four questions individually and collectively.

Connecting Vision and Practice

Each principal felt it was her role to show the connection between the practices

occurring in the school and the school vision. Sometimes this involved directly stating the

connections, while other times it involved creating opportunities for the connection to be

constructed by the school stakeholders. Principal Redbud commented that when her

school revisits their vision, she uses a questioning route that provides a clear, cohesive

focus on what the school should practically be about based on the personal experiences of

the participants:

When we talk about vision we begin with a basic discussion of 'Why was

school good for you? What was bad for you? What in school was good for

you? What are your past experiences? Why was this teacher one you liked

better than another —what did she do? What did this school setting do for

you that another did not? It was down to telling what it looked like – What

was said to you? What were you doing? You gotta state what your beliefs

are. That old one line mission statement doesn't cut it – it does not say

what you really believe. I am talking about core learning principles/beliefs

– it is what the vision looks like in practice.

It should be noted that the above conversation was conducted with parents, students and faculty to generate multiple perspectives.

Principal Tuliptree also designed a time for her constituents to construct the connection between the school vision and its practices. She shared:

We looked at our vision at the beginning of this school year. Then a few weeks later I did an activity where I asked the teachers, 'How have you seen this vision enacted in our school this first few weeks of school?' They wrote down their reflections and then I read them. It was really affirming for the whole school to hear. They listed specific people and actions tied to the vision. It was very affirming to some of our new people and set the stage for other new people who needed to know what we are about. I put the results of this activity on our website so all the teachers could read it.

Recognizing the connection of their practices to support of the vision was also seen in Principal Persimmon's school. One of the things she indicated was a regular challenge was helping the teachers understand that extending the vision does not always translate into one more responsibility. In light of their new technology tools, she commented:

I think when we were adding the technology the teachers thought there was going to be something extra; they didn't really get a clear picture that we're trying to give them a tool and not a totally separate thing to do. I

have had to help them see how their use of technology to reach students in content areas is the vision-there is no separate thing.

The principals instigated the venues for the reflection and understanding of how the practices connect to the vision. They commented that this occurred in less formal ways in conversations with individuals and groups, and that they viewed it as contributing to building cohesion to the vision when they identified and articulated examples of the connection throughout the school year.

Theme IV: Leaders Monitor Vision

All of the leaders stressed the continuous assessment of progress on the vision using multiple data sources. They viewed it as their role to set up systems for monitoring the success and needs of the vision. They have specific group processes they use to analyze information and input relevant to the vision. Additionally, they reported that they were present, actively engaged and contributing members of the discourse about the assessed indicators, along with other stakeholders. The principals used data and information gleaned in informal and formal sharing times to inform and encourage actions in support of the vision. Principals had established regular, commonly understood benchmarks for success using varied monitoring tools.

Assessment Benchmarks

The principals all spoke of regular assessments being used to assess the success of student learning. Part of the discussion dealt with the judicious and appropriate use of assessments. Principal Tuliptree commented on how different assessments serve different purposes:

We believe in assessments, but assessment can have different purposes.

Some are for accountability and program evaluation and are done with

everybody the same way. In the case of a recent reading assessment

imposed on the teachers from the district level, the district heard our

vision-related concern that assessments to inform instruction are not one-

size-fits-all. Those you want to tailor to the needs of the students. So we

went from a quarterly reading assessment of all students to one of those

below grade level. Kids on or above grade level do not need the same

level of monitoring as those below grade level.

Principal Goldenrain spoke of how her school's vision included having 90% of the

students reading on grade level. Assessing student reading level was foundational to

knowing where they were with their vision. While she monitored assessment results, she

also put the responsibility for monitoring assessments with the parents, teachers and

students.

We use an ongoing reading assessment every quarter. The teachers do

their own graphing now – I am not doing it and they know it is their

responsibility. They have the graphs on their walls and show the progress

and grab the kid who is falling through the cracks. They zero in on that!

There is an ongoing focus on where they are in terms of our vision of

having 90% of our students reading on grade level.

Reports to parents on where their children were in their reading level were also sent home

quarterly.

Regular Assessment through Multiple Techniques

The traditional use of standardized tests, such as criterion-referenced and norm-referenced tests, were common indicators used by the principals since they were required by the state and provided a regular benchmark of student learning. However, assessments used to impact decisions about student learning went far beyond the sometimes annual standardized tests in the schools studied. There was clearly a pattern of ongoing assessment throughout the school year to guide instruction and reveal other factors supportive of student learning. Principal Redbud shared that she attended a conference several years ago that gathered principals to discuss the impending NCLB requirements. One of the things she was exposed to at the conference was research on what made a difference in achievement gains in schools. One consistent finding that dominated the conference discourse was the use of frequent assessments and data-driven decision-making. Principal Apple shared:

> Once we aligned our curriculum to the state standards, I asked the faculty,
> 'How are we going to assess them?' The comment back from some of
> them has been, 'There are assessments here in the textbook, already
> made.' I said that yes, there were assessments, but that we were going to
> develop our own to be given every six to nine weeks. And from those we
> would decide what we were going to do if they were not learning.

The principals also spoke of the value they saw in pre and post testing with the same instruments over time to establish trends of improvement or need. Like Principal Apple, Principal Persimmon expected her faculty to create their own ongoing assessments in addition to commercially produced assessments. She referred to the teacher assessments

as end-of-instruction assessments and was complimentary about how similar the results on the ongoing assessments paralleled the commercial results. The benefit of the teacher-made tests was that they could be given in an ongoing way throughout the school year, rather than waiting until the end of the school year to assess instructional success. Adding to the frustration of the state assessments was the reality that the results often did not arrive until teachers had left for the summer, and the teacher-made assessments countered that dilemma.

In addition to the assessment of content, the principals spoke of looking at data to assess other conditions related to improved student learning. Surveys were used to regularly assess the environment for learning, as perceived by their various stakeholders. Principal Redbud spoke of her school hiring a parent liaison to assess parental input and involvement and coordinate resources in support of her parents working with their children. They used a survey received through the national PTA that was very extensive. One thing they learned from the survey was their need to invite their parents to faculty professional development days.

Principal Tuliptree discussed how she used assessments to initiate conversations that would foster active intervention. At her school they created a staff survey, parent survey, and student survey to gather input from these groups about what they wanted their school to look like. She took the survey data, as well as student achievement data, and on a professional development day blew them all up on poster-size paper. She placed them on walls up and down the halls of the school with a blank poster comment page next to each. She then asked small, cross-grade level groups of teachers to do a gallery walk and comment verbally and on the comment posted comment pages what they

thought. She indicated that it promoted a lot of discussion across grade levels about student learning and actions to consider to address obvious areas of need. Additionally, it provided a venue to celebrate areas of strength, based on the data.

