UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF PRINCIPALS' USE OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP CONVERSATION

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

By

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Norman, Oklahoma
2024

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A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF PRINCIPALS' USE OF
TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP CONVERSATION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful for the contributions of my dissertation committee for their guidance, encouragement, mentorship, and support through this process. My professors at the University of Oklahoma have been engaging and inspirational. They have fostered my curiosity and helped channel my exuberance and passion into this study. I thank my chair, Dr. Curt Adams, for the numerous conversations about this topic and many others and for the assistance of Dr. Timothy Ford, Dr. Beverly Edwards, and Dr. Jennifer Kisamore. Your time, insights, and expertise have helped bring me to this moment.

Thank you to three incredible educational leaders I met in this program – Heather Ellis, Kyle Genzer, and Sharla Harris. The students and communities you serve are blessed by your compassion and concern for students. You also made time in class edifying and enjoyable for all the right reasons. This study analyzed the power of questions among other things. A simple question can truly be transformational, even one that simply asks, "Hey, you want to come to lunch with us?" Even grownups need lunch buddies.

There are so many educators who have molded and shaped me from elementary through college and into my calling as a teacher and administrator. I dedicate this to you as your conversations have enriched and challenged me. Of particular note are

Stephanie Brimacomb, Tonya Morgan, Sydnie Ritze, Randy Williams, and Karen Workun. You look at realities and strive for aspirations. You ask the essential questions of "why not?" and "what if?" You have forced me to rethink assumptions about what teaching and learning can be and what I can be as a part of it. And of course, there have been role models and mentors as administrators. Mark Cyrus, Dr. Lisa Muller, and Dr. Judi Thorn – thank you seems insufficient. You have shown me what it means to not only have an open-door policy, but a truly open mind, open ear, and open heart. You weren't afraid to confront my insufficiencies and fears. You held the bar high, but you helped me get over it as a classroom teacher and then as an administrator just trying to make it through the week. Your compassion and professionalism seem unmatched. Your courage to confront issues by caring enough to engage is admirable. Your friendship is truly a blessing that can never be repaid.

This work is also inspired by thousands of students I've had now in my career. Of particular note are my AVID students who motivate and encourage me. When I was ready to give up, I remembered they commit to do hard things so I should as well. I've recited Langston Hughes' poem "Hold fast to dreams" to them many times, and they told me to keep chasing this dream. I couldn't let you down.

And to my family, you are my all. You've supported the life and love of an educator. Carter, Grant, and Kennedy, I always wanted to be the kind of teacher and later principal that you and all students deserve. I fell short on many occasions of how to also be the father you deserved. Thank you for loving me anyway. My mother, Eileen Fox, and my grandparents, Chester and Hazel Matthews, have been some of the finest examples of selfless servants and true teachers in every sense of those words. I work and

live with those models constantly prodding me. Thank you for always wanting and encouraging the best in me. Jamey, you are my love. You possibly thought this would never come to fruition but thank you for continuing to hope and let me serve students, staff members, and families. You are the best life partner I could have ever imagined.

Lastly, I must admit with all transparency that of all the challenges faced during this process including job changes, life happening, and a global pandemic, there was one constant voice I heard over and over. Dr. Keith Ballard was a true champion of relational leadership and challenging conversations. I have heard his voice, perhaps not even in a whisper, saying, “Fox, why haven’t you finished yet? Get it done!” I am grateful for his leadership, legacy, and inspiration. Talk may be cheap and some claim we have to walk the walk if we talk the talk. I’ve found we truly walk the walk by talking the talk. Dr. Ballard both walked and talked, and our education systems, state, and communities are better because of it.

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ABSTRACT

Leadership at the level of a school site matters with the school principal serving as a central source of influence (Dodson, 2015; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Leithwood et al. (2004) found principal leadership just behind teaching in terms of the impact on student learning among school-related factors. School principals are tasked with being or becoming leaders of learning who can develop a team who delivers the multifaceted aspects of effective instruction with transformational effects (Kim, 2020). Transformative Leadership Conversation (TLC) was constructed for the purpose of leading transformation in schools yet is atypical of most discourse leveraged by school leaders (Adams et al., 2023a). This study defines TLC and describes its elements. The case for principals' use of TLC is made by describing the relational and contextual nature of principal leadership and the power of conversation to influence the minds and actions of people. This study describes the extent to which teachers report principals using the structural elements of TLC including reflective questions, deep listening, and affirming language. Teachers did not report routine use of TLC. The study also demonstrates school leaders need training to use elements of TLC, missing elements of TLC are vital to sensemaking and learning dialogue, and context of school leadership conversations matter, particularly in regards to the types of schools and the school accountability grade where principals and teachers perform their work.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As far back as 1970, a United States Select Senate Committee on Educational Opportunity identified the importance of the principal for an effective school. In their report, they asserted that the principal was the most important and influential individual in any school. Their claim stemmed from the responsibility principals have for all activities occurring in and around the school (U. S. Congress, 1970). Senators asserted principals set the tone for the overall performance of the school, the climate of instruction, the level of professionalism of the staff, and their overall morale (U. S. Congress, 1970). More than three decades later, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) arrived at a similar conclusion. They argued that school principals are the heart of effective schools. The importance of a principal for high quality teaching and learning remains a central tenet to this day (Marzano et al., 2005; Quinn, 2002). In fact, the heartbeat of a quality school is sustained by a principal who leverages effective behaviors and practices to help teachers and students reach their potential (Donohoo & Katz, 2020; Hattie, 2023; NASSP, 2011; Stronge et al., 2008).

Marzano et al. (2005) linked several aspects of effective schools to principal leadership. Effective principals establish a clear mission and goals (Bamburg & Andrews, 1991; Duke, 1982). School leaders also influence the climate of the school and enhance learning in classrooms (Brookover et al., 1978; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Griffith, 2000; Villani, 1996). Similarly, school leaders stimulate positive attitudes of teachers

(Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Oakes, 1989; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rutter, et al., 1979). Principals have strong direct effects on teacher behaviors (Brookover et al., 1978; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; McDill et al., 1969; Miller & Sayre, 1986). Principals have direct effects on teachers' organizational commitment (Selamat et al., 2013). School leaders also affect the organization of curriculum and instruction at both the school and classroom level (Bossert, et al., 1982; Cohen & Miller, 1980; Eberts & Stone, 1988; Glasman & Binianimov, 1981; Oakes, 1989). Through these and other activities, principals influence their students' opportunities to learn (Duke & Canady, 1991; Dwyer, 1986; Murphy & Hallinger, 1989).

Quinn (2002) found strong instructional leadership by the principal was crucial for creating a school that values excellence. He further noted principal leadership can achieve an exceptional education for all students as opposed to pockets or silos of quality. School leaders certainly shape the realities of their staff and students, but the work to do so is not simple or easy (Bauer & Silver, 2016; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Goldring et al., 2012). Due to the outcomes and complexities of school leadership, Eacott (2015, p. 2) noted a need to explore educational leadership and administration more thoroughly as the domain of educational administration "…faces increasing questions of its relevance and status within education, and as education itself faces increasing challenges from both within, and beyond."

School leadership is demanding and complex (Keller & Slayton, 2016). The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) noted, even before the COVID-19 Pandemic (hereafter referred to as the Pandemic), the world in which schools operate is vastly different than in the recent past, and school leaders should only presume additional

change is on the horizon. Current realities such as learning losses, heightened political rhetoric, school closures, and external threats are increasing pressures and demands on principals (Patrinos, 2022). The Pandemic added stressors for all parties engaged in education, but overall, school leaders are more likely to experience occupational stress than are teachers (Darmody & Smyth, 2011; Sebastian et al., 2023; Upadaya et al., 2021). Arastaman and Cetinkaya (2022) noted challenges of long work hours and increased students' needs are not novel sources of stress for school leaders, but they have changed as a result of the Pandemic and impacted the lives of administrators on both professional and personal levels. Stressors on school leaders have affected their mental health and well-being (Arastaman & Cetinkaya, 2022; Harris & Jones, 2020). While these stressors are documented, Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2020) found low turnover among school staff, including school leadership, promoted higher student achievement and promoted relational conditions conducive to a caring school environment. While principal turnover led to greater teacher turnover, schools that experienced longer principal tenures had lower teacher turnover, greater collaboration, more professional learning among staff, wider engagement in decision making, and lower dissatisfaction and burnout (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Pressures on school leaders can be significant and varied due to the complexities of their leadership requirements (Keller & Slayton, 2016). Researchers have also noted that as newer expectations and greater responsibilities for school leaders arise, particularly in the areas of instructional leadership, isolation affects the quality of a principal's work life and intention to stay on the job (Bauer & Silver, 2017). The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) noted a high turnover rate in school leaders and

pointed to complexities in responsibilities and persistent pressures that undermine improvements in student outcomes. Not surprisingly, Ford et al. (2024a) found school leaders reported less job satisfaction and higher stress levels than in years past which partially counts for annual turnover rates among principals of 25%. Principal turnover rose with each subsequent year reaching 50% by year five and 60%-80% by year six (Ford et al, 2024a).

Ford and colleagues (2024a) argued that principals are expected to protect teaching and learning from uncertain and demanding external constraints. The National Association of Secondary School Principals described general pressures on school leaders such as the global economy with subsequent job transformation, rapidly advancing technologies, and changes in student behaviors and needs (NASSP, 2018). Klock and Wells (2015) documented workload pressures of school leaders, and found principals not only reported high levels of external stressors but also reported that they are increasing. Examples of external pressures included changing expectations for evaluation and supervision of instruction, legislative mandates, and calls for innovation (Klock & Wells, 2015; Wells, 2013; West et al., 2014).

School leaders also respond to pressures as articulated by students. In the State of the American Youth Survey (Gallup, 2023), middle and high school students reported their individual schools were more welcoming and more physically safe spaces but assigned grades of C+ for exciting learning opportunities and B- overall. Patrinos (2023) quantified learning loss associated with duration of school closures from the Pandemic that for every week a school was closed, learning levels declined by almost 1% of a standard deviation. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) further

demonstrated that math understanding of the nation's 13-year-olds regressed to levels from the 1990's while struggling readers scored lower than their counterparts in 1971 (NAEP, 2023). Reeves and Eaker (2023) speculated learning gaps from the Pandemic such as those described by Patrinos (2023) may lead to an explosion of future high school dropouts if leaders fail to take decisive steps to remediate widespread struggles among students.

Politicians, community and business leaders, and parents have decried declining academic outcomes while school leaders face growing levels of teacher dissatisfaction and teacher shortages (Schmitt & DeCourcy, 2022). Merrimack College (2023) reported there is a growing perception that the general public does not understand or appreciate the work of teachers. In fact, less than half of teachers who responded felt they were respected and viewed as professionals, which was a dramatic decrease compared to the rate of 77% from a decade earlier (Merrimack College, 2023). Simultaneously, educators find themselves facing pressures from market competition, politicians, and government entities demanding more accountability and rising expectations for student outcomes (Merrimack College, 2023; Olsen, 2017). One such example of these pressures can be found in school safety and discipline. Currently, school and district leaders are challenged with demands to maintain safe and orderly school environments while also facing increased scrutiny and lawsuits over racial and ethnic disparities in discipline rates (Owens, 2022). A variety of pressures from stakeholders have been articulated, yet principals are called upon to lead in these contexts and not merely manage schools.

Johnson and Luthans (1990) attempted to clarify the distinction between management and leadership and found although managers can exercise influence over employees,

management is not leadership. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (2018) stated highly effective school leadership encompasses efforts aimed at supporting adults and students to function at peak levels. Such efforts often require changes to school structures and conditions that define how students and teachers engage in teaching and learning (Grissom et al., 2013; Keller & Slayton, 2016; Wallace Foundation 2013). The outdated management approach described the principal as merely the "overseer of buses, boilers and books" (Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 6).

Change is difficult, particularly in the school setting (Donohoo & Katz, 2020). Eacott (2015) called the school "one of the most canonical institutions in modernity" (p. 34). In his meta-analyses of teacher effects, Hattie (2009) argued that teaching and learning have been stable over the past century with little meaningful change. This stability in teaching and learning practices has persisted amidst a context where many new school leadership concepts have been advanced (Donohoo & Katz, 2020). When describing various leadership models, Hattie stated that "…any new model can be formed by simply inventing an adjective to preface the word *leadership*" (as quoted in DeWitt, 2017, p. 12). Ruairc et al. (2013) warned the complexity and the proliferation of models and perspectives on school leadership may result in the inability of the concept to frame the work in schools.

At the heart of these different leadership models and approaches lies the question, Which works best? Of course, like in many instances, best is dependent upon what measures or definitions are used. Best for what? Most efficient? Most likely to succeed? Most cost effective? Most likely to benefit the largest number of followers? Most likely to bring status to the leader? All of these may be worthy goals or outcomes given certain

requirements of the context. When it comes to transformation, current leadership concepts miss the mark largely because the concept of transformation is unique (Adams et al., 2023b).

A successful leader not only has to navigate specific factors but also apply the appropriate leadership behaviors and practices at the appropriate time with authenticity (Crippen, 2012). Hayes and Comer (2010) stipulated this authenticity was a true paradox as it was not a quality a leader could possess innately but rather a quality attributed by others. They stated, "The paradox is that you need to be who you really are (authentic) while also adapting your behaviours to the situation and/or follower audience" (Hayes & Comer, 2010, p. 20). This takes place while simultaneously allowing for autonomy and empowerment of those being led, thus, the complexity of the work for the school leader (Calvert, 2014; Morrison, 2002; Sergiovanni, 2001). Day et al. (2016) concluded that a school's ability to improve and sustain effectiveness across the long term are not primarily the result of a general leadership style manifested by the principal but rather decisions and actions responsive to the unique dynamics of different situations. Transforming social conditions in schools presents various unique and dynamic challenges for school principals that common leadership concepts are not designed to address (Adams et al., 2023b).

