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LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN RURAL REMOTE HIGH SCHOOLS OF A SOUTHWESTERN STATE

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

BY

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DEDICATION PAGE

I dedicate this work to my husband, Scott, my children, and my grandchildren. They showed patience and understanding during the 6 ½ years I have dedicated to obtaining yet another degree. They overlooked my shortcomings in social and familial responsibilities. My husband and grandchildren pitched in around the house to help keep things relatively tidy and even cooked means so I could work long hours at the computer. My children hosted holidays in my place and was forgiving of my distraction.

I am looking forward to returning to the fold and participating without distraction the lofty role of wife, mother, and grandmother.

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Abstract

This hermeneutic phenomenology research study expands the knowledge base concerning leadership experiences of female high school principals. Specifically, the research explored the perceptions of four female high school principals about their own lived experiences as leaders in remote rural school districts. The research used phenomenological interviews to obtain rich descriptive data about experiences pertaining to their education leadership role. The in-depth interviews were conducted after the manner of Seidman's (2013) 3-phase process to collect 1) a focused life history, 2) details of experience, and 3) the reflection of meaning from the participants.

The intersection of rural context, gender, and high school level creates a nuanced subset in school leadership research. Rather than discuss gender and rurality as separate themes, these two factors are presented within the emerging themes given the context of the participants work and life experiences in being a female school leader in a rural school. Five (5) significant themes emerged through the analysis of the data generated from the participants' interviews about their lived experiences: (a) Transitioning to Principal with subthemes of district/rural background and Encouragement/Support, (b) Complexities Inherent to the Role of Principal, (d) Incidents in the Experience of Principal, (e) Relationships Important to the Experience with subthemes of student, faculty, and community, and (f) Family-like climate.

The findings of this study suggest implications for practice at the building and district level as well for research to appreciate the importance of rural schools benefiting from effective leaders including those who may be female.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Research has shown that school leadership has an indirect effect on student achievement and that second only to the classroom teacher, the school principal largely shapes student learning (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Leadership can be defined by its responsibilities, and effective leadership can be defined by its characteristics. School leadership has changed from simple site management to encompass many more responsibilities. School leaders must manage multiple responsibilities, such as developing and supporting teachers; direction setting with accountability; financial and human resource management; and collaboration with external stakeholders and agencies (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2012). In the era of high stakes testing and accountability, choosing the right people to lead our nation's schools is more important than ever. This holds especially true in the nation's remote, rural schools that face challenges in filling vacancies as well as retaining qualified principals (Howley & Pendarvis, 2002; Natkin, 2003; Provasnik, KewalRamani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007). Although schools in remote rural areas have been known for their conservative nature and are still predominately overseen by male school leaders, they have made strides in opening up top leadership positions to both genders, male and female, increasing the leadership pool. However, research on female leaders in remote rural areas is limited.

A recent Wallace Foundation Perspective summarized a decade of research identifying what effective school principals do (2013). The research identified five key practices for effective principals, "shaping vision of academic success for all students;

creating a climate hospitable to education; cultivating leadership in others; improving instruction; and managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement" (2013, p. 4). A number of other studies have found similarities in effective leaders including some referencing the rural context. Few studies, however, have attempted to understand the female leader in a rural context. This study will add to the small body of knowledge pertaining to female leaders in rural contexts.

Researchers have endeavored to understand what makes good leadership, beginning with Carlyle's 1907 "great man" theory (as cited in Burns, 1978) while others focused not only on personal characteristics or traits possessed by effective leaders but also on leader behaviors in response to specific contexts and/or situations in contingency theory (Ayman, 2004; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Hoy & Miskel, 1987). Historically, effective leadership styles have been equated to stereotypical male characteristics resulting in the assumption that women would have difficulty filling leadership roles. "Think manager-think male" was a common perception that has been a barrier to women in leadership roles (Schein, 1973; 1975).

Yet, the number of women filling the leadership role in school districts across the country is on the rise. Overall, female principals have increased from 41% in 1987-1988 to 52% in 2011-2012 (see Table 1). The increase in women in school leadership positions calls for an increase in research devoted to understanding the leadership of women at the school level.

The increase of female principals has been most dramatic for rural schools and in the sub category of high schools (Table 1). In 1987-1988 only 1/3 of principals in rural public schools were female; however, by 2011-2012 the number of female

principals in rural schools increased to forty-four percent. In one Southwestern state with only two large urban areas, 127 out of 424 total public high schools are designated as remote rural (NCES, 2013). Female principals lead eight (8) of these, roughly nine percent. This falls considerably below the national percentage for rural school female leaders in general, 44 percent. Although the reason for the low numbers of female principals in these areas is not the focus of the current research, it is interesting to note. The low numbers of female principals in rural remote schools could have various explanations ranging from gender bias of conservative communities, school boards, and/or district administration to the reluctance of women to apply in rural areas (Fisher, 2010). Anticipating that this Southwest state will follow the trend of the rest of the country with an increase in the numbers of female principals, the need exists for additional research to understand the lived experiences of female high school principals in the remote rural context.

Table 1: Public School Principals by Gender

PRINCIPAL GENDER	1987-1988	1999-2000	2011-2012.
ALL PUBLIC SCHOOLS			
MALE % ALL LEVELS	59	56	48
FEMALE % ALL LEVELS	41	44	52
MALE % HIGH SCHOOL	91	79	70
FEMALE % HIGH SCHOOL	9	21	30
RURAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS			
MALE % ALL LEVELS	75		56
FEMALE % ALL LEVELS	25		44

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey: 1987-88, 1999-2000, 2011-2012

Purpose of Study

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of female school principals working in remote rural high schools and to illuminate their work experiences in order to inform both school leadership practice as a whole and to contribute additional empirical research on understanding the practice of female principals.