Leadership Presence and Participation with Assessment

Principal Apple commented on how the level of involvement and expectations of the principal with regard to data often influenced the value it was seen to have in the eyes of the school community. She commented that there were a lot of administrators who let teachers do whatever they wanted to do, and chose the managerial roles of answering phones and site maintenance. By contrast, she said she saw it as a whole new world today and checking on the work of teachers and students was the leaders job, saying:

> We test periodically every nine weeks in reading and math. I get a report
>
> through our computer math program on every child and how many
>
> objectives they have mastered – which is something new for these teachers
>
> because the principal is looking now to see what objectives are mastered
>
> and calling the teacher in to ask why one student has mastered only four
>
> this nine weeks, while another mastered over a hundred.

Beyond just questioning the results, Principal Apple also shared how looking at assessment results created discussions that promoted action to intervene based on them. She stated:

> I had one teacher who gave a child an F. When I asked about it, she said,
>
> "Well, he is just not doing it!" I responded by prompting her to think
>
> about the options for reaching him. Do we need to keep him after school?
>
> Do we need to call parents and get them involved? How many times have

you come in early and worked with the child? They know these questions

are coming. I communicate the value that there will be intervention to

assure our students are learning.

Assessment formed a proactive base for improving the student's learning, in this case.

Ultimately, the principals found that what gets monitored gets attention. They saw

it as their role to lead the organization of the assessment plan for their school, assure it

measured their vision, and most importantly, create venues for discussing the results and

taking action.

Other Findings

In phenomenology, the primary emphasis is on describing themes that

transcended all of the interviewees. However, there were additional themes found among

several of the principals that are worth considering when describing their experiences

developing a shared school vision.

Woven into several of the principals' interviews were references to their own

professional development. It appeared that many were influenced by professional

literature and leadership experiences, in and out of the field of education. Several who

mentioned the long and complex process that developing, implementing and sustaining a

school vision collaboratively, also mentioned their reliance on good information and

knowledge that guided their efforts. One principal mentioned:

I'll tell you, it took me going home every night the first several years and

reading motivational books on leadership-I was buying one a week and

had to regroup at home and get my thoughts together before I could face

some of the situations at school. I also joined a school leadership support

group that exposed me to a lot of good articles and good thought-

provoking conversations.

Their own leadership professional development had to be initiated by them. Rarely did

the principals have professional development provided based on their needs, rather it was

their initiative that got them whatever professional development experiences they would

have.

A related item several principals commented on was the contextual use of school

leadership tools by them. One principal spoke highly of the processing structures she

found with one particular school improvement author's guide. However, she regularly

commented how certain tools or ideas suggested in the guide were found by her or her

faculty to not be necessary for their context or where they were at a given time. The same

principal highlighted other processing structures she used in tandem with her favorite

author's. The weaving of a tapestry of leadership practices that elicited the best fit for the

context was seen in several principals' interviews. They resisted a cookbook approach to

school improvement and leadership, and their conversations punctuated the intentionality,

autonomy, and ownership they exercised when choosing courses of action.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings suggested four themes that transcended the lived

experiences of the seven elementary principals involved in creating a shared vision in

their schools. The themes focused on the aspects of leadership used by the interviewed

principals to empower, support, coherently build and monitor a shared school vision.

In the first theme, Leaders Empower Vision, each of the principals described the critical need for leaders to provide opportunities for the development of an informed knowledge base by those stakeholders involved in the development of the shared vision, *before* the beliefs and vision are crafted. This essential foundation was empowered by enabling information-gathering opportunities by stakeholders, including cross-site visits, cross-classroom visits, book studies, use of technology, professional literature, and attending professional meetings, all of which were focused on improving student learning. The principals stated that they created collaborative structures within their schools so that the gathered information could then be shared, reflected upon in light of their school's context, and used to guide its application in the development of the vision and core learning principles.

In the second theme, Leaders Model Support for Vision, they spoke of the importance of achieving a consensus of commitment to the vision. All were involved in extending their school visions through the addition of technology and commensurately through new teaching and learning practices. Once the consensus of commitment was achieved, the leadership role of building their confidence to embrace the demands of change and risk-taking was essential. Through shared leadership and supportive professional development, the principals reported improved self-efficacy with their staffs. Support for the vision was also seen in the leader's commitment to it. The principals all had individual ways that they actively modeled their support of the vision, from navigating political waters to taking on roles directly related to the success of the school vision.

In the third theme, Leaders Build Vision Coherence, the principals all spoke of the need for focus that vision could provide. Leaders maintained vision focus for their schools in a variety of ways, including regularly verbalizing and highlighting how classroom practices tied to the vision, insisting on structures that would assure alignment of all initiatives to the vision, inclusion of multiple stakeholder perspectives to arrive at the best decisions for the success of the vision, and accountability structures to maintain the focus on the vision.

Finally, the fourth theme, Leaders Monitor Vision, stressed how what gets monitored gets attention. The leaders not only measured student learning and the conditions that support it, but they provided group and individual venues to collaborate and communicate with the school community the implications of the assessments as they related to reaching their shared school visions. Key to monitoring the assessments was providing the leadership to establish benchmarks, using varied techniques on a regular basis, and remaining a constant, involved presence in supporting the needed discourse and actions to move the vision forward.

The themes of the interviews suggested additional conclusions of how leadership impacts the success of shared school visions. Leaders created the conditions of learning communities of continuous inquiry in their schools. They empowered constructive actions focused on student learning. They built leadership capacity through shared leadership, thereby fostering collective responsibility for all students. School leaders supported a shared school vision by intentionally using strategies and structures for collaboration, reflection and action. Ultimately, they recognized the contextual, slow

process that leading a meaningful shared vision entails, when designed, implemented and guided by the best research available.

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

The purpose of this study was to expose aspects of leadership contributing to the development of shared school vision. Using a phenomenological approach, the lived experiences and perceptions of seven elementary school principals involved in the development of shared visions in their respective schools revealed some common themes. The overlap of these themes demonstrated the phenomenological concept of "imaginative variation," whereby the common experiences, or meaning units, associated with developing a shared vision were teased apart and considered as both a piece and a part of the whole (Moustakas, 1994). As the interviews were examined, the lens of the professional learning community provided an overarching interpretive framework which revealed commonalities across the lived experiences of the seven principals studied. These common themes primarily applied to school conditions and leadership behaviors they found important in establishing a shared school vision. Ultimately, the findings share what the principals perceived to be conditions supportive of developing a shared school vision and the commensurate leadership actions they intentionally took to support those conditions. The common leadership themes for developing their schools' shared visions included:

1. Leaders Empower Vision

2. Leaders Model Support for Vision

3. Leaders Build Vision Coherence

4. Leaders Monitor Vision

The themes which emerged reflected how the interviewed principals chose to use leadership to face the challenges associated with developing a shared school vision. These challenges, detailed in Chapter One of this study, summarily included:

Challenge #1: If vision is important to the success of a school, how does a leader learn how to develop and sustain a shared vision?

Challenge #2: In a time of diverse and multiple demands on a school leader, how does the leader determine a meaningful, focused vision his/her school community can support?

Challenge #3: How can a principal orchestrate the shared creation of a school vision that will reflect the multiple perspectives of the school community and enhance its sustainability beyond his/her tenure and the inevitable winds of change the school will face in the future?

Challenge #4: What is the role of a school leader in restructuring and re-culturing schools to replace isolated, ineffective teaching and learning practices with authentic, relevant practices grounded in collaborative moral purpose and supported by a trustful environment rich in social capital?