Transformation of social structures is not simply changing external conditions but requires a shift in human awareness that completely alters how an organization and its individuals see the world (Anderson & Anderson, 2001; Poutiatine, 2009). Transformation is an ongoing process of re-structuring and re-orienting relationships with self, with others, and/or with the environment (Adams et al., 2023b; Avolio et al., 2004;

Palmer, 2014; Quinn et al., 2000). Transformative Leadership Conversation (Adams et al., 2023a) has been constructed with the complexity of leadership and transformation in mind. Transformative Leadership Conversation (TLC) is a transformative process which utilizes sensemaking and learning dialogue to move individuals and organizations towards a collaboratively constructed aspirational reality (Adams et al., 2023a). Conceptually, TLC aligns with the dynamic nature of transformation, yet evidence is lacking on how frequently school principals use the structural elements of TLC as they interact with teachers in the context of change.

Statement of the Problem

The problem leading to this study emerges from the need in school leadership research and practice to identify behaviors and practices that are conducive to specific pursuits and unique challenges. Robinson and colleagues (2008) argued that research and practice need to move away from generalized theories and towards an understanding of specific leadership behaviors suitable within certain contexts and situations. Similarly, Olsen (2017) stated that conceptualizations of school leadership have often been of limited value to practitioners due to the lack of a clear theoretical explanation of the activities school leaders use to exercise their influence, particularly with teachers. Keller and Slayton (2016) note gaps in examinations of school leadership due to varied internal and external constraints that add to the complexity of understanding and explaining a principals' likelihood of success to bring about change in their school. Transformation is different from change as a specific leadership pursuit and presents a unique challenge (Adams et al., 2023a). Transformation, whether occurring in a person, relationship, group, school, or school system, is a quest that has eluded many leadership concepts and

frameworks; thus, knowledge about how school leaders use conversation to transform social contexts is scarce (Adams et al., 2023a).

TLC was constructed to guide educational leaders in using sensemaking and learning dialogue to change unproductive social structures. Adams et al. (2023a) define TLC as a form of dialogue that leverages meaning-making to stimulate motivational energy within people to transform structures that inhibit aspirational realities. Initial evidence shows that use of TLC can activate autonomous motivation and energy in teachers (Adams et al., 2023a). What is not clear is how common the use of TLC is among school principals. Thus, this study's purpose was to describe the use of TLC by school principals as reported by teachers. Three general questions were advanced: To what extent do teachers report that their school principal uses elements of TLC? Are there differences in the use of TLC based on teacher characteristics? Are there differences in the use of TLC based on school characteristics?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to use survey research to address the research questions. With limited evidence on the use of TLC structures, the intent was to describe the extent to which teachers report principals using reflective questions, deep listening, and affirming language in their interactions. Additionally, the study examined the extent to which use of the structural elements of TLC varied by teacher and school characteristics.

The study relied upon data from a random sample of 2,500 teachers in a southwestern state in the U. S. All certified teachers in the state were included in the data file and randomly sampled. Sampled teachers received an electronic survey emailed

directly to their email address; usable responses were obtained from 1,615 teachers. For the first research question, an item-level analysis of the TLC survey was conducted. The item-level analysis reported means and standard deviation for each item. Additionally, a cut score of 4 was used to calculate the percent of teachers who reported their principal's frequent use of TLC. The second research question was analyzed by comparing means difference in TLC by teacher and school characteristics. Analysis of variance was used to estimate if group differences were statistically significant.

Definition of Concepts

Key concepts include:

Transformative Leadership Conversation (TLC) – Sensemaking and learning dialogue used to fundamentally re-structure how people see reality and how they relate to self, others, and the environment.

Transformation – an ongoing process of re-structuring and re-orienting relationships with self, with others, and/or with the environment.

Dialogue – a meaning making process whereby thoughts inherent in actions are explored both individually and in community with others.

Sensemaking and learning dialogue – a reflective process of inquiry that brings meaning and action together in individuals and in groups.

Sensemaking dialogue – dialogue which directs participants towards uncovering mental representations and how they view their own realities.

Learning dialogue – the use of conversation to make sense of changes in action by integrating people, mental representations, and system functioning in order to activate collective learning.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five additional chapters. Chapter two is a review of the current literature that exists on transformative leadership conversation and the work of school leaders. It is organized around a definition of TLC and description of its parts including sensemaking and learning dialogue. It ends with an exploration of the current models and context of school leadership as well as the case for principal use of TLC. Chapter three describes the conceptual framework of TLC as evidenced by its structural components, namely framing, reflective questioning, deep listening, and affirming language. The section also illustrates TLC is not a structure that exerts external forces to implement change through command, control, or coercion but occurs in and through the unique context of transformation and reaching co-created aspirational realities. Chapter four presents the study's intended research methods. It includes a description of the study design, measures, sample, data collection and analysis, and limitations. This chapter also contains the rationale for the research methods as they relate to the three research questions. Chapter five reports on the results of the study as arranged by research question. Lastly, chapter six presents the concluding analysis and discusses the findings relating to the research questions. Three knowledge claims are put forth as well as implications for future research and practitioners in the field of school leadership and school leadership development.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) captured the profound importance of principals by arguing that an "excellent" school has an exceptional principal while a "failing" school usually results with and from weak leadership. School leadership literature demonstrates that school principals have both direct and indirect influence over all aspects and processes within their school (Leithwood et al., 2004; Perilla, 2014). What also seems clear in the literature is that contextual factors play a role in the work of leaders (Huggins et al., 2016; Northouse, 2004; Stogdill, 1974). Donohoo and Katz (2020) found simply providing information about improvement efforts does not lead to better outcomes on its own. In fact, introducing evidence-based approaches does not guarantee either successful implementation or meaningful improvement (Donohoo & Katz, 2020). Augustine et al., (2009) argued contexts and tasks required greater consideration when studying principal leadership.

The dilemma of school improvement exists alongside the vast needs, responsibilities, and tasks of school leaders (Marzano et al., 2005). Many school leaders respond and react to challenges that arise on a routine basis with a communication approach that seeks to align actions with expectations for the particular role-group (Anderson & Mungal, 2016). An externally controlling use of conversation is indeed necessary for certain situations and tasks, yet it does not nurture the social and psychological conditions from which

transformation occurs (Adams et al., 2023b). TLC was constructed for the purpose of leading transformation and is atypical of most discourse leveraged by school leaders (Adams et al., 2023b). The concept emerged from the need to provide school leaders with direction in using dialogue to fundamentally change social conditions in their schools. Being a new concept, the first intention of the literature review is to define TLC and describe its elements. Next the case for principals' use of TLC is made by describing the relational and contextual nature of principal leadership and the power of conversation to influence the minds and actions of people.

Transformative Leadership Conversation: A Definition and Description of Its Parts

Adams et al. (2023a) define TLC as "sensemaking and learning dialogue used to fundamentally re-structure how people see reality and how they relate to self, others, and the environment" (p.2). Sensemaking and learning dialogue require the intentional use of conversation to generate meaning making reflection and interactions within and among people. TLC relies on the specific elements – framing, reflective questioning, deep listening, and affirming language – to facilitate dialogue (Adams et al., 2023a). TLC derives from a particular meaning of transformation, dialogue, and sensemaking and learning dialogue. These features of the concept are described in greater detail next.

Transformation

Transformation is commonly used in the context of education but seldom defined. For example, Rose (2022) stated that at its best, education should be transformational; that is, it should transform students, educators, families, and even communities. Caldwell and Spinks (1998) presented a design in which schools would be transformed in all

dimensions including the scheduling of teaching and learning practices and resource management to move beyond devices of the industrial age into a knowledge society (Caldwell, 2000). Schlechty (2009) argued for a transformation in how schools are governed and operated. Mandinach and Jackson (2012) called for transforming teaching and learning with data-driven decisions. Day et al. (2020) described transformational leaders in education as those who build vision and set directions, understand and develop people, redesign the organization, and manage teaching and learning.

General uses of transformation outside of education can be equally vague. Pourdehnad and Bharathy (2004) noted transformation is generally conceived of as a qualitative or marked change of form or condition. Poutiatine (2009) examined graduate students in a course exploring transformational leadership who enumerated frustrations from a spiraling dynamic of explaining the ambiguity and confounding nature of transformation. With vague usages of transformation, it is not surprising that many efforts to transform conditions merely end up rearranging external structures. Zohar (1997) argued that transformation requires leaders who truly change the thinking *behind* their thinking; thus leaders are required to step outside current structures of the organization (Pellissier & de Sousa, 2013; Pourdehnad & Bharathy, 2004; Zohar, 1997). She provided a metaphor of renovation to illustrate true transformation and stated, “Most transformation programs satisfy themselves with shifting the same old furniture about in the same old room. Some seek to throw some of the furniture away. But real transformation requires that we redesign the room itself” (Zohar, 1990, p. 131).

Transformation, for TLC purposes, is defined as an ongoing process of re-structuring and re-orienting relationships with self, with others, and/or with the

environment (Adams et. al, 2023b; Avolio et al., 2004; Palmer, 2014; Quinn et al., 2000). Transformation is not simply change. Transformation encompasses newness, and TLC provides the opportunity for a new consciousness to be created (Adams et al, 2023b). McRaney (2022) wrote of a cognitive dissonance that draws attention to incongruences between new evidence and models with expectations or prior experiences. He further stated the brain prefers to assimilate new information into prior understandings unless it is sufficiently motivated to do otherwise (McRaney, 2022). TLC provides the opportunity and vehicle to push beyond those prior understandings or beliefs to arrive at a new comprehension.

Transformation works at the individual level as internal thought processes that were once engrained begin to shift so that reality can be viewed through new lenses (Adams et al., 2023b; Dweck, 2006; Gardner, 2006.). Theologian Richard Rohr described transformation as the "…simultaneous unraveling of a patterned way of being and a discerning re-orientation to meaning and reality" (Rohr 2020 as quoted by Adams et al., 2023b, p. 410).

School leaders often navigate outward pressures for change and internal desires for improvement as a dissatisfaction with the status quo. Ruairc and associates (2013) described the demand for "quick fixes" emanating from the general marketplace for educational institutions. They stated these fixes were often driven by external pressures including politicians and their priorities for reform based in a variety of agendas and reasonings (Ruairc et al., 2013). Muller (2014) noted decades of education reform have failed to eliminate persistent achievement gaps in American education. So called quick fixes may address technical changes or variations aimed at addressing contemporary

issues of school leadership but do not engage deeper seated thoughts, beliefs, or assumptions (Ruairc et al., 2013).

Adams et al. (2023a) assessed a need for educational leaders and systems to adapt to unprecedented challenges and unpredictable shifts in the external environment of schooling. This need calls for more than merely responding expeditiously to an immediate crisis. Rather, Adams and colleagues (2023a) stated the intentionality of TLC presents multiple benefits. TLC provides a conversational structure that functions alongside the unique context and dynamics of transformation. This occurs as educators work collaboratively and with focused intention to fundamentally re-shape the social structures within and around their schools (Adams et al, 2023a). This intentional collaboration can be facilitated through dialogue.

Dialogue

Dialogue is vital to leaders of organizations. Covey (1989) described its importance as an opportunity to make deposits into the emotional bank account of the parties engaged regardless of whether the dialogue was personal or professional. Dewitt (2017) suggested school leaders use dialogue to host collaborative conversations with various stakeholders including staff, students, and even parents to co-construct meaningful goals for the work within the school itself. This is significant as Fairhurst (2009) stated that language does not simply mirror reality but rather constitutes it. Dialogue is a meaning making process whereby thoughts inherent in actions are explored both individually and in community with others (Adams et al., 2023b; Bohm, 1986; Isaacs, 2001).

As dialogue sets the tone and structure of conversation, Adams et al. (2023b) found dialogue involves listening and reflecting as much as sharing or expressing thoughts through talk. Further they noted that although "talk" is routine in schools, actual dialogue is infrequent. Bohm (1986) distinguished dialogue from activities of conversation such as discussion, rhetorical debate, persuasion, or communicating ideas or information. Rather, dialogue is a meaning-making process where thoughts that lead to actions can be explored individually and with others (Adams et al., 2023b; Bohm, 1986; Isaacs, 2001). Dialogue is active and goes beyond a deeper self-awareness or understanding; it is a status continually being created in individuals, groups, and social orders (Adams et al., 2023b; Freire, 1998, 2000). Dialogue is enhanced by and leads to sensemaking through this recursive process.

Burns (1978) conceptualized leadership as a social process of interactions between "leaders" and "followers" collaborating with common interests towards mutually beneficial purposes. Mezirow (2003) described a process of communicative learning which includes becoming aware of the assumptions, intentions, and qualifications of a person who is communicating. Further, he stated that dialogue employed both intrapersonal processes of developing models while a person was speaking simultaneously with interpersonal processes of taking perspectives and adapting messages to be sent (Mezirow, 2003). That social process involves communication, and at its core, communication strives to create a shared reality between senders and receivers (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Similarly, Tourish and Jackson (2008) stated communication sits at the heart of all leadership. Boden (1994) also stated that talk is the actual work performed by leaders.