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to describing how the principals in this study addressed these challenges, as well as the resulting implications on the practice, preparation, and future research of school leaders developing a shared school vision.

Challenge #1: The "How" of Developing and Sustaining a Shared School Vision

Interestingly, the study began with a literature base that supported the value of a vision to the success of an organization, including a school. However, how to develop and sustain a vision is scantily treated in the literature. Additionally, following the

interviews with the seven principals in this study, all of them indicated that they had

never been trained on how to develop and sustain a vision for a school during their

university preparation experiences. One of the principals even went so far as to imply that

all visions were generic enough to be applicable to all schools. As the principals were

faced with developing a shared vision as part of a technology grant application process,

they began to inquire what the process of creating a shared vision would look like for

their schools. Their various inquiries yielded a handful of writings about vision

development (Bernhardt, 2002; Glickman, 1993; Senge, 2000), however, none of the

principals were comfortable embracing a "cookbook" approach to creating their schools'

shared visions. Instead, they used the knowledge they gained through personal inquiry

and collaboration with other school leaders to create an eclectic, informed foundation

from which to create a contextually-appropriate school vision. The results of their pursuit

of "how" to create and sustain a shared school vision yielded some common experiences.

Challenge #1: Implications for Practice, Preparation and Future Research for the

"How" of Developing and Sustaining a Shared School Vision

In terms of their practices, the studied principals firstly turned to research-based

sources on vision creation and carefully personalized what processes they would choose

for their schools' visioning experience. They all embraced the belief that their school

communities would need to be informed about effective practices associated with high

student achievement, as well as have access to data that would reveal the needs of the

students and school community. They viewed it as the principal's job to orchestrate

researching, selecting and disseminating the information. They all committed to sharing

the information with all school community stakeholder groups, and the principals

recognized the importance of their support in creating the venues for the information to be discussed from those multiple perspectives when making decisions in support of the vision. In essence, the principals insisted on a shared vision founded on research-based principles. They would not progress to clarifying the values and beliefs of their school communities before assuring they were provided opportunities to develop a knowledge base from which to inform those values and beliefs. The knowledge base would include effective teaching and learning research and school-specific data.

Sustaining the vision required the principal regularly communicating the vision and identifying and reinforcing school practices that supported it. This was one of the areas all of the principals felt they needed to do a better job. Through a multitude of methods, from storytelling to sharing peer observations, the need to regularly communicate the vision and spotlight examples of the vision in practice was one way the principals used to sustain the vision.

Another implication for practice is the need for collaborative structures to determine the focus of the shared vision. Once the principals felt comfortable that the school community understood the needs of the students, based on collected data, and had opportunity to clarify beliefs and values from an informed research base, there was a need to focus the school improvement effort. Collaboratively, a few credible goals would need to become the focus of the school's improvement efforts. Having structures for democratically determining such goals was essential to the successful development of a shared vision.

Implications for the preparation of future school leaders developing and sustaining a shared vision is seen in the need for school leadership standards of

accountability. The ELCC standards represent the most recent effort to establish school leadership standards. The creation of a school vision is the first of seven standards and should provide a much-needed focus for its value to school improvement. Problematic is the continuing lack of insistence on such standards being uniformly accepted and developed in university administrator preparation programs, nationwide. Further exacerbating this reality are the myriad of opportunities across America's state educational systems for individuals to become alternatively certified school leaders without any uniform preparation program. By way of illustration, and rhetorically speaking, is it possible to incorporate into a licensure test a question(s) whose response(s) adequately demonstrates an understanding of what is involved in crafting a shared school vision? At a minimum, the systems that turn out our future school leaders should provide mentored pre-service and in-service requirements for school leaders that model research-based principles of quality, ongoing professional development specific to their roles and responsibilities. Such a commitment to uniform standards of excellent school leadership behaviors, could potentially offer the greatest hope that the concept of developing and sustaining a vision would receive more than the current voluntary and arbitrary attention to this critical skill.

In terms of future research for developing and sustaining a shared vision, the study revealed all of its participants did not have an understanding of how to develop and sustain a shared school vision. The researcher's training and development of nearly 800 principals and superintendents corroborates the vagueness with which school administrators appear to understand how to develop a shared school vision. Not only is research needed on additional models for developing and sustaining vision, but how to

then disseminate that information meaningfully to existing and pre-service school leaders, as well as determining effective accountability structures that would lead to the application of such models. Of particular interest as our schools become increasingly diverse would be improved understandings for school leaders about how to be most successful in gaining the participation of their various stakeholders in developing and supporting the school vision. Meaningfully involving poor and/or illiterate clientele, as well as implications for involving ethnically-based predispositions about the role of schools and the family's participation in the process of schooling and sharing leadership, are but a few topics for further research. This study also examined seven female, non-urban, elementary principals. Research on how developing and sustaining vision is impacted by the gender of the lead principal, the level of the school (e.g., elementary, secondary, university), and the location of the school (rural, urban, suburban) are but a few demographic distinctions further study may or may not find make a difference in the various thematic areas highlighted in this study.

Challenge #2: Parameters for Shared Vision

As the principals expressed their personal angst and high levels of faculty stress in trying to provide for the myriad of expectations of them and their schools, not the least of which being the pounding pressures to improve student achievement per No Child Left Behind legislation, the need for them to lead a sane approach to their school visions was an inherent challenge. Expectations of schools and school leaders took various forms for each of the principals, however, the commonly held realization was that there would need to be parameters to guide the shared visions which would squarely address the multiple expectations.

Firstly, there were varying expectations of the school community, internally and externally, as to what the principal should be doing as leader of the school. The expectations spanned the spectrum from the traditional managerial role to the inclusive, facilitative instructional leader role. Secondly, what practices and methods would be used to support the vision were as varied as the number of prescriptive, oft-respected, initiatives available. Thirdly, a host of non-negotiable expectations, such as NCLB legislation and state and district mandates, would need to be woven into whatever vision was ultimately crafted. Fourthly, with the increasing diversity of the school community come additional pressures to meet its changing needs, tempered by the caution of teachers to not overextend their burgeoning list of expectations of them. These expectations fed continuing debates about the purpose of schools, from developing democratic citizens to simply getting better test scores on standardized measures of achievement. The result was a common realization by all of the principals that parameters would need to be explicitly developed that would guide how the shared vision would be developed, implemented, and sustained in light of the multiple expectations. Interestingly, the resulting parameters for leading a shared school vision simultaneously communicated high expectations for school improvement, including 1) the vision and its reflective practices would be based on the latest and best research for high student achievement, 2) decisions collaboratively made to improve teaching and learning would be based on a variety of regularly collected data organized around benchmarks for monitoring the success of the vision, 3) classroom practices would be focused on student learning, 4) improvement initiatives would be aligned to the purposes of the vision, with care taken to not overextend the school community in the process, and 5) the school community would demonstrate collective

responsibility and a consensus of commitment in support of the shared vision, empowered by inclusive input and feedback structures.