Challenges to effective interaction, collaboration, and communication may be present within an organization at both the macro and micro levels. Prestia (2018) warned of the dangers of ineffective communication that arise from mixed messages or alternative truths. This takes place due to or when a lack of clarity creates misunderstandings, arguments, and friction among individuals within the organization. Wheatley (2006) described these types of communication failures between individuals or within organizations as a fundamental misperception of information. Bushe and Marshak (2009) found dialogue could assist leaders and organizations in reducing the multiple ill effects of communication challenges. They emphasized four characteristics of dialogic organizational development practices that have a direct effect on consciousness, mindsets, and/or prevailing belief systems. Those characteristics include (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, pp. 361-2):

1. Emphasizing the everyday conversations that take place within the system.
2. A purposeful inquiry to surface, legitimate, and/or learn from the variety of perspectives, cultures, and/or narratives in the system.
3. A change process that results in new images, narratives, texts, and socially constructed realities that affect how people think and act.
4. A change process consistent with traditional organizational development values of collaboration, free and informed choice, and capacity building.

Sensemaking and Learning Dialogue

The specific intent of sensemaking and learning dialogue is to employ social change by tapping an inner energy that keeps transformation moving towards an aspirational outcome (Adams et al., 2023b). Sensemaking and learning dialogue can be integrated and lead to transformation through three distinct but related levels of interaction – dialogue with self, dialogue with others, and dialogue with the social

context (Adams et al., 2023b). Figure 2.1 illustrates this trajectory of transformation through the internal and external dialogues at work in movement beyond realities toward aspirations.

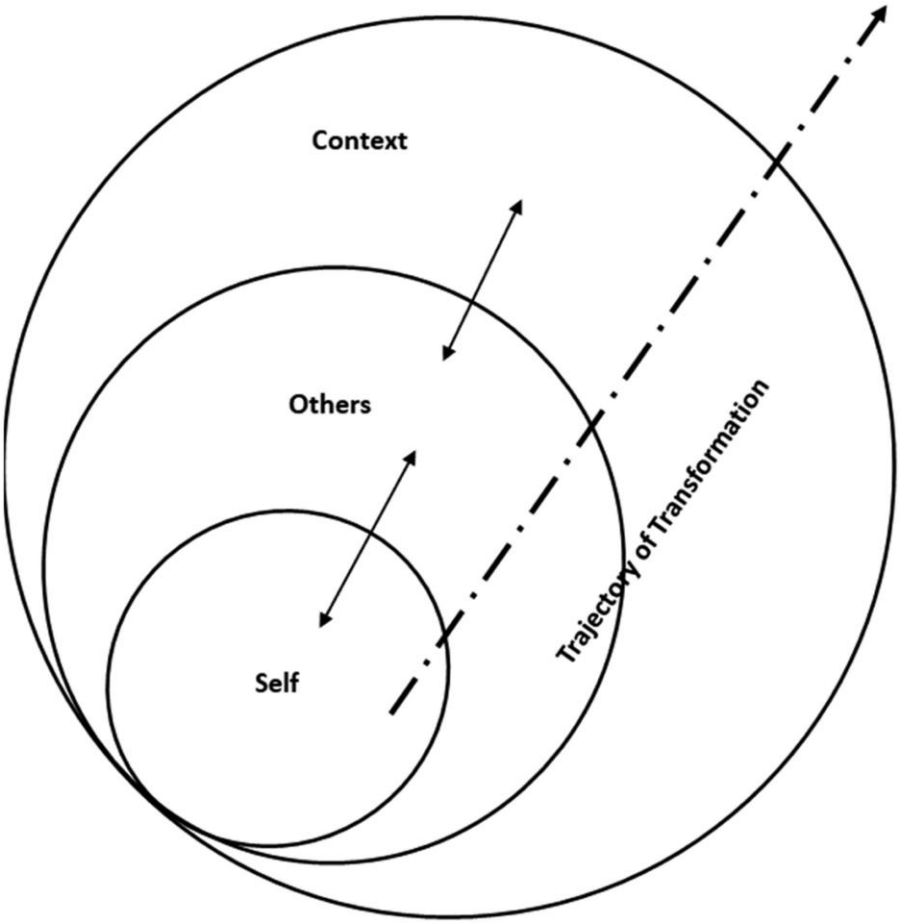


Figure 2.1 TLC Theory of Action, (Adams et al., 2023b)

Sensemaking adds a crucial layer to dialogue as it directs participants towards uncovering mental representations and how they view their own realities (Adams et al., 2023b). According to Adams and colleagues (2023b) sensemaking dialogue has two basic purposes: to construct mental representations encompassed in an aspirational reality and to construct relationships that direct ongoing actions or work towards the attainment of that aspirational reality. An example of sensemaking in a school may be centered around a desire for students to graduate with "life ready" skills. Sensemaking dialogue would

allow participants to first explore what assumptions and representations they have for what life readiness is and looks like for themselves and their students. Sensemaking dialogue would also allow for the examination of how participants would structure or organize their work processes to move towards graduates with life ready skills.

Learning dialogue is distinguished from sensemaking dialogue as it focuses primarily on the work phenomena undertaken to bring the aspiration into existence. Whereas sensemaking dialogue engages the "workers" in conversation about what is possible, learning dialogue explores the processes and progress towards that new possibility. Learning dialogue uses conversation to clarify, articulate, and explore changes that take place as collaborators move towards the goal (Adams et al., 2023a; Edmondson, 2002). It is critical for school leaders to effectively leverage learning dialogue with stakeholders, staff, and collaborators to bring aspirations to fruition.

Leaders must utilize words to carry out a variety of tasks ranging from discussing issues to mobilizing individuals for action (Adams et al., 2023a; Arriaza, 2015; Fairhurst, 2008, 2009; Gronn, 1983). Principals often use language and rhetoric to persuade staff and students or to seek compliance with initiatives (Lowenhaupt, 2014). Using conversation for sensemaking and learning, however, is not the same as engaging in activities like attaining compliance, transmitting information, or influencing staff. Even if the administrator is seeking compliance for a new process or influencing staff to adopt a new curriculum, those uses of language are not transformative (Adams et al., 2023a). Rather, transformation through sensemaking and learning dialogue occurs internally as previous patterns of thinking are broken down and distinctive arrangements of internal and external relationships are created (Adams et al., 2023a; Marshak, 2019; Mezirow,

2008; Rohr, 2020). Mezirow (1994) argued this occurs through reflection of unexamined beliefs when those beliefs are confronted with a disorienting dilemma and are found wanting and/or dysfunctional. Brooks (2023) depicted conversation as a vehicle capable of leading others on a mutual expedition toward understanding. Research has not yet focused much attention to *how* school leaders can structure their interactions and conversations to bring about such transformation.

The Case for Principal Use of TLC

In this section, leadership literature is used to build a case for principals using TLC in interactions with teachers around an aspirational change. The case emerges from three lines of leadership evidence. First, school leaders use relationships with teachers to cultivate a teaching and learning environment that enables students and teachers to reach their potential (Desautels, 2020; Dewitt, 2017; Donohoo & Katz, 2020; Hattie, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Second, evidence shows that conversation is leadership. That is, the capacity to shape and influence individual and collective action toward an aspirational future occurs through conversation (LeFevre & Robinson, 2015; Lowenhaupt, 2014;). Third, although conversation is central to the work of school principals, little attention has been devoted to how principals talk with teachers (Adams et al., 2023b).

The Work of the Principal is Relational

Much of the school leadership research in the last 20 years has attempted to conceptualize leadership behaviors in what Olsen (2017) called more practitioner-friendly ways. A purpose of these attempts is to provide clearer distinctions between what school leaders do in practice as opposed to theory (Olsen, 2017). The work of the school leader is relational as school leaders perform their work through others (Hart, 1993; Olsen, 2017). Maxwell (2016, p. 10) wrote, "Leadership impact is drawn not from position or title but from authentic relationships." There are relationships and interactions between school leaders and staff members, adults and students, school stakeholders and parents and the community at large. Therefore, school leadership consists of a series of complex and interwoven activities among various stakeholder groups with authenticity and intentionality (Forsyth et al., 2011; Olsen, 2017; Van Maele et al., 2014).

Researchers have described multiple incidences and effects of these relational leadership activities. Ruairc and colleagues (2013) highlighted school leadership's importance to the experiences that students and adults alike had in schools. They also acknowledged those relationships are fraught with the complexities of humanity and are far from simplistic interactions (Ruairc et al., 2013). Kouzes and Posner (2007) stated school leadership is traversed through the relationships and roles of an aspirational leader and those who follow. Elmore (2004) stated leadership in schools should work through those relationships to provide guidance and direction to achieve an outcome of instructional improvement.

Ottesen (2013) stated there was an urgent need for transformative leadership in schools, but transformative leadership was elusive because all voices and perspectives

had to be thoroughly listened to, debated, and respected within those schools. School leadership activities must be leveraged alongside and simultaneously to the complex interactions and relationships with stakeholders to bring about transformation (Forsyth et al., 2011; Olsen, 2017; Van Maele et al., 2014). Lambert (2003) described some effective school leadership activities deployed by principals as learning opportunities found in interactions with colleagues, coaching conversations, shared decision-making practices, and parent or community forums; therefore, the principal was a central figure in this desire to achieve transformation within the school setting and worked relationally through others.

Bryk and Schneider (2003) posited an outcome of principal leadership activities was relational trust developed through social exchanges or interactions. This relational trust built in interactions and conversations supported a moral imperative focused on improving the school and was conditional upon factors such as the centrality of principal leadership, stability of the school community, and parent engagement (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Processes and practices of school leaders, therefore, require flexibility, trust, and intentionality (Olsen, 2017). Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) further argued that relationships and interactive people skills are embedded in every dimension of leadership.

Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) described leadership as being co-created in systems of richly interconnected relationships and interactive contexts (IBM Global CEO Study, 2010). Lortie (2009) found a leader's ability to influence and/or persuade was navigated through interactions with individuals from inside the organization with particular focus on connecting to their values, needs, motivations, and beliefs. Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) found both leaders and followers traverse a dynamic relational

context that included but was not limited to top-down influences of leaders to followers (Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012).

Olsen (2017) argued principals cannot afford to separate the relational requirements of their leadership position from task responsibilities because there are aspects of relationship building that determine how tasks should be carried out. Principals use interactions to build relationships, increase capacity and autonomy, or direct behaviors in a manner that may tighten and loosen the reins between the various parties (Fairhurst, 2009; Gronn, 1983). Reckmeyer (2020) showed that the frequency and quality of principal-teacher interaction had a significant effect on teacher well-being with quality showing a stronger relationship than frequency. Thus, the work of the school leader is relational and the quality of the interactions effect school outcomes (Forsyth et al., 2011; Hart, 1993; Olsen, 2017; Van Maele et al., 2014)

TLC works through the relational ties connecting principals and staff, making it a conduit and therefore, an important relational element to understand (Adams et al., 2023b). TLC leverages a readily available resource for a school leader – conversation – to manifest transformation as a process that begins with individuals but ripples outward through relationships as new social realities are created (Adams et al., 2023b). Conversation is both the activity and the process for co-created reality because "talk" is the work of the leader (Lowenhaupt, 2014).

Conversation is Leadership

Olsen (2017) characterized principal-teacher interactions as leadership activities that consist primarily of conversation. Boden (1994) asserted that the work of leaders is

carried out through the use of language. Lowenhaupt (2014) summarized school leadership by asserting the *talk* of school leaders is the *work* of school leaders.

School leaders employ language for a variety of tasks including persuading stakeholders while exploring an idea or resource or addressing a crisis situation. Nevertheless, the language used for transformation is distinct from language used to control, organize, or mobilize (Adams et al., 2023a). Robinson (2001) explained leadership is exercised "…when ideas expressed in talk or action are recognized by others as capable of progressing tasks or problems which are important to them" (p. 93). Fairhurst (2008) stated leadership is a process of influence and meaning management among stakeholders that results in the performance of an action or the attainment of a goal. This leadership influence and meaning management was not necessarily performed by a designated role but could shift among and be redistributed through various actors. (Fairhurst, 2008). Obviously, both the expression of ideas and the determination of problems that are important to stakeholders must be developed through interactional communication with leaders and others. Further, Fairhurst (2007) argued leaders incorporate conversational tools while acting simultaneously as managers of meaning and passive receptors of meaning. Brooks (2023) asserted this conversation was an act of joint exploration and not unidirectional. Palmer (1993) stated authentic conversation was a result of free choice among free people as leadership evoked energies within others that far exceeded the powers of coercion.

TLC builds upon work of researchers who have used discourse analysis and added to the body of leadership knowledge regarding tasks such as talking about issues, crafting messages, or motivating others to act (Adams et al., 2023a; Arriaza, 2015; Fairhurst,

2008, 2009; Gronn, 1983). Fairhurst (2011) asked researchers to abandon the notion that communication from leadership is simply the transmittal of a message to a subordinate and indicated instead, it is better understood as the co-creation of meaning between people. Fairhurst (2011, p. 47) further stated that "We must see meaning creation as the milieu in which all communications operate."

Gronn (1983) noted the dynamic elements of extemporaneity and improvision in social and professional interactions which make them critical areas to study while simultaneously challenging to standardize. Regardless of whether conversations are formal or informal, Lowenhaupt (2014) stated language was not an accessory or tool to be deployed but rather a core and defining component of leadership. Phillips (1992) asserted the power to motivate resides primarily with communication. Phillips (1992) went on to state in most organizations, private conversation is even more important than public speaking. He found that even casual conversation with an individual or small groups of employees would allow the leader to gain valuable insight about how employees feel and think about issues within the organization (Phillips, 1992). Lowenhaupt (2014) went further stating these subtleties could also be deployed to develop a sense of loyalty won through personal contact more than other methods.