Challenge #2: Implications for Practice, Preparation and Future Research on

Parameters for Shared Vision

The leaders in this study dealt with the ambivalent, broad expectations for them and their schools by establishing parameters from which to screen or interpret those expectations. They consistently spoke of their role in providing direction and support for the school community as it worked towards the shared vision. One common finding was that the principals would not go forward with the vision until they determined there was a healthy consensus of commitment. One implication for practice in establishing the parameters that guide the development and sustenance of a shared school vision, is educating the school community on the parameters and enforcing the parameters, publicly and privately. Once collectively agreed upon, the principals used financial support of practices that supported the vision. They also spotlighted and praised efforts that supported the vision. They created structures that would enable the teachers to be focused and they aligned other initiatives to the vision. The principals each became personally involved in some aspect of the work of implementing the vision (e.g., becoming the technology support and maintenance contact for technology equipment whose integration would serve the vision). They also took on the role of advocate for those taking risks and respectfully modeled and defended the parameters at levels inside and outside the walls of their local school (e.g., district office). Another way the parameters were honored was by making everyone accountable to know the vision and conveying the expectation that it would be translated into high-achieving teaching and

learning practices. The principals provided regular opportunities for input and feedback on how the vision was going, included both praise and confronting ineffective practices and/or mediocrity. These were typically created through a persistent monitoring of data intentionally and collaboratively set up to measure progress towards the vision. These behaviors all served to reinforce the parameters established.

In considering the implications for preparing principals to maintain a focus on the vision, exposure to the many effective initiatives that exist and what effective teaching and learning practices they impact would be particularly helpful. Internships and networks can serve as vehicles for sharing the tenets and benefits of various initiatives. Pre-service and in-service principals should seek out external opportunities to network with other professionals doing what they do. School leaders should participation in professional development opportunities that demonstrate and model the research-based principles of effective professional development. Such opportunities as participation in local school and community renewal networks, university-school-community partnerships, and appropriate interdisciplinary advanced degree programs focused on educational renewal are examples of important ways school leaders could deepen their understanding of current research and engage in meaningful, collegial dialogue.

In terms of future research, the parameters the principals supported in this study involved use of data and research, varied collaborative opportunities to have discourse and input about the implications of the research and data on their schools' teaching and learning practices, and the inclusion of multiple stakeholder perspectives. Future research is needed on innovative time structures to most effectively enable school improvements found in shared school visions. As demographics of stakeholders change,

so to may the times and collaborative structures needed to capture the varied perspectives and the methods that must be considered in light of socioeconomic and ethnic predispositions. The principals in this study sought innovative uses of money and time (e.g., hiring substitutes through grant monies to enable cross-grade level examination of student work). They also used their power to arrange schedules that facilitated grade level collaboration, such a common planning periods. However, all of these opportunities generally remained within the current time structures of our existing schools. Research must be done to demonstrate the value of new time structures that facilitate collaboration and a serious commitment to the time needed for quality professional development of leaders and educators.

Challenge #3: A Shared Vision through Shared Involvement

Each principal recognized the inconceivability of leading school improvement single-handedly, particularly in light of the diverse layers of imposed expectations on the school. Each principal also recognized the need for their school community to have ownership in the purposes of their school. The principal sought ways to be inclusive of multiple school community perspectives in crafting the vision. Additionally, each principal created ways to share their leadership in support of the school vision. Investing and providing meaningful professional development to develop leadership skills in school community leaders represented one way the principal built leadership capacity in support of the shared school vision. Moving the concept of 'leader' from exclusively representing the position of the principal to inclusively offering broader, skillful sharing of leadership with various school community members, subsequently empowered the vision. Such shared governance structures were intended to sustain the vision of the school beyond the

principal's tenure. The principals in the study concurred that the extra time and effort

spent in developing collaborative structures enabling shared leadership did result in an

improved culture of purpose and motivation through ownership. As cited in the study, the

value of building social capital in a school focused on a high moral purpose contributes

greatly to the achievement of the school. Sharing leadership skillfully can increase

trustful social relationships necessary to collaborative work and illuminate the moral

purpose of the vision of the school.

Challenge #3: Implications for Practice, Preparation and Future Research on a Shared

Vision through Shared Involvement

In terms of implications of sharing involvement to strengthen school vision, the

research clearly demonstrates the benefits of broad and skillful leadership practices to

school success (Glickman, 1993; Lambert, 1998). Building leadership capacity is

becoming an increasingly critical skill of school leaders as more and more of them face

increasingly complex issues, retire, or leave the profession. For a vision to have staying

power, the leadership of that vision has to rest in the hands of more than just one

principal. This can only be accomplished through sharing leadership with those who can

promote and sustain the school vision. Principals in this study sought a consensus of

commitment and received it based on an investment made in informing their school

communities why the vision represented something purposeful to the future success of

their students. Efforts to involve the school community in making informed school

improvement decisions requires structures for the inquiry, discourse, and action planning

to occur. This collaborative approach to data-based decision-making through the

involvement and support of multiple school community leaders improves the chances that

the vision will have continuity and consistency regardless of changes in the principal, for example. The implication on practice for a school leader is that they are responsible for overseeing and supporting the skillful leadership development of those they would share leadership with. It is not enough for many stakeholders to be involved in input and feedback loops about a decision, rather it is necessary to lead those input and feedback mechanisms in a skillful manner. Respect for the parameters spoken of in the previous section of this chapter can provide a helpful framework for dealing with change within the school. The principals in the study spoke of the many changes their schools faced, many of which they did not have direct control over. The principal felt it was their duty to always maintain a focus on student learning and to assist the school community in understanding how the involuntary changes could be sustained and incorporated into the shared vision.

As principals are being prepared for the concept of sharing leadership, a written decision-making plan can often provide a measure of confidence to replace the loss of power and authority. Allen, et al. (1999) examined what to consider in sharing governance within a school and what should be included in a shared, written decision-making plan. Lambert's (1998) work on broad and skillfully-based leadership is also a helpful source for considerations in building leadership capacity. She makes a distinction between 'leader' and 'leadership' and examines the effects of shared leadership and leadership styles as they impact student achievement and school culture. Current and future school leaders can neither single-handedly lead all of the necessary practices to meet a shared school vision, nor make all of the decisions needed to respond to continuous changes affecting the school vision. Developing skillful leaders from across

their school stakeholder community has the potential to empower the shared school vision.

In terms of future research, the issue of principal succession and how a new principal adapts to an existing school vision and culture would be informative. Mechanisms and considerations for leaders new to a school to understand the school culture and leadership would be potentially helpful in averting unnecessary changes while illuminating needed changes to empower a shared vision's viability and usefulness.

Challenge #4: Attacking Isolation

The research on school improvement continues to decry the benefits of collaboration over isolation (Glickman, 1993; Hord, 1997; O'Hair, et al., 2000; Putnam, 2000; Senge, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1991). The role of leadership in providing skillfully-led, informed venues for collaboration provides the foundation necessary for school communities to embrace inquiry and discourse, and ultimately guide decisions to improve student achievement. In developing such venues, the deepening of reflection on teaching and learning practices can only flourish in a trustful, collaborative climate. The principals in the study modeled professionalism in reframing criticisms into productive examinations of their practices. To varying degrees, the principals in the study sought to create and support the development and deepening of social capital necessary to realizing the purposes inherent in their shared school visions.