Simpson and colleagues (2018) acknowledged that all talk from leaders should not be characterized as leadership talk. They defined leadership talk as that which is transformative because it alters trajectories and produces new movements with the emergence of practice. They further asserted that multiple turning points could be found in those conversations which provided opportunities for creative impulses and desires for change to develop authentically and organically. Some conversations with leaders may

simply affirm existing realities of the followers or the organization itself (Simpson, et al. 2018). However, leadership talk is not merely typified by who is doing the talking but by how practice is transformed because of the interaction (Simpson et al., 2018). This is the essence of TLC. TLC is not focused on principal talk in and of itself but rather the structuring of conversation so that necessary changes emerge from meaning and action (Adams et al., 2023b). This type of framework and roadmap for school leaders has been missing as principals seek to move their educators and institutions towards new aspirational states. It seems leadership talk is missing from the conversation about school leadership due to gaps in school leadership development programs and the changing nature of pressures on school leadership.

Leadership Talk is Missing from the Conversation about School Leadership

Adams et al. (2023b) found the appeal of TLC as a concept has not resulted in its common implementation by school leaders. While school leaders have opportunities for improvement efforts and transformative leadership, Gronn (2003) argued demands placed on them had become exceedingly large and complex particularly in the face of extensively growing constraints which resulted in diminishing opportunities to affect transformation. The leadership tasks and activities of school leaders, including their use of language, have been studied, but language applied to a structure moving towards transformation must be extended, contested, and ongoing and is rare (Adams et al., 2023a). Palmer (1997, p. 14) stated, “Taking the conversation of colleagues into the deep places where, we might grow in self-knowledge for the sake of our professional practice will not be an easy, or popular, task. But it is a task that leaders of every educational institution must take up if they wish to strengthen their institution’s capacity to pursue the

educational mission." To understand some of the barriers and gaps in leadership talk by school leaders, it is useful to review school leadership development and models particularly in regard to what we know of leadership talk.

First, limits of leveraging leadership talk in schools can be viewed through the lens of school leadership development. Augustine et al. (2009) found systemic issues with the cultivation and development of school leaders. These issues included a failure to attract high-quality candidates to leadership positions in schools, particularly in those that are deemed high needs (Knapp et al., 2003). Other researchers have called for increasingly rigorous leadership standards in order to reinforce an expectation that principals act as instructional leaders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Usdan et al., 2000). For example, Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2007) found the development of rigorous leadership standards improved alignment for professional development needs at a school site which built the capacity of staff.

In school leader preparation programs, little attention is paid to leadership by relationship or interactions (Dodson, 2015). In a study of principal training and preparation, Dodson (2015) even called for the development of school leaders who are ready to navigate contemporary realities and challenges facing educators and education. He found that most preparation programs involve a mixture of course work with field experiences. Study participants articulated the most benefit from field experiences where they worked closely with experienced administrators as they handled day to day practical situations as opposed to observations at meetings or supervisory responsibilities in hallways, dining areas, school events, or duty stations (Dodson, 2015). Participants in these programs also expressed a desire for coursework that

included budgetary and financial needs, teacher observation and evaluation, curriculum planning and evaluation, and student discipline needs (Dodson, 2015). These are areas that only generically cover some aspects of leading through conversation.

Likewise, Augustine et al. (2009) argued school leaders are not sufficiently prepared in their pre-service programs, as they are more focused on managerial issues such as compliance and regulatory issues, school law, and administrative requirements. School leadership preparation programs have failed to adequately address topics needed for instructional leadership such as exploring instructional strategies, curriculum, and supporting teachers' professional growth (Copland, 1999; Elmore, 2000; Usdan et al., 2000). In addition, pre-service programs have typically lacked strong clinical components that require and allow candidates to gain practical knowledge and experience prior to leading their own schools (Peterson, 2002).

Donmoyer et al. (2012) called for principal preparation programs which develop principals who have shown the capacity to work with their staff to diagnose student learning problems and improve instruction. Similarly, Lowenhaupt (2014) called for greater emphasis on the importance of language in school leadership preparation programs. She asserted this need as principals use language to describe and define the complexities of school improvement and use rhetoric to persuade current staff members or recruit new staff to engage in the work at their site (Lowenhaupt, 2014). Ruairc and associates (2013) stated key aspects of inclusive school leadership require a range of both characteristics and activities that demonstrate tolerance, respect, listening, clarifying, being comfortable with differences and ambiguities, as well as articulating and challenging rationales for fundamental actions and attitudes.

Similarly, Halawah (2005) found a link between effective communication structures and positive school culture. School leaders, however, report a lack of confidence and skill in having constructive conversations with instructional staff. Specifically, LeFevre and Robinson (2015) found that principals routinely struggle to have effective conversations about staff performance issues. They indicated many school leaders tended to tolerate, protect, and circumvent such issues rather than effectively addressing them (LeFevre & Robinson, 2015) which in turn affects school culture.

This lack of communication skill is a major limiting factor on school leadership effectiveness due to its association with trust (LeFevre & Robinson, 2015). Relational skills are required to build trust among principals and teachers which in turn is needed to improve teaching and learning (LeFevre & Robinson, 2015). Lefevre and Robinson (2015) stated improved teaching and learning may be accomplished through integration of new instructional roles and responsibilities, challenging current instructional culture, or addressing more specific problems of teacher performance. They further quantified one of the key determinants of trust was a school leader's willingness to address perceived deficiencies in teacher performance as teachers are unlikely to trust leaders who either avoid dealing with such issues or who deal with them ineffectively (LeFevre & Robinson, 2015).

Kolosey (2011) studied three elementary, three middle school, and three high school assistant principals by using a critical incident protocol with both oral and written interview formats. It was concluded that professional learning conversations for teacher growth were more prevalent at the elementary school level than middle school and high school (Kolosey, 2011). Trust appeared to be more difficult to cultivate at middle and

high school levels due in part to a lack of protocols or structures for facilitating conversations and building trust (Kolosey, 2011). Bryk and Schneider (2003) argued trust is also a foundational characteristic for teachers to feel safety in experimenting with new teaching techniques and practices designed to meet student needs. The influence a school leader possesses is based off of relational capacity and skill and leading through conversation provides a framework and structure for school leaders to create new social constructs through interactions that transform internal and external realities (Adams et al., 2023b).

Beyond the lack of focus on relational and conversational leadership in principal preparation programs and new school leaders, even strong, well-equipped school leaders encounter conditions that hinder school improvement efforts (Portin et al., 2003). The context and complexities of school leadership are rife with issues such as principal access to actionable data and authority to allocate resources (Portin et al., 2003). These resources include a school leader's own time and calendar. Portin and colleagues (2003) noted school principals are often overscheduled with standing meetings that interfere with time for classroom observations or following up on staff inquiries and conversations.

Challenges with the allocation of school leaders' time may impede effective leadership conversations centered on learning; however, the efficacy of observations once held and subsequent conversations with staff also demonstrate mixed results (Elseman, 2021). Connelly (2012) argued teacher evaluation observations and measures used by principals were generally inconsistent, unaligned with standards of effective instructional practices, lacking rigor, and generally invalid.

Another context of school leadership is the development of multiple metrics or success indicators that do not reflect upon leadership talk. Although one of the developments from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and later the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) was a desire to move beyond test scores to look at a more holistic picture of school performance, an expectation of transparency in student outcomes exists from the development of school report cards (Klein, 2016). Ruairc et al. (2013) stated the high stakes accountability movement often gave rise to formulaic approaches to school leadership and a quest for the "one best way" to run a school. This quest often led to more autocratic leadership behaviors and changes characterized as technical rather than transformative (Ruaric et al., 2013).

Besides student achievement, current state school report cards also look at indicators such as progress for certain demographic groups including English Learners or ethnicities. Factors such as attendance (or chronic absenteeism) have also been evaluated. The state of Oklahoma developed a mechanism for schools and districts to provide evidence for "Programs of Excellence" with rubrics designed to facilitate communication among stakeholders beyond educators in a building. This designation was to help determine which schools demonstrated exemplary performance not only in core subjects such as World languages, English, or Math instruction, but also with aspects of school safety and student well-being. These types of indicators for school performance or outcomes appear to integrate more of a student-centered focus (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2020).

The link between principal leadership and student outcomes has been indirect and routed through the work of the teacher (Robinson et al., 2008); however, principals use

leadership practices to influence aspects of school culture, teacher commitment, and teacher capacity. Successful schools also look beyond student achievement to social outcomes which many educators have also ranked as equally important as testing data (Day et al., 2016). This combats earlier tendencies to focus on more specific cognitive goals to the exclusion of student needs in the process due to the pressures and expectations around testing, homework, and traditional demonstrations of student learning (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

An additional barrier to transformative educational practices and the use of conversational leadership is that education is not immune to the challenge of overcoming institutional inertia (Donohoo & Katz, 2020). While models in the educational field are rare, with an example from health care, Balas and Boren (2000) found the transfer to practice rate was slow as less than 50% of best practices were actually incorporated. Those best practices that were implemented took an average of 17 years for deployment (Balas & Boren, 2000; Donohoo & Katz, 2020). If it took 17 years for transfer to practice in a school setting, it would mark a traditional student passing from kindergarten to matriculation as a college graduate. Neither students, families, nor public trust will wait for such a long implementation window. School leaders must execute transformation at a more rapid rate.

Events such as school closures due to COVID-19, demonstrations for social justice causes, and nationwide teaching shortages also highlight the need for school leaders to be more than mere managers of efficiencies at their school sites (Mason et al., 2023). There is a call for school leaders of today to ensure educational equity, particularly for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. (Honig & Rainey,

2020). Honig and Rainey (2020) asserted this call was for more than mere improvement but for school leaders to undertake actions that promote excellence in instruction for all. Likewise, The National Association of Secondary School Principals (2014) stated there is a greater sense of urgency for school leaders to act effectively due in part to increased accountability measures for students on both the school and individual level. Beyond accountability requirements, NASSP also pointed to technology changes and the needs of diverse student populations as drivers of leadership activities and expectations (NASSP, 2014). School leaders who simply ask their staff to do more or attempt to implement new intervention strategies do not automatically find increased levels of success (NASSP, 2014). As a result, the NASSP called for "A Shift in Focus" between old school processes and new school outcomes (Table 2.1).

As part of the discussion on the changing nature of the school principal, ASCD (2015) advanced a Principal Leadership Development Framework that emphasized four key roles of a school leader including Principal as Visionary, Instructional Leader, Influencer and Learner and Collaborator. Each of these roles is further broken down into leadership activities that involve communication, collaboration, creation, and facilitating.

While communication and collaboration are concepts generally associated and connected to conversational approaches, the use of talk by school leaders in carrying out leadership tasks and roles is missing specifically. Limited to no attention about school leadership conversation leaves principals with little understanding about the function of conversational structures like those found in TLC. This missing component of understanding school leadership exists contemporaneously with the growing demands upon school leaders reflected by increased expectations of the education system in

general, greater accountability pressures, increasing emphasis on raising performance standards, and expanding social goals for schools (Day et al., 2020).

Old school	New school
Managers	Instructional leaders
Adult-focused	Student-focused
Learning time is a constant	Learning time is a variable
Teaching	Learning
Seat time	Mastery
Bell curve	J curve
Covering content	Mastering essential learning
Access for all	Excellence for all
Success for some	Success for all
Individual star teachers	Teams
Status Quo	Change

Table 2.1 (NASSP, 2014)

In conclusion, school leadership preparation, contexts, and models point to a need for leveraging relational and conversational capacity for school leaders to work in the exigencies of American education. However, the use of talk by school leaders is missing from calls to elevate leadership preparation, to improve professional development, and to

enhance leadership processes. Nowhere in the evidence presented above did scholars recommend or describe how conversation shapes the work and responsibilities of school principals. Limited understanding about the structure and function of conversation has likely consequences for how school principals use discourse with teachers.

The practical consequences of this omission are likely to appear in the conversation patterns principals use with teachers. TLC is not a naturally occurring form of discourse and depends on specific structures. These structures are used as the conceptual framework for this study.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The structure of TLC: Framing, Questioning, Listening, and Affirming

The structural component of TLC is used as the conceptual framework for the empirical investigation. As indicated in the literature review, TLC is defined as sensemaking and learning dialogue used to fundamentally re-structure how people see reality and how they relate to self, others, and the environment (Adams et al., 2023b). Sensemaking and learning dialogue, though, is not a natural conversational approach for school leaders. It requires intentional action by school principals to generate the reflective thinking behind transformative efforts. This is why the structural component to TLC is instructive. The structure identifies conversational mechanisms that can activate sensemaking and learning dialogue. Specifically, the structures are framing, reflective questioning, deep listening, and affirming language (Adams et al, 2023b).