When asked what they might have done differently about developing a shared school vision, all of the principals spoke of the importance of regularly communicating the vision and stating how the various practices in the school tied to the shared vision. Several of the principals perceived they had made a mistake in assuming that there was a

consensus of understanding about what the shared vision was and what it looked like in practice. Some shared specific instances of when they realized there was a discrepancy between what they assumed was a well-understood vision and what was happening in practice. They saw it as the responsibility of the leader of the school to regularly revisit the vision visually, verbally and/or symbolically to reinforce the aligned focus of the shared vision. A common theme the principals used to build vision coherence and understanding was to establish mechanisms for monitoring the vision. The results of these regular and multiple kinds of assessment served as springboards for having the conversations about and reflecting on the shared vision. These opportunities for discourse provided focus, alignment, and a basis for needed actions in support of the shared vision. They also reinforced to the school community that the school vision mattered. Such structures conveyed there was a moral purpose to the work the school community was engaged in, and the purpose was important enough to spend time reflecting, creating, problem-solving, sharing, reframing, and acting through supportive conditions and structures for reaching the shared vision.

Challenge #4: Implications for Practice, Preparation and Future Research on Attacking Isolation

In practice, school leaders generally possess some control over the organizational and physical structures of their schools. Creating schedules that facilitate collaboration and promoting interdisciplinary study of authentic teaching and learning practices, including peer observations, cross-site visits, book studies and exposure to external expertise as a second set of eyes to challenge the school to be better, are all examples of methods a school leader can use to combat the isolation inherent in traditional schools.

The principals in this study also spoke of the role they played in encouraging the heart of their school communities. This was accomplished in a variety of ways, yet all of the principals in this study acknowledged the need to build the self-efficacy of their school communities. Kouzes and Posner (1999) succinctly summarized themes associated with encouraging the heart of employees. Their themes became evident to varying degrees in the experiences of the principals in this study. The principals set clear standards for the shared vision, they expected the best out of their teachers, parents and students, and they were involved enough that they knew what was happening with the vision, by paying attention to it through both formal and informal assessments of the vision in practice. An implication for future principals is the need to refine their skills in storytelling. In order to truly personalize recognition and celebrate successes, the art form of storytelling can be a compelling mechanism for maintaining moral purpose, developing the sense of community that nurtures social capital, and building a collective sense of responsibility for the learning of all students. As school leaders develop these skills in themselves, they cannot forget that building leadership capacity necessitates building the skill in others in their school community and offering them venues to practices their leadership skills. Principals who encourage the heart set the example by what they say and do, and can be important models that influence the attitudes and motivations that affect a shared school vision.

As we consider future research implications associated with attacking isolation, the need to continue to explore innovative physical and social school structures that encourage collaboration aimed at improved authentic practices for teaching and learning is necessary. Again, the quality professional development of school leaders and those

they share their leadership with cannot be overstated. Observing the principles of effective professional development will reduce isolation and assist in the responsive development and sustenance of a shared school vision.

Conclusion

Therefore, the findings and conclusions of the study, as viewed from the lived experiences of the seven elementary principals, are offered as their approaches to developing and sustaining a shared school vision. Their reflections and clarifications described learning communities of continuous inquiry that resulted in constructive actions focused on improving student learning. The principals described how they shared leadership and built leadership capacity to empower their intentional strategies and structures of collaboration and discourse. While the principals began with personal visions for their schools, they allowed the vision to evolve, within understood parameters, using the meaningful input and reflections of their school community stakeholders. Pervading each school's vision was an ongoing, deepening collective responsibility for student learning through focused ownership of practices that would support the vision. In the course of the interview with Principal Redbud, it was discovered that she would be retiring this school year. The researcher asked her to share her hopes for the school's vision after she leaves. She stated:

> The leader position has a great impact, is what I have realized. It is easy
>
> for people to take the easy way out, and it would not take long with
>
> turnover in staff and different conversations with families to lose the
>
> vision. In terms of after I am gone, the best gift I will have left these
>
> people is having supported the development of their own strong, informed

belief system and capable leadership so that, in fact, they could go and recreate and offer the same opportunities in other schools. For me, that is the ultimate; to take it from our little place and spread it to other school communities who can then benefit from my people's experiences.

This study approaches the concept of a shared school vision from the perspective of seven, female, elementary school principals. The value of vision to the success of an organization is well-documented, and this study provides some insights into the way these principals sought to capture the essence of their role of leader in the development of a shared school vision, in light of the complex variations inherent in their respective contexts and personal expertise. The practices these principals found successful in their schools corroborates much of the professional learning community research, adding to the practical implications for school leaders seeking to improve schools and increase student achievement for all students. The challenge is to continue the research that would inform school leaders about what aspects of school leadership contribute to the development of a shared school vision.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

10 Practices of High-Achieving Schools

K20 Center for Educational & Community Renewal   University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK

Practice 1: Shared Values, Common Goals and Shared Purpose

A shared set of goals, commitments, and practices enacted throughout the school.

Common goals in a school serve as a basis for decision-making (i.e., "How does that

decision fit with what we believe in?") and give individuals an enhanced sense of

purpose. They make individuals part of a bigger cause – of a cause beyond one's self.

Practice 2: Authentic Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

Authentic pedagogy is practiced in the school. Students learn best when they

1. Think

2. Develop in-depth understanding

3. Apply academic learning to important, realistic problems and connect learning to
   the real-world

Practice 3: Shared Leadership & Decision-Making

Shared decision-making structures are designed to involve teachers, administrators,

parents and students in making critical decisions that impact teaching and learning.

Decision-making structures emphasize the importance of hearing all voices in the school

community and emphasizing decision-making based on inquiry and data.

Practice 4: Caring/Personalized, Small School

Unlike conventional schools where teachers feel responsible for their students only while the students are in their classrooms, in professional learning communities, teachers believe they are responsible for all students in the school all the time. Even in large schools, reorganization leads to personalized, caring environments through the development of practices such as teams, large blocks of time, small loads, and advisors/advocates. In these schools where collective responsibility for students and smaller learning communities exist, students feel cared about and important.

Practice 5: Teachers Collaborate and Learn Together

Teachers form study groups to examine research-based on successful teaching and learning. They set collective standards based on shared goals, work to connect the curriculum both internally and externally, examine student work together, and supervise and guide one another.

Practice 6: Inquiry and Discourse

Inquiry and discourse about school practices allows teachers to consider relevant perspectives, data, and knowledge. It involves asking questions such as:

- On what basis are we doing what we are doing? What evidence or support do we have to justify our practice? How do we know whether what we are doing is effective?

- What information, data, knowledge, and perspectives can we gather to assist us in studying our practice?

- How does what we are doing fit with our values and beliefs as a school?

- How does what we are doing serve the needs of the diverse individuals and groups who make up our community? Whose interests do our practices serve? Whose interests do they not serve?

The primary purpose of inquiry and discourse is the improvement of teaching, learning, and school practice in the classrooms and schools that engage in it.

Practice 7: Supportive Superintendent/Principal Leadership

Superintendent/Principal involvement in a school's efforts to become more democratic can range from being actively resistant to actively supportive of democratic efforts. Superintendent/Principal resistance involves placing obstacles in the way of teachers attempting to become more democratic (e.g., withholding financial or material support) or simply refusing to engage in certain practices (e.g., sharing decisions). Passive forms of Superintendent/Principal support consist of neither blocking the efforts of teachers engaged in school renewal work, nor proactively supporting or becoming personally involved in such efforts. Active Superintendent/Principal support includes regularly publicly and privately communicating support for democratic efforts, personally participating in such efforts, and providing time for discussing the school's movement toward professional learning communities.

Practice 8: Connection to Home and Community

In order to be a professional learning community, a school must connect itself with families and communities in various ways. On one level it should involve families and communities in the work of the school, which is educating students for democratic citizenship. On a second level the school should involve itself in the work of the family and community.

Practice 9: Concern for Equity

Schools are concerned with issues of equity and justice not only within the school, but also in the local and global communities. Some equity issues that a school might examine include:

- Why is there a disparity between races in achievement in our school?

- How can we provide less affluent students with equitable access to technology?

- Do our instructional practices legitimate the background and culture of some students at the expense of others?

- How do we group students and how does this impact each different group of students?

- How do our discipline policies and practices affect students from nondominate cultural groups?

- Do ourinteractions and language subtly and subconsciously promote socially constructed gender roles and expectations to students?

- Do our shared decision making procedures ensure that the voices of all teachers, parents, and students get heard?

Practice 10: Access to External Expertise

In democratic schools teachers and others are regularly exposed to ideas and knowledge from sources external to the school. These schools are constantly participating in individual or collective staff development efforts. Ideas and knowledge brought in from external sources are not simply "adopted" and put into practice, but rather are discussed, debated, and subjected to inquiry and discourse.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

Methodology

While there are some prescriptive guides on how to create an organizational

vision (Bernhardt, 2001; Senge, 1990; Quigley, 1993), a school leader must personalize

his/her approach to its development. Manasse (1985) states, "This personalized approach

to leadership may, in fact, run counter to some of the programmatic efforts to create

'effective schools' based on a set list of characteristics..." (p. 152). Leaders must assist

their school communities in recognizing their vision reflects local needs and values.

Chance (1992) concisely summarizes this reality when he states:

> Every school is different and any attempt at imposing one single vision on
>
> all schools is doomed to failure. All schools are not, and cannot ever be,
>
> identical. An attempt to create sameness in education is part of the
>
> problem, not part of the solution (pp. 38-39).

In light of the personalized nature of vision, this study does not seek to create a

standardized template for the creation and development of a shared school vision.

Instead, it employs a methodology that describes the experiences of leaders engaged in

the development of shared vision from their perspectives and in light of the unique

contexts they are operating, so as to capture the essence of the experience.

Design of the Study

This study was a naturalistic qualitative study using phenomenological

methodology. Naturalistic studies in education seek to find perspectives about the truth of

educational experiences and interactions therein (Tesch, 1990). Phenomenology uses data

from the first-hand experiences of the participants to describe how and what they know about the particular experience and its essence and is a deeply reflective practice through which one inquires into human meaning (van Manen, 1990). Max van Manen describes the essence of a phenomenon as "a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of a lived experience" (1990, p. 77).

Husserl identified various components within the context of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). *Intentionality* refers to the consciousness one has about the experience. *Noema* and *noesis* together produce *intentionality*. The *noema* is not the experience itself, but the essence of the experience with its uniqueness. *Noesis* is the perception of the experience. *Intuition* is the process through which one questions, affirms, or senses an experience and is essential to understanding the experience.

Phenomenological research consists of a triangle of core processes (Moustakas, 1994). One process, the *epoche*, refers to the suspending of commonplace evaluations and understandings so that the researcher can take a fresh, open perspective of the experience and its essence. Epoche requires the researcher to *bracket,* or suspend, his biases from compromising his objectivity. A second core process is that of transcendental-phenomenological *reduction*. This refers to the process of carefully considering each part of the experience in a new way. A third process is *imaginative variation* by which each part of an experience and its essences is teased apart and considered as both a piece and a part of the whole. These three processes bring a rich texture of synthesis and analysis about the experience and its essences.

Population Sample and Description of Data Sources

School principals from which data were collected for this study were selected in a purposive manner. Creswell (1998) suggests that phenomenological data be collected utilizing long interview protocol from a criterion sample of up to 10 individuals who have experienced a phenomenon. In this study, the objective was to select elementary school principals who had all participated in a statewide school leadership grant initiative in Oklahoma (Phase I) and whose participation qualified them to apply for a competitive grant (Phase II) requiring the development of an action plan to implement three practices associated with high-achieving schools using technology as a tool in the implementation. A requirement of the competitive grant was to have one of the three practices the school addressed be the practice of shared vision. Participants in this study were all elementary principals whose schools were subsequently awarded the Phase II competitive grants. Twelve elementary schools, of three hundred eligible schools, were awarded the Phase II grants. Awarded grants were selected through a grant review process involving four readers representing relevant, but varied, areas of expertise. Through structured discourse about key grant component indicators (Appendix E), the four readers of each grant collaboratively arrived at a team rating for each grant on a scale of one to five, one being lower quality and five being higher quality. This study chose to focus on the exemplary elementary school principals and their school grants. To ascribe exemplary status to the selected participants, the twelve elementary school recipients' grant ratings were examined and the top seven elementary school grants (Table 3), based on the grant review team ratings, were selected for inclusion in this study. (Note: Originally,

the top eight elementary school grants were selected for inclusion in this study. A discussion about what the grant project directors and field coordinators knew about the grant schools and their work on vision led to the elimination of one school whose action plan narrative was not representative of what they were finding in the field. For the purposes of this study, that school was eliminated because it no longer fit the criteria of being an exemplary school).

Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

Following phenomenological procedures that have evolved based on the phenomenological processes of Husserl (Creswell, 1998; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; Moustakas, 1994), interviews were conducted to describe the first-hand experiences of the seven exemplary elementary school principals involved in leading the development of a shared vision in their schools. The epoche, reduction and imaginative variation processes were employed after the principal interviews analyses to describe each principal's reflections of how and what each knew about the particular lived experience of leading the development of a shared vision in a school, as well as essences of that experience. The same information was covered in each participant's interview, with allowance for probing to extract deeper meanings of that information (Appendix F). Transcribed interviews, bracketing the researcher's experiences, were used to focus objectively on the lived experience of each principal developing a shared school vision as they expressed it.

Interview transcriptions from each principal were analyzed and statements or meaning units determined, also called horizonalization (Creswell, 1998). The meaning units were then examined and put into clusters of meanings or themes. Themes seen in all

seven principals' shared experiences as found in all seven interview transcriptions and seen in action plan documents were then tied together by texturally (what was experienced?) and structurally (how was it experienced?) describing their experiences in developing shared school visions.