Framing

Heidegger (1962, p. 24) wrote, "Every inquiry is a seeking. Every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought." Framing advances conversation as an inquiry process and establishes a subject to be explored through conversation. There are two purposes of framing: to set the subject to be explored and to establish a structure for the inquiry (Adams et al., 2023a). Framing allows for reflective thinking together, sharing information and experiences, constructing knowledge, and deepening an understanding of

factors that shape school life. This requires mental planning and organizational support to bring individuals with disparate ideas and experiences into an opportunity for meaning-making dialogue (Cook & Yannow, 2011; Fairhurst, 2005). Prestia (2018) described this approach to messaging and dialogue to assure truth, mindfulness, and relevance prior to an understanding and development of meaning. Osland and Kobl (2007) warned that failure take an audience into consideration and how a hearer will receive a message can often result in misinterpretation and confusion which are significant barriers to effective leadership and a generation of new learning.

Framing a conversation is similar to priming a pump cognitively. It allows for the building of shared mental models through the use of intentional language. It is an outgrowth of planning that precedes the conversation (Fairhurst, 2005) and helps to move the participants toward a desired vision of important concepts and/or a desired outcome (Adams et al., 2023a). Framing can also alleviate some challenges with use of "jargon," which is widespread in most organizations but particularly in educational settings. Buzzwords and trendy talking points such as "differentiation," "social-emotional learning," "trauma-informed practices," "social justice," "equity," and "learning loss" can hold various meanings for various stakeholders; thus, framing is important to establish a common departure point for the conversation (Adams et al., 2023a). Palmer (1993) warned of school leaders framing conversations about teaching and learning only in technical terms without exploring deeper dimensions that leverage a community of discourse nurtured by personal experience and reflection.

Some examples of the need and the power of framing can be seen with talking points from the Pandemic. Arguments around practices from mask wearing and vaccines were

often centered around ideas of personal freedom and public safety. For example, some opponents of wearing masks in public articulated a personal freedom argument such as "Public entities or government officials should not infringe upon my right to decide whether or not I want to wear a mask." Conversely, an argument for public safety could be found in statements such as "There are requirements for wearing a seat belt in a car or bans on smoking in public due to public safety concerns, and mask requirements are another protocol in the same vein." Actions and strong attitudes flow from this framing and the framing of conversations affected opportunities to communicate clearly.

Wheatley (2006) described communication issues as a fundamental misperception of information. Wheatley (2006) deemed communication a leadership skill which requires an approach to messaging that assures greater levels of truthfulness, mindfulness, and relevance prior to the mutual development of meaning and understanding; therefore, framing precedes meaning making. Fairhurst (2005) stated the Sender--Message--Receiver model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949) neglected to account for the role of making meaning in communication practice and study. Wheatley (2006) explained that failure to consider one's audience in messaging and dialogue may result in greater levels of confusion and misinterpretation. Therefore, TLC requires situational awareness, particularly in framing so that the context and conditions in which TLC occurs may be considered (Adams et al., 2023a). TLC can take place through individual conversations or in larger groups such as departments, teams, or other organizational structures. This is why purposeful planning and mental preparation is required to help facilitate entering the conversation from a position of curiosity and openness in order to understand and not judge (Adams et al., 2023a; Bohm, 1986: Isaacs, 2001). This curiosity

leading to inquiry as seeking (Heidegger, 1962) has been promoted since ancient times as the Stoic Epictetus wrote, “Throw out your conceited opinions, for it is impossible for a person to begin to learn what he thinks he already knows” (2.17.1). A frame of inquiry rather than judgement assists in developing questions which may more richly explore a topic than the development of answers.

Reflective Questioning

Adams and associates (2023b) cite Berger’s characterization of questions as a valuable currency exchanged while mining for new depths of understandings (Berger, 2014). The role of questions in organizational learning has been thoroughly examined, particularly in establishing pathways to effective dialogue (Leeds, 2000; Marquardt, 2014; Nadler & Chandon, 2004), yet van Niekerk (2023) found most leaders assume their role is to provide answers and not develop questions. Conversely, Earl and Timperley (2009) stated productive conversation is not formulaic but rather an iterative process that begins with asking questions followed by the examining of evidence and consideration of what the evidence means. Earl and Timperly (2009) viewed inquiry as a habit of mind and a way of thinking characterized by a dynamic system of feedback loops. These loops move towards clearer directions and decisions and draw on, or pursue, information as the participants become closer to understanding some phenomenon.

A study of 191 executives by the Center for Creative Leadership demonstrated the importance of effective questioning by leaders in the workplace (Daudelin, 1996). The study linked successful leadership with the ability of the leader to ask effective questions as well as the creation of an environment where others also felt safe to ask meaningful questions (Olsen 2017; Marquardt, 2014; Marquardt & Loan, 2005). Berger (2014)

viewed inquiry and questioning as valuable currency that educational leaders can deploy as they navigate challenges, explore opportunities, and address the myriad of complexities of school leadership. Marquardt (2014) noted astute leaders use questions to not only gain information but also foster participation, to spur innovation, to solve problems and even build relationships.

In many cases, educators may be accustomed to relying upon anecdotal evidence rather than knowledge sets surrounding complex issues (Earl & Temperly, 2009). This may be due in part to the personal experience and perceived relevance to the context in which the educator is working (Earl & Timperley, 2009). This can lead to the development of underlying assumptions about the work educators perform ranging from views about students, teaching and learning practices, school leadership, parent involvement, and even the broader community. Questioning can help bring underlying assumptions to light. Paul and Elder (2007) also found questions to be beneficial for raising awareness of hidden factors or underlying assumptions to participants in a conversation. Ickes (2009) described empathic accuracy as the degree to which a perceiver can accurately infer the content of a speaker's thoughts or feelings. Epley (2014) found that individuals overestimate their ability to understand others. He went on to say that study participants not only fundamentally misunderstood others but were also largely unaware of their mistakes. (Epley, 2014). The inquiry process initiated through reflective questioning can allow for what Epley (2014) terms as perspective getting rather than perspective taking.

TLC draws on critical and Socratic questioning as the means to enter and sustain sensemaking and learning dialogue. TLC uses critical questions as a dialogue generator.

The aim of this dialogue is to shift power from authority positions down to the autonomous motivation and action of people engaged in transformative work. TLC also organizes questions by three purposes. These purposes are to investigate an aspirational reality, to imagine new social arrangements, and to integrate sensemaking with action (Adams et al., 2023b).

Investigative questions are designed to initiate conversations and allow for reflection and deep thinking about general concepts of interest to the conversation participants. For example, this may include the present realities that exist within a school where teachers and leaders are seeking transformation. Investigative questions allow for exploration around what may be generally understood as a definition of concepts as broad as equity, deep learning, assessment, engagement, or classroom participation. Individuals may use each of these concepts differently and their experiences with professional literature or classroom practice shape their personal working definitions. These types of questions make space for thinking about the concept prior to acting; thus inquiry is allowed to proceed prior to developing or carrying out solutions (Berger, 2014; Gregersen, 2018). The intent of investigative questions is to develop shared meaning and understanding; therefore, dialogue with others is needed as well as internal reflection and dialogue from the participants themselves. Investigative questions as part of dialogue serves to facilitate shared meaning to combat the challenge of misperception as articulated by writer Anaïs Nin (1961, p. 124) who stated, “We do not see things as they are, we see things as we are.”

Investigative questions are considered “open-ended” and may begin with what, how or why to explore the concept as situated in daily organizational life (Berger, 2014).

Using student engagement as an example of a concept that an administrator may want to explore with a teacher, investigative questions might include: What does student engagement look like in your classroom? What does it sound like? How might it differ from one content area to another? How might students feel if they experience engagement? Why would signs of engagement be important in your practice and/or in your subject matter?

Besides investigative questions, TLC also utilizes imaginative questions which look beyond present realities toward future possibilities. Although connected to investigative questions, the goal is to look outside current structures, scenarios, and norms to explore a new way of doing and being with an anticipated outcome that new will mean improved. Berger (2014) views this difference between investigative and imaginative questions as the juxtaposition of holding on to "what is" yet asking "what if." As investigative questions make space for reflecting prior to acting, imaginative questions make space for divergent thinking where innovative ideas about the work can be reflected upon and explored (Adams et al., 2023b).

Prompts for imaginative questions may begin with "what if" and "how might." Some examples around the concept of equity might include: How might you make your practice more equitable? What if classroom procedures could be designed with a clearer focus on equity? How might students relate to their peers in an equitable classroom? How might students relate to other adults, in and outside of their own classroom? What if you had a specific professional practice goal that had an equity aim as an outcome? These types of questions help to put more structure to the mental models that surround general

concepts. This occurs as the desired reality begins to form tentative propositional relationships between what is present and what is desired (Adams et al., 2023b).

Integrative questions move beyond exploring what is present and envisioning what is possible to guide transformations in practice and structures. These questions guide both individual and collective learning through exploration of changes in structures and/or actions which in turn affect changes in social conditions and context. Integrative questions not only facilitate transformations but should also foster an environment of continued support and growth necessary for transformation and action to be sustained. Integrative questions are designed to reflect upon the effect of changes brought forth in practice (Adams et al., 2023b). They can be as simple as "how is it going?" or "how is it working so far?" Integrative questions look towards the applicability of new learning and sense-making. With the concept again of engagement, one example might be "how is a change in levels of student engagement manifesting in task completion or levels of student achievement?"

Principals who develop a culture of questioning help foster a workplace where ideas, responsibility, and challenges are shared among stakeholders. Marquardt and Loan (2005) explained this culture of questioning creates a culture of "we," rather than a culture of "you versus me," or in a school setting, the "principal versus the teacher." This approach of sharing from a culture of questioning may affect a school culture of "we" as educators discuss problems through a lens of possession that is no longer "yours" or "mine," but "ours" (Olsen, 2017).

The three types of questions further exploration and dialogue and allow for participants to co-create meaning. These types of questions are conversational and

organic because they are pathway towards both initiating conversation as well as furthering conversation towards the goal of developing an aspirational reality. Investigative, imaginative, and integrative questions have a distinct purpose but work cohesively moving desired changes from an internal thought process to co-created outcomes and improvements. These questions are not designed merely to create understanding but also to create pathways of action. This requires movement and motion which the questions in and of themselves do not bring. TLC must leverage listening to propel the movement and understanding forward (Adams et al., 2023b).

Deep Listening

As investigative, imaginative, and integrative questions begin conversations, deep listening is the avenue to keep conversations going and nurture them to develop and grow to richer levels. Deep listening has the potential to reach cognitive structures that lie behind both conscious and unconscious thoughts (Adams, 2023b; Marshak, 2004). Many may assume listening naturally occurs in conversation, but it requires intentionality and a sense of earnestness that should be regarded as at least equally if not more importantly than talking (Brearley, 2015; Floyd, 2010, Larson, 2007; Wolvin & Coakley, 1996).

Much has been written, taught, and shared with leaders regarding Carl Rodgers' active listening technique (Rogers & Farson, 1957); deep listening, however, is significantly different than active listening. Active listening is demonstrated when the listener uses statements or clarifying questions aimed at acknowledging and affirming what the speaker is saying (Rost & Wilson, 2013). Deep listening extends beyond this acknowledgment because its purpose is to process information about the mental representations, mindsets, and dispositions reflected by the speakers' thoughts and

feelings (Adams et al., 2023b; Marshak, 2015). While an active listener may reflect back to the speaker what is said, the deep listener focuses no only on what is said but also what is not said while thinking critically about feelings that may be unexpressed in the words, thoughts, and actions of their dialogue partner (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Marshak & Katz, 1997).

Haskell (2001) described deep listening as a whole-body experience as one listens with eyes, ears, mind, and heart. Deep listening reflects an *a priori* mindset of curiosity to seek out and arrive at sense-making and new learning. The focus is on understanding and not evaluating or judging the speaker (Adams et al., 2023b). There is not a step-by-step flow chart or progression from framing, then questioning, then listening as again, deep listening is organic and flows. Dialogue is linked in a cycle of questioning and listening. As investigative, imaginative, and integrative questions continue to develop from cycles of listening, the conversation is strengthened, lengthened, and deepened as listening informs the creation of new questions that are applied to the conversation allowing for continued development of sense-making (Adams et al., 2023b, Marshak, 2019).

Listening as a leader is not passive nor scripted but organic and nuanced. It is critical for leaders to study and apply deep listening for numerous reasons including gaining insight into the work, moving towards aspirational realities, and developing greater buy-in and deployment from employees who want to feel seen and heard.

Affirming Language

TLC uses affirming language that supports the internal motivation of participants whereby individuals and groups struggle, learn, grow, and persist through the challenges of constructing new social realities (Adams et al., 2023b). Affirming language is used to

acknowledge and encourage the struggle that results from de-constructing a view or understanding of a previous reality and developing a new way of being or interacting with self, others and the environment (Marshak, 2004). This may also involve supporting and enticing people to examine and investigate their thoughts and perceptions more deeply than they had predicted at the beginning of this exploratory process (Adams et al., 2023b; Marshak, 2019).

Summary of the Structure

TLC is not a structure that exerts external forces to implement change through command, control, or coercion. Rather, TLC leverages interactions that demonstrate the value of people and the importance of their thoughts, ideas, perceptions, and experiences while pursuing a mutually developed aspiration (Adams et al., 2023a). TLC is not a scripted process that moves in a linear fashion as a flow chart through stages of framing, questioning, deep listening, and affirming language. Instead, it is iterative and moves cyclically towards co-construction of a new reality.

TLC occurs in a variety of contexts and manners, but what is most evident is the interplay of framing, questioning, deep listening, and affirming language (Adams et al., 2023a). For example, TLC can be present in groups such as a professional learning community. It can also take place in pre-arranged, formal meetings. It may also be found in informal meetings and interactions. What is necessary for TLC to occur is an interaction or exploration of a social reality that is deemed lacking by the participants who aspire to co-create a transformed reality not yet actualized (Adams et al., 2023a).