Trustworthiness

To ensure that the participants' interpretations and perceptions were collected without influence of the researcher, member checks were utilized (Maxwell, 1996, p. 89). Audio tapes were personally transcribed word-for-word by the researcher. Bracketing out preconceptions of the meaning of the data, the researcher then subjected the interview transcriptions to horizonalization, whereby every significant statement relevant to the topic of vision was identified and given equal value (Moustakas, 1994). From these statements, clusters of meanings or themes were determined that transcended all seven interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Participants in the study were then asked to verify the accuracy of the written interview transcriptions. Additionally, they were asked whether they concurred with the identified themes and the way their experiences were expressed in the findings chapter of this study. All participants confirmed the accuracy of the interviews, themes and represented findings.

Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher is forthright in acknowledging their connection to the topic of a study, exposing readers to potential biases, values and interests (Creswell, 2003). The researcher of this study is the co-director of the Phase I Oklahoma school leadership grant initiative mentioned earlier in this chapter. As such, along with his director and another co-director, the leadership program was crafted to include research-

based information on practices associated with high student achievement. One of those practices was that of establishing vision. The researcher is also a principal investigator on the Phase II competitive grant program, and was involved in endorsing the requirement that all grant-writing principals explain in written narrative the supporting evidence, obstacles and actions they viewed as pertinent in relation to the establishment of a shared vision. The participants in this study were principals who participated in the Phase I program and went on to be awarded Phase II grants based on the judgment of grant reviewers trained in the application of research-based criteria of the Phase I and II programs. These reviewers subsequently deemed them exemplary for effecting school improvements based on that criteria. The researcher was involved in the development and promotion of the criteria during his direct and indirect work with program participants. In essence, the participants were exposed to the same research information about developing a shared vision through their involvement in the programs mentioned, and the researcher was involved in collaboratively assembling that information with the assistance of colleagues within the grant programs, as well as consultants outside of the program. Creswell (2003) expounds on such researcher realities when he states:

> ...the researcher filters the data through a personal lens that is situated in a
>
> specific sociopolitical and historical moment. One cannot escape the
>
> personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis (p. 182)

The study required that the essence of the participating principals' experiences with developing shared vision be richly described, texturally and structurally, bracketing any potentially preconceived notions that might arise from the personal lens of the phenomenological researcher's personal biography.

APPENDIX C

K20 Center for Educational & Community Renewal
1627 Cross Center Dr. – Kelly House
Norman, Oklahoma 73072
405.325.1267

OETT Grants-to-Schools

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW GUIDE
PRACTICE 1: SHARED VISION/VALUES/PURPOSE

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed about Practice 1 of your OETT Grants-to-Schools grant. The information will be valuable as we research how vision impacts student achievement in a school setting.

The following questions will be presented to you orally and your oral responses audio taped. Follow-up questions may be asked for clarification of responses to these questions.

1. Articulate your school's vision, as developed for Practice 1 of your OETT grant.

2. Who was involved in the development of your school vision?

3. What structures/processes were used to arrive at your vision?

4. What information did you use to inform your vision?

5. In looking at your process for developing a school vision, what did you feel were strengths in your process that others should consider in developing their school visions?

6. In retrospect, was there anything you would have done differently in developing the vision?

7. How do you facilitate the articulation and communication of the vision within your learning community (e.g., where, how often and to whom do you share your school's vision)?

8. Describe how you monitor the success of your vision?

9. What is the relationship of your school policies and programs to your school vision?

10. Is there any other information related to Practice 1 you would like to share

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D: Key Grant Component Indicators

OETT/OK-ACTS Partnership
Phase II Grant Review Criteria

The following grant areas will be reviewed on a scale from 1 to 7.

A. Structures: Facilitating communication, input, and information flow

B. Technology: Implementing for integration of authentic teaching and learning

C. Assessment: Guiding decisions and providing feedback for improvement

D. Research: Reviewing for guidance and data in decision-making

E. Stakeholders: Inclusion for differing perspectives and ideas

F. Staff Development: On-going learning processes

G. Leadership and Service: Guiding and serving a common good

H. Grant Narrative: Rationale of the grant proposal

I. Technology Adequacy and Appropriateness: Technology has a purpose and is tied to grant goals.

J. Grant Budget Proposal: Budget reflects grant goals and details are adequate.

K. Systemic Support: Broad based stakeholder support is indicated.

APPENDIX E

Individual Informed Consent Form for Research
University of Oklahoma, Norman

This survey is part of research being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus. This document is intended to provide information so survey and interview respondents can acknowledge informed consent for participation in a research project.

Title: OETT and OK-ACTS: Partnering for Professional Learning Communities (PLC)
Principal Investigator: Mary John O'Hair, Ed.D., K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal
Co-Principal investigators: Mark Nanny, Ph.D., Civil Engineering and Environmental Sciences
Randy Averso, M.Ed., K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal
Jean Cate, M.Ed., K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal

This research is designed to understand perceptions and change processes that are involved within a school community following their one to three-year engagement in 10 practices designed to increase student learning and foster democratic citizenship. Participants agree to complete the Rubric for High Achieving Schools. The Rubric consists of the 10 practices linked directly to improved student achievement and involves the participant to give examples of each practice, describe obstacles to each practice, and develop an action plan to overcome obstacles. Practices focus on the following: core learning principles; authentic teaching and learning; shared leadership and decision-making; teacher collaboration and learning; inquiry and discourse; supportive administrative leadership; caring and collective responsibility for students; connection to home and community; concern for equity; and access to external expertise. Time required to complete the Rubric will vary by school. Most schools connect the Rubric to school and district goals and devote professional development days (approximately 4-8 days per year) to identifying, analyzing, and implementing the Rubric's 10 practices. In addition to completion of the Rubric, selected participants from OK-ACTS Phase II schools and districts agree to a follow-up interview (approximately 1-2 hour) based on practices described in the Rubric. Participants will be asked to describe the process involved in developing the practice, the obstacles encountered, and how they plan to or have overcome obstacles.

Please read the statements below:
1. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty.
2. I understand I am entitled to no benefits for participation.
3. I may terminate my participation at any time prior to the completion of this study without penalty.
4. Any information I may give during my participation will be used for research purposes only.
   Responses will not be shared with persons who are not directly involved with this study.
5. All information I give will be kept confidential.
6. I understand that there are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study.