Adams et al. (2023a) argue that TLC situates and flourishes in nuances, struggles, complexities, paradoxes, and contradictions. This is the fertile soil of transformation and

of traveling collectively and collaboratively to an aspiration. The individuals involved begin the work of transformation internally with thoughts and understandings and the corresponding new behaviors, actions, and attitudes lead to motivations toward movement within and among stakeholders (Adams et al., 2023b). It is a powerful tool that can and should be used by school leaders in their work, but the question remains how teachers describe the use of TLC in their interactions with their school principal.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD

Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of the empirical analysis is to address three research questions: To what extent do teachers report that their school principal uses elements of TLC? Are there differences in the reported use of TLC based on teacher characteristics? Are there differences in the reported use of TLC based on the characteristics of the schools in which those teachers and principals work? This study used a descriptive survey research design to collect and analyze data from teachers. A descriptive design allowed for a clear account of how teachers experience and report conversations with their school principal.

Data source

Data were collected from a random sample of 2,500 teachers in a southwestern state in the U. S. All certified teachers in the state were included in the data file and randomly sampled using SPSS 28.0. Sampled teachers received an electronic survey emailed directly to their email address. A total of three follow-up emails were used with non-respondents. Usable responses were obtained from 1,615 teachers for a response rate of 65%. Teachers in the sample averaged 15 years of teaching experience with 7 years in their current school. Eighty-one percent of teachers identified as female and 18% as male. Seventy-nine percent of teachers listed a racial identification as White.

Measures

The survey utilized the School Leader Transformative Leadership Conversation Scale developed by Adams et al. (2023a). The scale begins with the prompt “In

conversations with me about an aspirational change, my school principal generally…" Items that followed the prompt represent the use of reflective questions, deep listening, and affirming language. Items used a 5-point Likert response set ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). Reflective questioning items include: "Asks questions that challenge me to think deeper about my work;" "Asks questions that allow me to think about assumptions I make in my work;" "Asks questions that allow me to self-reflect on my work;" and "Asks questions that allow me to reflect on multiple thoughts and interpretations about my work." Deep listening items include: "Listens with curiosity to what I have to say;" "Listens to me in a non-judgmental way;" "Listens to understand what I am experiencing;" and "Listens for how I might improve." Affirming language items include: "Recognizes the work I do with encouragement;" "Expresses concern for my well-being;" "Let's me know that he/she trusts me:" and " "Tells me I can be effective in the changes I am making in my work." The full survey is listed in Appendix A.

Prior research found that the TLC items load strongly on one factor and have excellent internal item consistency (Adams et al., 2023a). All 12 items on the School Leader Transformative Leadership Conversation Scale (Adams et al., 2023a) loaded strongly on one factor, with loadings ranging from 0.76 to 0.90. Item consistency was also strong, and all items had a congruence rating from 80% to 100%. The measure had a Cronbach alpha of 0.96, indicating excellent reliability.

Analysis

An item-level analysis of the TLC survey was conducted for the first research question. The item-level analysis reported means and standard deviation for each item.

Additionally, a cut score of 4 was used to calculate the percent of teachers who report their principal's frequent use of TLC. The second research question was analyzed by comparing mean differences in TLC by teacher characteristics. The third research question was analyzed by comparing mean differences in TLC by school characteristics. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to estimate if group differences were statistically significant for both the second and third research questions.

Limitations

Limitations with the research design affect knowledge claims that can be made from the evidence. Four limitations are worth noting. First, data came from teacher self-report which may be biased by unmeasured teacher factors. For example, teacher perceptions toward the principal may consciously or unconsciously influence how they interpret interactions. Second, the descriptive data do not address factors that may influence principal use of TLC, nor do they present evidence on any potential effects of TLC on teacher mental states and behaviors. Third, there are several structural elements of TLC as described in the conceptual framework that are not measured with the survey. The survey does not capture framing, it does not address investigative imaginative, and integrative questions, and it does not account for nuances of deep listening. Fourth, the data were limited to teachers in a southwestern state and do not support inferences about school principals in general.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

The results of this study were organized by the three specific research questions. The first research question addressed the frequency of TLC use by school principals as reported by teachers. Means, standard deviations, and percentage of teachers reporting frequent use are presented for TLC overall, each structural component, and the individual items. The second research question addressed differences in TLC use based on teacher characteristics. The third research question analyzed differences in TLC use based on school characteristics. For the second and third research questions, group means are reported along with ANOVA results to determine if group differences were statistically significant.

RQ1: To what extent do teachers report that their school principal uses elements of TLC?

Two types of data were presented to address the first research question. First, data were reported for the overall use of TLC and use of the structural components of questioning, deep listening, and affirming language. Second, data were presented at the item level to describe the use of specific conversational practices.

Table 5.1 presents data describing teacher perceptions of overall TLC use by school principals and use of the structural components of questioning, deep listening, and affirming language. TLC had a mean of 3.2 with 25.7% of teachers in the sample reporting frequent use of TLC practices. Questioning had a mean of 2.85 with 11.3%

of teachers reporting frequent principal use of questioning. Affirming language had a mean of 3.36 with 31.6% of teachers reporting frequent principal use of affirming language. Neither TLC as a whole nor each structural component of TLC reached the 4.0 threshold to indicate frequent use.

Table 5.1

Reported use of TLC

Item	Mean	SD	% Use
TLC	3.20	1.08	25.7
Questioning	2.85	1.09	11.3
Listening	3.37	1.16	28.2
Affirming	3.36	1.20	31.6

Note: N = 1615. % use is based on the percentage of teachers with response values at 4.00 or above. Four or above represents a response of frequent or always.

Table 5.2 reported results from individual items measuring question use by principals. Item means all fell below the 4.0 threshold used to denote frequent use of questions with teachers. Additionally, less than 10% of the sample reported frequent use of questioning practices by principals. The lowest reported item was “My school principal generally asks questions that allow me to think about assumptions I make in my work” with an overall mean of 2.85. Slightly higher was “My principal generally asks questions that challenge me to think deeper about my work” with an overall mean of 2.88. The higher reported items were “Asks questions that allow me to reflect on multiple thoughts and interpretations about my work” with an overall mean of 3.36 and “Asks questions that allow me to self-reflect on my work” at 3.37.

Table 5.2

Reported use of Questioning

Item	Mean	SD	% Use
Asks questions that challenge me to think deeper about my work.	2.88	1.20	9.5
Asks questions that allow me to think about assumptions I make in my work.	2.85	1.09	7.6
Asks questions that allow me to self-reflect on my work.	3.37	1.16	9.4
Asks questions that allow me to reflect on multiple thoughts and interpretations about my work.	3.36	1.20	5.6

Note: N = 1615. % use is based on the percentage of teachers with response values at 4.00 or above. Four or above represents a response of frequent or always.

Table 5.3 reported results from individual items measuring deep listening by principals. Item means all fell below the 4.0 threshold used to denote frequent use of deep listening. Teachers reported higher percentages of principal use of listening than they reported of questioning. The lowest reported item was “My school principal generally listens for how I might improve” with an overall mean of 3.15. The second lowest items was “My principal generally listens to what I am experiencing” with an overall mean of 3.36. Slightly higher was the item “Listens with curiosity to what I have to say” with an overall mean of 3.41. The highest reported item for listening was “Listens to me in a non-judgmental way” with an overall mean of 3.57.

Table 5.3

Reported use of Deep Listening

Item	Mean	SD	% Use
Listens with curiosity to what I have to say.	3.41	1.27	22.4
Listens to me in a non-judgmental way.	3.57	1.27	28.8
Listens to understand what I am experiencing.	3.36	1.26	21.2
Listens for how I might improve.	3.15	1.21	13.5

Note: N = 1615. % use is based on the percentage of teachers with response values at 4.00 or above. Four or above represents a response of frequent or always.

Table 5.4 reported results from individual items measuring principal use of affirming language. Item means all fell below the 4.0 threshold used to denote frequent use by principals. The lowest reported item was "My school principal generally tells me I can be effective with the changes I am making in my work" with an overall mean of 3.14. The next lowest reported item was "Expresses concern for my well-being" with an overall mean of 3.35. Slightly higher was "My principal generally recognizes the work I do with encouragement" with an overall mean of 3.43. The highest reported item measuring affirming language was "My principal generally lets me know that he/she trusts me" with an overall mean of 3.53.

Table 5.4

Reported Use of Affirming Language

Item	Mean	SD	% Use
Recognizes the work I do with encouragement.	3.43	1.33	27.2
Expresses concern for my well-being.	3.35	1.36	26.4
Lets me know that he/she trusts me.	3.53	1.33	28.5
Tells me I can be effective in the changes I am making in my work.	3.14	1.25	14.6

Note: N = 1615. % use is based on the percentage of teachers with response values at 4.00 or above. Four or above represents a response of frequent or always.

RQ2: Are there differences in the reported use of TLC based on teacher characteristics?

Group means and ANOVA results were used to address the second research question about differences in reported TLC use based on teacher characteristics. Teacher characteristics included the length of experience as a teacher, the length of tenure in their current school, teacher gender, and teacher ethnicity. Tables included group means and standard deviations with ANOVA results reported in the notes.

Teachers were grouped by three experience categories. Teachers were categorized as "novice" with experience levels from 1-3 years, "experienced" with 4-9 years and "career" with 10 years of experience or more. Table 5.5 reported an overall mean of 3.25 and standard deviation of 1.08 for novice teachers, a mean of 3.12 with a standard deviation of 1.09 for experienced teachers, and a mean of 3.22 with a standard deviation of 1.07 for career teachers. Novice teachers reported slightly higher use of TLC by school

principals compared to experienced teachers and career teachers. ANOVA results reveal that these differences were not statistically significant, $F(2, 16{,}123) = 1.38$, $p = .25$.

Table 5.5

Reported Use of TLC by Years of Teaching Experience

Category	Mean	SD
Novice	3.25	1.08
Experienced	3.12	1.09
Career	3.22	1.07
Total	3.2	1.08

Note: N = 1615. There was not a significant effect of years of teaching experience ($F_{2, 16,123} = 1.38$, $p = .25$)

Table 5.6 reported item analysis based on teachers' experience in their current school. Three categories were used to delineate teachers who are new to their school (1-3 years' experience), experienced teachers in the school (4-9 years) and career teachers in their school (10+ years). An overall mean of 3.28 and standard deviation of 1.09 was reported for new teachers, a mean of 3.15 with a standard deviation of 1.09 for experienced teachers, and a mean of 3.13 with a standard deviation of 1.08 for career teachers. Teachers new to the building reported slightly higher use of TLC by their school principal compared to experienced and career teachers. ANOVA results reveal that these differences were not statistically significant, $F(2, 1547) = 3.25$, $p = .25$.

Table 5.6

Reported Use of TLC by Years of Experience in Current School

Category	Mean	SD
New	3.28	1.09
Experienced	3.15	1.09
Career	3.13	1.08
Total	3.2	1.08

Note: N = 1549. There was not a significant effect of years of teaching experience in current school ($F_{2,1547}$ = 3.25, p = .25)

Table 5.7 reported item analysis based on gender. An overall mean of 3.19 and standard deviation of 1.08 was reported for females. An overall mean was 3.26 and a standard deviation of 1.04 was reported for males. Male teachers reported a slightly higher mean from principal use of TLC. ANOVA results reveal that these differences were not statistically significant, $F(1,1582) = .95$, $p = .33$.

Table 5.7

Reported Use of TLC by Gender

	Mean	SD
Female	3.19	1.08
Male	3.26	1.04
Total	3.2	1.07

Note: N = 1583. There was not a significant effect of gender ($F_{1,1582}$ =.95, p = .33)

Table 5.8 reported item analysis based on teacher ethnicity. Respondents were categorized as white and non-white. An overall mean of 3.21 of white teachers was reported with a standard deviation of 1.07. An overall mean was 3.16 and a standard deviation of 1.11 was reported for non-white teachers. White teachers reported a slightly higher mean from principal use of TLC than non-white teachers. ANOVA results reveal that these differences were not statistically significant, $F(1, 1574) = .59$, $p = .44$.

Table 5.8

Reported Use of TLC by Ethnicity

	Mean	SD
White	3.21	1.07
Non-white	3.16	1.11
Total	3.2	1.07

Note: N = 1575. There was not a significant effect of ethnicity ($F_{1,1574} = .59$, $p = .44$)

RQ3: Are there differences in the reported use of TLC based on school characteristics?

Group means and ANOVA were used to address the third research question about differences in reported TLC use based on school characteristics. Distinctive school characteristics included Title I versus non-Title I schools, school accountability grade, type of school, and grade configuration of school. Tables included group means and standard deviations with ANOVA results reported in the notes.

Table 5.9 reported item analysis based on teachers working in Title I or non-Title I schools. An overall mean of 3.21 was reported with a standard deviation of 1.08 for teachers in Title I schools. An overall mean was 3.15 with a standard deviation of 1.05 was reported for teachers in non-Title I schools. Teachers in Title I schools reported a slightly higher mean of principal use of TLC than those in non-Title I schools. ANOVA results reveal that these differences were not statistically significant, $F(1, 1567) = .68$, $p = .41$.

Table 5.9

Reported Use of TLC by Title I or non-Title I School Teachers

	Mean	SD
Title I	3.21	1.08
Non-Title I	3.15	1.05
Total	3.20	1.07

Note: N = 1568. There was not a significant effect of teachers working in Title I schools ($F_{1,1567} = .68$, $p = .41$)

Table 5.10 reported item analysis based on school accountability grade. An overall mean of 3.21 was reported with a standard deviation of 1.08 for teachers in Title I schools. An overall mean for schools with a grade of A was 3.46 with a standard deviation of 1.0. The overall mean for schools with a grade of B was 3.33 with a standard deviation of 1.04. The overall mean for schools with a grade of C was 3.11 with a standard deviation of 1.05. The overall mean for schools with a grade of D was 3.1 with a standard deviation of 1.12. The overall mean for schools with a grade of F was 2.68 with

a standard deviation of 1.08. ANOVA results reveal that these differences were statistically significant, $F(4, 1378) = 12.81$, $p < .001$.

Table 5.10

Reported Use of TLC by School Accountability Grade

	Mean	SD
A	3.46	1.00
B	3.33	1.04
C	3.11	1.05
D	3.10	1.12
F	2.68	1.17
Total	3.18	1.08

Note: N = 1382. There was a significant effect of teachers working in schools based on accountability grade ($F_{4,1378} = 12.81$, $p < .001$)

Table 5.11 reported item analysis for the type of school where the teacher was employed. This school characteristic included traditional public schools, charter schools, private schools, and online schools. Due to the lower response rate for some specific categories, responses were sorted into groupings of those who were traditional public schools and those who were not. The second category was noted as "other." An overall mean of 3.13 and a standard deviation of 1.07 was reported for traditional public schools. For those schools which were not traditional public schools (other), the overall mean was

3.83 with a standard deviation of 0.86. Those schools which were not traditional public schools had a higher overall mean. ANOVA results reveal that these differences were statistically significant, $F(1, 1586) = 67.01$, $p < 001$.

Table 5.11

Reported Use of TLC by School Type

	Mean	SD
Traditional Public School	3.13	1.07
Other	3.83	0.86
Total	3.20	1.07

Note: N = 1587. There was a significant effect of teachers working in schools based on type ($F_{1,1586} = 67.01$, $p < .001$)

Table 5.12 reported item analysis for school grade configuration. This school characteristic included three categories of elementary (pre-kindergarten through 4th grade), intermediate (grades 5-6) and secondary (grades 7-12). An overall mean for teachers in elementary schools was 3.23 with a standard deviation of 1.06. An overall mean was 3.22 with a standard deviation of 1.11 was reported for teachers in intermediate schools. An overall mean was 3.14 with a standard deviation was 1.07 for teachers in secondary schools. The mean was highest for teachers in elementary schools and slightly lower for intermediate and secondary schools. ANOVA results reveal that these differences were not statistically significant, $F(1, 2) = 1.12$, $p = .33$.

Table 5.12

Reported Use of TLC by Grade Configuration of School

	Mean	SD
Elementary School	3.23	1.06
Intermediate School	3.23	1.11
Secondary School	3.14	1.06
Total	3.20	1.07

Note: N = 1583. There was not a significant effect of teachers working in schools based on grade configuration ($F_{1,2}$ = 1.12, p = .33)

Summary of Results

Teachers did not report frequent use of TLC overall by their principal, nor did they report frequent use of individual elements of the TLC structure by their principal. The structural components of listening and affirming reported higher overall mean scores than TLC in general or in the component of questioning. There were no statistically significant differences between reported use of TLC by principals when analyzed by the teacher characteristics of years of experience overall as a teacher, years of experience in their current school, teacher gender, or teacher ethnicity. There were statistically significant differences in reported use of TLC from teachers based upon their school accountability grade and their school type. There were not statistically significant differences in reported use of TLC based upon Title I versus non-Title I schools or grade configurations.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to establish the foundation for a line of inquiry around the use of Transformative Leadership Conversation by school principals. The foundation consists of the following: (1) literature describing the work of the principal as relational, (2) defining and describing TLC, (3) and measuring the extent to which principals use the structural components of framing, questioning, deep listening, and affirming language. The research addressed three primary questions: To what extent do teachers report that their school principal uses elements of TLC? Are there differences in the reported use of TLC based on teacher characteristics? Are there differences in the reported use of TLC based on school characteristics? In this chapter, the findings are used to generate knowledge claims about TLC and its use. These claims are then used to describe implications for school leadership. The chapter begins with an overview of the findings. Next, knowledge claims are advanced by considering the findings within the context of leadership practice. The chapter concludes with implications for school leadership.

Overview of the Findings

The central finding of this study was that principal use of the structural elements of TLC as reported by their teachers was limited. Only 25.7% of teachers reported frequent use of TLC elements with a mean of 3.2. Of the structural elements, affirming

language was used most frequently with 31.6% of teachers reporting frequent use and a mean of 3.36. Frequent deep listening was reported by 28.2% of teachers with a mean of 3.37. Principals used reflective questioning the least of all structural elements with only 11.6% of teachers reporting frequent use with a mean of 2.85. Means for the structural components were all below the 4.0 threshold for frequent use.

Item results described the frequency of specific behaviors within the structural component. For questioning, no item reached 10% for frequent use. This means that 90% of teachers in the sample did not interact often with principals around questions related to how they approach their work. There was not a difference in how teachers responded to the questions "Asks questions that challenge me to think deeper about my work" (9.5%) and "Asks questions that allow me to self-reflect on my work" (9.4%). That item also had the highest mean of 3.37. The lowest reported practice was "Asks questions that allow me to reflect on multiple thoughts and interpretations about my work" with a mean score of 3.36 and reported use of 5.6%.

For deep listening, teachers reported principal use at a slightly higher rate than questioning although no item reached 30% for frequent use. This means that over 70% of teachers in the sample did not describe principal behaviors associated with deep listening. The lowest item was "Listens for how I might improve" with a mean of 3.15 and percentage of 13.5%. The highest rated item was "Listens to me in a non-judgmental way" with a mean of 3.57 and reported percentage of 28.8%. The other items were closely reported with "Listens to what curiosity to what I have to say" with a mean of

3.41 and 22.4% and “Listens to understand what I am experiencing” with a mean score of 3.36 and 21.2% reported usage.

For affirming language, teachers reported its use with the greatest frequency, although again, no item reached 30%. This means that more than 70% of teachers in the sample did not describe principal behaviors associated with affirming language on a consistent basis. Language that demonstrated trust reported the highest mean at 3.53 and the highest percentage of 28.5%. The lowest reported item was “Tells me I can be effective in the changes I am making in my work” with a mean of 3.14 and reported percentage of 14.6%. The intermediary items for this element were closely calculated. “Recognizes the work I do with encouragement” reported a mean of 3.43 and percentage of 27.2%. “Expresses concern for my well-being” had similar findings with a mean of 3.35 and 26.4%.

The second research question examined differences in TLC use based on teacher characteristics. The purpose of this question was to understand if principals may interact differently with teachers based on demographics or experience. Mean differences by teacher characteristics were not statistically significant. The mean for reported TLC use in the overall study was 3.2. The reported means based on teachers’ overall years of experience, overall years in their current school, gender, and ethnicity did not show great variance from the overall mean. The lowest reported mean was 3.12 from experienced teachers or those with 4-9 years of overall teaching experience. The highest reported mean was 3.28 from teachers who were newest to their current school site with 0-3 years of experience.

The third research question examined differences in TLC use based on school characteristics. The purpose of this question was to understand if principals may interact differently with teachers based on school outcomes, grade configuration, or school type. Analysis of this research question did show some statistically significant differences in teachers' report of principal use of TLC although not across all categories. The overall reported mean for TLC was 3.2. For Title I schools the mean was 3.21 and for non-Title I schools it was 3.15. Similarly, the mean for secondary schools (grades 7-12) was 3.14 and for both intermediate schools (grades 5-6) and for elementary schools (grades pre-kindergarten-4) was 3.23. There was greater variance in the means found in the types of schools. Traditional public schools reported a mean of 3.13 and "other schools" had a reported mean of 3.83. Those schools classified as "other" included responses from staff at charter schools, online schools and private schools.

The largest differences between reported means were found by school accountability grade (Table 5.10). The overall reported mean was 3.18. There was a downward pattern of reported means with A schools at the top scoring 3.46, B schools with 3.33, C schools with 3.11, D schools slightly lower at 3.10 and F schools at the bottom with a reported mean of 2.68.

In summary, the descriptive evidence reports limited use of TLC structures by principals with teachers. Principals used more affirming language with teachers than reflective questioning and deep listening. TLC practices did appear to be more frequent for teachers in schools with better accountability grades and in the smaller number of schools that were not traditional public schools. These results are used to generate knowledge claims for school leadership.

Knowledge Claims

Certain claims about principal use of TLC can be drawn from the study of principals' reported use of the structural components of TLC by their teachers. These claims relate to the use of conversational structures – more specifically, what use or lack thereof means for sensemaking and learning dialogue and how school context may influence leadership conversation. The claims are developed by situating the findings in the context of leadership conversation. Olsen (2017) characterized interactions between principals and teachers as a series of leadership activities that consist primarily of conversation. Forsyth and Adams (2004, p. 252) conceptualized such interactions as social capital or "the glue that enables cooperative human action." Even across differing school and community contexts, effective principals set direction, develop people, and redesign organizations (Sutcher et al., 2017). If the work of the school leader is interactive, relational, and conversational, why are the conversational structures of TLC not more prevalent? Three claims are advanced: (1) School leaders need training to use elements of TLC, (2) Missing elements of TLC are vital to sensemaking and learning dialogue, and (3) Context matters for school leadership.

Claim 1: School leaders need training to use elements of TLC

As mentioned in the literature review, conversation is foundational to school leadership. Principals are engaged in constant conversation with teachers around various subjects and occurring in multiple contexts for assorted purposes (Boden, 1994; Lowenhaupt, 2014; Olsen, 2017). Principals can use language to control, organize, or mobilize teacher pursuits while transformation requires a unique use of language (Adams et al., 2023b). Findings in this study suggest that many principals do not interact with

teachers by using reflective questioning, deep listening, and affirming language. Jalajel (2023) found leaders who listened to employees saw growth in engagement and post-Pandemic, engaged employees were 50% less likely to be watching for or actively seeking a job and seven times more likely to recommend their workplace as a great place for others to work. In a period when recruitment and retention of teachers are at crisis levels, school leaders need to evaluate how elements of TLC can enhance staff engagement.

There were elements of TLC that teachers reported experiencing more frequently such as deep listening and affirming language, but overall TLC was not reported at a high level. While Simpson et al. (2018) acknowledged not all talk from leaders should be characterized as "leadership talk," true leadership talk produces new movements and alters trajectories in a manner considered to be transformative. Kim (2020) noted that while most principals have teaching experience along with specific prerequisites for leadership roles, continuous learning is critical for success as a school leader. There is an expectation that professional learning would naturally occur within preparation programs from higher education. While studying principal preparation programs, Crow and Whiteman (2016, p. 19) wrote, "Standards and policies for leadership preparation programs are only effective if they are based on what we know about both what is happening and what should be occurring in order to prepare effective, innovative change agents for schools." Beyond the shortcomings of preparation programs in this area, Levin and colleagues (2020) found principals on the job reported obstacles to meaningful professional learning opportunities, particularly for those planning to leave the field.

As an example of what we know is happening and what should be occurring, the Wallace Foundation (2011) called for four interrelated domains of school leadership behaviors and practices to produce positive school outcomes. These domains integrated instruction, people, and organizational skills for school leaders comprised of:

1. Engaging in instructionally focused interactions with teachers
2. Building a productive climate
3. Facilitating collaboration and professional learning communities
4. Managing personnel and resources strategically

Each of these four domains are enhanced or limited by school leaders' abilities to have leadership conversations with staff and other stakeholders: yet, principal preparation programs are lacking in the integration of these skills and tasks (Augustine et al., 2009; Dodson, 2015). Kraft and Gilmour (2016) found that while principal-teacher conversations could assist in developing common frameworks and language, particularly in discussing instruction, those conversations tended to be brief and infrequent.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2024) call for principal preparation that focuses on similar school leadership needs such as a focus on leading instruction, developing staff, creating a learning organization, and developing skills of feedback and reflection which in turn contribute to the development of principals' knowledge and skills and positive teacher and student outcomes. The field calls for principals to use relationships and interactions as a process to lead schools toward shared vision but these calls generally exclude specific behaviors on how to engage others. The data in this study are illustrative of this point. Teachers did not experience many interactions in which their principal used reflective questioning, deep listening, and affirming language. These conversational

structures facilitate the sensemaking and learning dialogue that underlie effective teaching, yet these structures with this sample of teachers were not used frequently.

Claim 2: Missing elements of TLC are vital to sensemaking and learning dialogue

TLC is the use of sensemaking and learning dialogue with the intention of fundamentally restructuring how people see reality and how they relate to self, others, and the environment (Adams et al., 2023a). TLC is not a structure that exerts external forces to implement change through command, control, or coercion (Adams et al., 2023a). Poutiatine (2009) argued the transformative process must work simultaneously on both the internal and the external levels as understanding of self and understanding of the world are both expanded. What is necessary for TLC to occur is an interaction or exploration of a social reality through sensemaking and learning dialogue by participants who fully engage in order to co-create an aspirational reality (Adams et al., 2023b).

Conversation in general, and TLC in particular, require intentionality and a structure for interactions between school leaders and their teachers that allow for sensemaking by participants (Adams & Olsen, 2016; Groysberg & Slind, 2012). There are structural elements within the framework of TLC that provide a lens and a set of operations with the goal of bringing true transformation. These components are framing, questioning, deep listening and affirming language. However, the structural components are not an order of operations nor a flowchart.