The investigators, Drs. Mary John O'Hair, Mark Nanny, Randy Averso, and Jean Cate or other key personnel are available to answer any questions regarding this research study and may be reached by phone at (405) 325-1267, by internet at www.k20center.org, or by contacting the Center for Educational and Community Renewal, 640 Parrington Oval, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, 73019.
For inquires about rights as a research participant, contact the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405/325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

I have read and understand the terms and conditions of this study and I hereby agree to participate in the above-described research study. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.
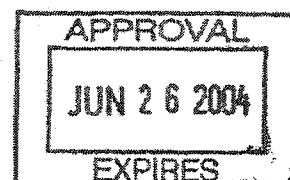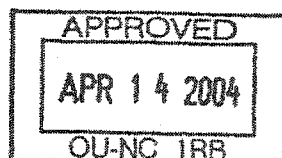*If selected to be interviewed, I consent to being audio taped. (Please check: yes ___ no ___)*

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Printed Name of Participant   Researcher Signature

APPROVED
APR 1 4 2004
OU-NC IRB

APPROVAL
JUN 2 6 2004
EXPIRES

APPENDIX F

APPENDIX F: Tables

Table 1. Educational Reform Strategies (Barber, 2002)

Barber's Matrix	1970s Knowledge Poor - Professional judgment	1980s Knowledge poor – National prescription	1990s Knowledge rich – National prescription	2000s Knowledge rich – Professional judgment
Characteristics of Reform Strategies	Prior to accountability	Concerns with performance & accountability (e.g., *A Nation at Risk)*	Deliberate process to base policies and practices on best research and knowledge.	Call into play the creative energies and ownership of the teaching force and its leaders.
	External ideas did not easily reach schools	State-driven prescription of standards and goals	Continual refinement of prescriptions through further research and inquiry	Remain cognizant of research and inquiry in creativity & autonomy.
	Ideas that did reach schools were not evident across classrooms	Absence of capacity-building strategies & resources on how to reach standards & goals		
	Little quality control of innovations			

Table 2: ELCC Standard One

The New Educational Leadership Constituent Council (Wilmore, 2002)STANDARD ONE: Creating the Vision of a Collaborative Learning Community SCHOOL BUILDING LEVEL	
Key Principal Behavior	Representative Practices
I. Development of School Vision	• Develop a vision of learning for a school that promotes the success of all students. • Base this vision on relevant knowledge and theories, including but not limited to an understanding of learning goals in a pluralistic society, the diversity of learners and learners' needs, schools as interactive social and cultural systems, and social and organizational change.
II. Articulation of School Vision	• Demonstrate the ability to articulate the components of this vision for a school and the leadership processes necessary to implement and support the vision. • Demonstrate the ability to use data-based research strategies and strategic planning processes that focus on student learning to inform the development of vision, drawing on relevant information sources such as student assessment results, student and family demographic data, and an analysis of community needs. • Demonstrate the ability to communicate the vision to staff, parents, students, and community members through the use of symbols, ceremonies, stories, and other activities.

III. Implementation of School Vision	• Formulate the initiatives necessary to motivate staff, students, and families to achieve the school's vision • Develop plans and processes for implementing the vision (e.g., articulating the vision and related goals, encouraging challenging standards, facilitating collegiality and teamwork, structuring significant work, ensuring appropriate use of student assessments, providing autonomy, supporting innovation, delegating responsibility, developing leadership in others, and securing needed resources).
IV. Stewardship of School Vision	• Demonstrate an understanding of the role effective communication skills play in building a shared commitment to the vision. • Design or adopt a system for using data-based research strategies to regularly monitor, evaluate and revise the vision. • Assume stewardship of the vision through various methods.
V. Community Involvement in the Vision	• Demonstrate the ability to involve community members in the realization of the vision and in related school improvement efforts. • Acquire and demonstrate the skills needed to communicate effectively with all stakeholders about implementation of the vision.

Table 3. Culture Shifts: Traditional Schools and Professional Learning Communities

(Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour, 2002)

Cultural Shift Element	TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES
Collaboration	Teacher isolation	Collaborative teams
Mission	Statements are generic Statements are brief, such as "We believe all children can learn."	Statements clarify what students will learn Statements address the question, "How will we know what students are learning?" Statements clarify how the school will respond when students do not learn.
Vision	Statements are average opinions. Statements deteriorate into wish lists. Statements are often ignored. Statements are often dictated or developed by few.	Statements are research-based Statements are credible and focus on results. Statements are used as a blueprint for improving. Statements are widely shared through broad collaboration.

Focus on Learning	Primarily focus on teaching	Primarily focus on learning
• Curriculum	Each teacher independently decides what to teach. Curriculum overload is common.	Collaboratively agreed upon curriculum focuses on what students are expected to learn Reduced content means meaningful content is taught at greater depth. Assessment is developed through collaboration. A plan for responding to students who are not learning is developed through collaboration.
• Collective Inquiry	Decision about improvement strategies are made by "averaging opinions."	Decisions are research-based with collaborative teams of teachers seeking out "best practices."
• Research & Results	Effectiveness of improvement strategies is externally validated. Teachers rely on others outside the school to identify what works. Emphasis is placed on how teachers like various approaches.	Approaches are internally validated. Teams of teachers try various approaches and collaborate on how the approaches affect student learning. The effect on student learning is the primary basis for assessing various improvement strategies.
Leadership	Administrators are viewed as being in leadership positions while teachers are viewed as "implementors" or followers.	Administrators are viewed as leaders of leaders. Teachers are viewed as transformational leaders.

Focused school improvement plans	School improvement plans focus on a wide variety of things.	School improvement plans focus on a few important goals that will affect student learning.
	The goal is often to "get the plan turned in." Then the plan is ignored.	The school improvement plan is the vehicle for organized, sustained school improvement.
Celebration	Celebration is infrequent. When teachers are recognized, the celebration almost always focuses on groups.	School improvement plans focus on a few important goals that will affect student learning
	Celebration and recognition occur when students reach an arbitrary standard.	In addition to celebration and recognition when a standard is met, celebrations recognize improvement.
	Recognition is limited to a few individuals.	The school works hard to "create" winners and celebrate their successes.
		Celebrations are linked to the vision and values of the school and improved student achievement.
Persistence	Improvement efforts frequently shift as new fads or trends come along.	The school is committed to "staying the course" in the attainment of the school vision. New initiatives are only implemented if it is determined that the change will help the school achieve its vision of the future.
		The leader's role is to promote, protect and defend the school's vision and values and to confront behavior that is incongruent with the school's vision and values.

Values & Goals	Both are random.	Both are linked to vision.
	Statements of both are excessive in number.	Statements of both are few in number.
	Values are articulated as beliefs. Goals focus on means rather than ends.	Statements are used as blueprint for improving.
	Values are articulated as behaviors and commitments.	Goals focus on desired outcome and are translated into measurable performance standards.
		Goals are monitored continuously
	Goals are impossible to assess or measure and are not monitored	Value statements focus on self.

Table 4. Exemplary Elementary Grant Schools Demographics*

School	Campus type	Number of students	Number of teachers	Minority ethnicity percentage	Free and reduced lunch percentages	Grades served
Apple	suburban	398	26	24%	46%	1-5
Birch	rural	500	32	10%	28.6%	K-5
Goldenrain	rural	429	29	26%	52%	1-5
Hemlock	suburban	443	28	36%	19%	1-5
Persimmon	suburban	632	40	18%	14%	K-5
Redbud	suburban	485	37	31%	58%	pK-5
Tuliptree	suburban	704	37	21%	13%	pK-5

(Statistics taken from October 2002 Oklahoma State Department of Education Accreditation Reports.)

*Exemplary Elementary Grant Schools are the top seven elementary schools receiving a 2003 Oklahoma Educational Technology Trust "Grants-to-Schools" grant, based on grant review team ratings.