Ashworth (2004) stated that understanding precedes effective learning, and conversation exhibits the participatory nature of human learning at its best. Just as the elements of TLC are required to enable sensemaking and learning dialogue, sensemaking

and learning dialogue are required to enable true transformation (Adams et al., 2023a). These elements could be thought of as both essential ingredients in a recipe and the preparation of the main course as well. If the elements are not present, the transformative process and arrival to the aspirational reality cannot be attained. Again, in this study teachers reported experiencing deep listening and affirming language more frequently than other elements of TLC, but overall TLC was not reported at a high level and no elements were reported as routinely used by their principal. The work of transformation in a school setting is likely to be hindered without leadership processes that re-structure beliefs as a step to re-ordering practices. The structural elements of TLC establish a framework to guide principals in this work.

Claim 3: Context matters for school leadership

The findings of this study did not demonstrate a statistically significant difference in reported use of TLC when analyzed by teacher characteristics including years of overall teaching experience, years of teaching in their current workplace, gender, or ethnicity. However, when characteristics of the school where teachers work were analyzed, statistically significant differences by types of schools and school accountability grades were found.

Pressures on school leaders can be significant and varied due to the complexities of their job requirements (Day et al., 2020; Ford et al., 2024b; Keller & Slayton, 2016). Further, researchers have found higher turnover rates, lower job satisfaction rates, and higher stress levels among school leaders, particularly in the face of persistent pressures that oftentimes undermine school improvement initiatives and outcomes (Bauer & Silver, 2017; Ford et al., 2024a; NPBEA, 2015). High stakes accountability is imposed on school

principals and teachers alike through educational policy at various levels of government entities (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Fullan, 2010; Olsen, 2017; Ravitch, 2011). Levin and colleagues (2020) found the pressures and distrust of high stakes accountability systems contributed to principals leaving their school or the profession.

Traditional public schools have received more scrutiny from the public and political entities so may reasonably be expected to perceive more external pressure than other school models. Non-traditional school models generally have fewer regulatory mandates placed upon them. This study found that teachers in non-traditional schools reported more frequent use of TLC than teachers in a traditional public school setting at a statistically significant level ($p < .001$).

Additionally, when analyzed by school accountability grade, the mean of reported use of TLC decreased with teachers in A schools reporting the highest levels of use and F schools reporting the lowest levels. There was a statistically significant effect of reported use of TLC by principals from teachers working in schools based on accountability grade ($p < .001$). It is reasonable to assume that school leaders and staff members in lower performing schools feel additional external pressures which may also mean more externally controlling behaviors are employed with staff and students alike. When viewed from a threat rigidity lens (Staw et al., 1981), high stakes accountability threats to staff and schools change group cohesion by emphasizing uniformity, centralizing communication, and increasing hierarchical structures (Brezicha et al., 2024). In schools where pressure to perform and raise student achievement assessment scores is greatest, there tends to be more external control. TLC is not a form of external control.

Conversely, Mokretsova and colleagues (2021) found that the principals' democratic leadership style is positively related to the autonomous motivation of teachers. Lewin (1997) called for a democratic leadership style as the most reliable path to facilitate change within an organization based on group decision-making that leveraged dialogue, feedback, and a commitment to action. Crosby (2021) posited this allows individuals to blame less, interact more, support roles within the organization more fully, and engage in ongoing dialogue. Gu and Sammons (2016) argued for school leaders to deploy context sensitive strategies to facilitate necessary long-term improvements. TLC provides a structure for these context sensitive conversations. Furthermore, Olsen (2017) found TLC could be used as a mechanism to support teachers and enhance principal-teacher relationships. This study notes the need for these supports and enhancements, particularly for school contexts where external pressures abound for school leaders and teachers alike. The findings also point to contextual barriers to using TLC. TLC seems challenging in contexts where external control is salient. Principals who are expected to implement district reforms with fidelity and to comply with district mandates are not likely to have the professional discretion to use TLC as frequently with teachers.

Implications for School Leaders

The first knowledge claim denoted that school leaders need additional awareness, understanding, and training with leadership conversations since their teachers do not perceive principal use of TLC on a routine basis. We know the work of school leaders is contextual and relational. This study found that teachers reported limited use of TLC as a whole as well as its structural elements of framing, questioning, deep listening, and

affirming language. Principals' use of affirming language was the most widely noted element of TLC. This may demonstrate a desire of school leaders to support their staff through use of encouragement. This may also be due in part to principal preparation programs and experiences including conversations where empathy and understanding were more routinely employed and experienced. However, educational leaders at the district level need to explore the transformational properties of TLC and leverage them in their work with site leaders. Site leaders need to similarly leverage TLC in their interactions with assistant principals, teacher leaders, classroom teachers, and staff. There are prospects to leverage TLC elements with a variety of staff at the site level from instructional coaches, department chairs, teacher-leaders, and perhaps even incorporate the elements in re-thinking discipline and restorative practices with students. The opportunities to cultivate TLC in interactions with community members, parent groups, and students may also provide an impetus for re-structuring and moving towards outcomes that are aspirational for multiple stakeholder groups.

This lack of utilization of TLC by school leaders also requires an examination of professional training and standards from professional organizations and higher education principal preparation programs. A powerful modeling opportunity may exist, for example, with higher education representatives to not only educate aspiring principals and educational leaders about TLC, but to participate with them in Transformative Leadership Conversations about aspects of principal preparation, challenges of school leadership, crafting communication to stakeholder groups, and meeting the changing needs of students in the 21st century among other topics. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) called for more effective ways of developing and sharing expertise across the teaching

profession coming out of the Pandemic. TLC provides one such opportunity to focus on specific behaviors educators can use if it is integrated, modeled, and disseminated in preparation and professional learning programs for educators in a systematic and systemic manner.

The second knowledge claim documented that opportunities for sensemaking and learning dialogue are diminished due to missing elements of TLC. Framing, questioning, deep listening, and affirming language – are missing in interactions between school leaders and their teachers. Leadership is relational and influence is exerted among individuals who have a relationship. If transformation of social structures such as schools are to develop, these elements must be nurtured to facilitate sensemaking and learning dialogue.

For example, little formal training has been provided to administrators on how to craft questions that are designed for transformational change, challenging the status quo, and deeper understanding. This is illustrated by the lowest scoring items on the overall survey. “Asks questions that challenge me to think deeper about my work” had a reported mean of 2.88. “Asks questions that allow me to think about assumptions I make at work” had a reported mean of 2.85. The implication for educational leaders is for more focus and attention be paid to crafting of quality questions to support inquiry and transformation. All educators need practice in the understanding, development, and utilization of investigative questions, imaginative questions, and integrative questions. Beyond use of these types of questions by educational leaders, it is very possible that classroom experiences and practices can be transformed as teachers impart these types of

questions to students and students formulate and integrate them into their individual curiosity to actualize their fully integrated selves.

The third knowledge claim that was generated in this study was that context matters for school leaders, particularly the unique context of seeking transformation. While teachers did not report significant differences in principal use of TLC by teacher characteristics and some aspects of school characteristics, they did report differences based on school accountability grade and school type. There are enormous pressures for school leaders when school accountability grades are scrutinized. There is an opportunity to explore how external pressures affect leadership activities in general, and conversation more specifically, for school leaders. Correlation does not demonstrate causation, so more research is needed along this line of inquiry, but training and development of the TLC framework and the structural components of framing, questioning, deep listening and affirming language may assist educators in transforming outcomes at schools deemed to be performing at lower levels.

Suggestions for Future Research

Thorn (2021) wrote of research as a beginning and not an end. With this in mind, future beginnings may seek to explore TLC in light of several potential pathways. One potential area of future exploration would be to correlate the teachers' reported use of TLC and its structural elements with principal perceptions of their own integration of TLC. Looking for connections or potential gaps in the perceptions of school principals and their specific teaching staff could provide insights into elements of TLC that may be more frequently noted or those that are lacking in application. Similarly, if teacher responses were linked with principal responses, researchers could look for agreement

levels between teachers who share the same principal. This might demonstrate aspects of interactions between principals and their individual teachers as well as elements of TLC that were not able to be analyzed in this study.

Further studies could explore connections between principal use of TLC and constructs such as teacher or principal burnout, staff turnover, engagement, collective trust, teacher efficacy, or collective efficacy. Ford et al. (2019) found organizational support for teacher psychological needs (STPN) was related to teachers' feelings of burnout, affective organizational commitment, and their decisions to leave their school or profession. The possible relationship between TLC and STPN could also be useful in exploring working conditions for teachers. Research could also explore principal use of TLC and other school indicators beyond accountability grade such as organizational culture and school climate. Principal use of TLC could also be evaluated in conjunction with student indicators such as absenteeism, self-efficacy, student engagement, support for student psychological needs, or post-secondary opportunities.

While this study generally explored the extent to which teachers reported the use of TLC by their principals, a more thorough examination of the structures could be a topic for future researchers. For example, reflective questioning is comprised of three types of questions – investigative, imaginative, and integrative (Adams et al., 2023a; Berger, 2014). The survey items asked teachers to report their experience with principals' use of reflective questioning and not those specific types of questions. School leaders could benefit and teachers' experience with reflective questioning deepened if further support and training was provided centering on the creation and integration of those specific question types.

In terms of the second research question that focused on differences in teacher characteristics, an expanded pool of survey responses could provide deeper analysis and understanding. For example, a larger pool of non-white respondents would provide opportunities to view more nuanced differences that may exist. The limited collection of survey responses did not look at content area or instructional disciplinary related categories. For example, are there differences between the reported use of TLC by teachers of English compared to science courses? Furthermore, the data analyzed in this particular study provided teacher demographics, but further research could also evaluate the use of TLC through the lens of principal demographics.

Similar opportunities to explore characteristics among a broader range of school characteristics and contexts might also prove fertile research ground. Challenges with this study exist with sample size while analyzing types of schools – namely traditional public schools and all other school types. The emergence of a variety of online schools, charter schools, and expansion of private schools present opportunities for researchers that are seeking to understand how teachers experience principal use of TLC. More questions about school characteristics exist than were answered in this study. A natural line of inquiry could arise around an assumption that TLC might be reported less in traditional public schools if the idea of traditional public school settings encompass more traditional leadership structures, hierarchies, bureaucracies, and protocols. If this is the case, do traditional public schools inherently present more barriers to TLC than other school models. If more barriers exist in a public school, is this due to less room for flexibility and responsiveness? Might barriers be tied to lower levels of relational capacity among the teaching staff or the school leadership?

The school characteristic that demonstrated the greatest variance in teachers' report of principal use of TLC was school accountability grade. As school accountability grades are a result of multi-layered factors, a deeper dive into this variance is warranted. Again, an examination of external pressures upon school leaders and/or staff could be viewed in the context of variances in leadership behaviors and/or the use of language by school leaders. The differences between language meant to mobilize, command, control, or transform could be explored within this category of school accountability grades.

An additional avenue of study might also explore the reported use of TLC by other instructional leaders who work with teachers from instructional coaches to assistant principals and supervisors of instructional staff. Perhaps closer and more frequent contact with assistant principals by teachers would manifest a higher percentage of the use of TLC than was reported by site principals. Similarly, a line of inquiry could be opened for the supervisors of school leaders including site principals and their assistants. What is the reported use of TLC by district administration staff in their interactions with subordinates at the building level? What training and preparation is evident for all instructional leaders engaged in the work of transformation?

Conclusion

The work of school leaders is relational and contextual. School leaders and stakeholders have the opportunity to transform current exigencies into aspirational realities. For too long, leadership conversations have not had a place at the table in preparation of aspiring school leaders or in their professional learning and continuous growth. TLC provides a framework, a lens, and a structure for the work of transformation. The power of transformation can elevate communities, schools, families,

staff, and most significantly students. They are worth the investment of energy, resources, and intentions. There is an adage that “talk is cheap” and another which states, “You talk the talk, so you better walk the walk.” Through the opportunity to unleash the potential in students’ lives, TLC demonstrates the value of talk is immeasurable. For school leaders to invest in this transformative power, they will “walk the walk” when they truly “talk the talk.”

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Appendix A: School Leader Transformative Leadership Conversation Scale

Directions: We are interested in understanding how education leaders use conversation to pursue an aspirational change. By aspirational change, we mean a challenging outcome that you and/or your school aspire to achieve over time. In thinking about the lead principal of your school, please respond to each of the following items based on how often your principal talks with you in this way.

In conversations with me about an aspirational change, my school principal generally

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Asks questions that challenge me to think deeper about my work					
Asks questions that allow me to think about assumptions I make in my work					
Asks questions that allow me to self-reflect on my work					
Asks questions that allow me to reflect on multiple thoughts and interpretations about my work					
Listens with curiosity to what I have to say					
Listens to me in a non-judgmental way					
Listens to what I am experiencing					
Listens for how I might improve					
Recognizes the work I do with encouragement					
Expresses concern for my well-being					
Tells me I can be effective in the changes I am making in my work					

Appendix B

IRB approval outcome letter

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: June 01, 2022 **IRB#:** 14609

Principal Investigator: Curt Adams, PHD

Approval Date: 5/31/2022

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: A Study of Leadership Conversation Approaches

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. **Note, the IRB made minor changes to the consent forms (added PI contact information). Please ensure that you are using the IRB stamped and approved consent forms once data collection begins (update Qualtrics accordingly).** To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board