Research focused on school leaders in the rural context remains sparse. This research study provides empirical data to illuminate a further understanding of the work of female school leaders and provides rich description of female leadership in rural contexts as a means to inform both school leadership practice and extend the research knowledge on understanding the work of female school leaders.

Even though the numbers have been steadily increasing, the percentage of female principals in rural secondary schools continues to lag behind the number of female principals in urban and suburban schools. Since the number of female principals in rural high schools is increasing and should continue to do so, it is important to understand their leadership behaviors and how the remote rural context affects their leadership experience, if at all. This study further expands knowledge of principal experiences in relation to gender and the remote rural context. In addition, the study expands knowledge concerning female principals' perception of their own influence, if any, on the remote rural school success and community climate. Participation in the study allowed female principals of rural schools an opportunity to reflect on their own leadership experiences resulting in increased self-awareness and performance assessment.

Significance of Study and Contribution to Practice

Few research studies look at the roles of female high school principals in rural areas. One exception reported the lived experiences of four female high school principals in rural schools of a Midwestern state looking for contextual influences on leadership style (Bartling, 2013). Bartling's findings revealed the pervasiveness of care-focused decision making and relational leadership, which are aligned with typical female leadership styles (Eagly & Carli, 2003) and beneficial to the rural context demands for multiple role leadership (Urick & Bowers 2013). These studies introduce the importance of understanding the female leadership role in rural schools.

Adding to such research is vital to provide additional empirical findings in light of the growing numbers of women filling school leadership roles in rural areas. Hearing the voices of these principals as they share their experiences informs district leaders wanting to attract suitable applicants to remote rural schools. Understanding the leadership practices through the experiences of female principals in rural schools assists other aspiring principals in understanding the multi-varied work of a school principal from the perspective of female school leaders. Practicing female principals, especially in rural high schools, have influence over not only their own schools and communities but also the larger community of school principals across the region. A close examination of the lived experiences of these principals informs practice of current principals as well as teachers contemplating the school leadership position whether male or female.

Research Question

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of female principals of remote rural high schools in one southwestern state. The overarching question asked: What are the lived experiences of female high school principals in the nuanced context of remote rural school districts as they reflect upon their experiences and the influence their leadership has upon students, school, and community? As the researcher elicited essential components of the lived experience of participants, additional probing questions were asked during the interview process. A sample of these probing or prompting questions can be found in the Interview Guide (see Appendix C).

Research Method

The goal of a phenomenology is to gain understanding of the participants' every day experiences (van Manen, 2015). The exploration of the phenomena of human experience through an interchange between researcher and participants led to additional knowledge (Moustakas, 1994) on the phenomenon of female principals of remote rural high schools. The researcher used interviews after Seidman's (2013) protocol as the main method of data collection. The study explored the lived experience of four (4) female high school principals from a selection of remote rural high schools. Female principals of remote rural high schools were contacted through their respective school email to ascertain their willingness to volunteer to participate in the study. These emails were followed by telephone contact until four participants agreed to participate.

Hermeneutic phenomenology (per van Manen, 2015) informed the analysis of the interview data. The researcher took the rich description of lived experience from

each participant's interviews and read and reread the transcripts allowing themes to emerge within and across participants' stories to contribute a structure to guide the reader. While phenomenology has focus on pre-reflective experience and feelings of the lived experience, hermeneutic phenomenology (Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007) specifically allows the researcher to make-meaning through an iterative process of reviewing the participants' descriptive stories to illuminate their experience of the phenomena.

Limitations of Study

The results of this study are intended to add to the research of female leadership in remote rural areas. The participant pool, drawn from a southwestern state and limited to female principals of remote rural high schools, may limit the generalizability of the results. In addition, women leaders are not a homogeneous group; therefore, the leadership behaviors of these women cannot be generalized to all women even in remote rural areas. In spite of the limitations, this study provides rich description of the female leaders' lived experiences and discusses the importance and the impact of their stories to understanding school leadership practice.

Definition of Terms

As the study focuses on principals of the remote rural classification, it is important that the terms "rural" and "remote rural" are clearly defined. The general term "rural" can be and often is defined differently depending whether the policy or research concern is population density or geographic isolation. The Census Bureau defines "rural" based on population size and density; "rural" is defined as "all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area" (U.S. Census Bureau). The current census (2010) delineates urban areas as having at least 2,500 people. The Office

of Management and Budget (OMB) defines rural based on distance from metropolitan areas considering areas adjacent to metropolitan areas to have "high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured by commuting ties" (2013). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) revised locale type definitions in 2006 using both OMB proximity measures and the Census Bureau population measures divided into four categories – city, suburban, town, and rural. Rural is further broken into three subcategories – fringe, distant, and remote.

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used:

Distant - Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.

Fringe - Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.

Remote Rural – Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster. (NCES)

The present study concerned female high school principals in remote rural locations only.

Rural - all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area with a population of less than 2,500.

Overview of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters and an appendix section. The first chapter provides an introduction to the background of research on school leadership and particularly on female and rural leadership as well as presenting the statement of the problem and research questions, rationale for using qualitative research methods, the limitations of the study, and definitions. The second chapter contains a review of relevant literature to orient the reader concerning the expectation of leadership in general as well as leadership in rural schools and leadership of women. Chapter three describes the research methods including restatement of research questions, the rationale for selecting participants, the forms of data collection, how the data will be analyzed, as well as a discussion of credibility and trustworthiness of the study including the limitations of the research design. Chapter four presents the findings from the in-depth interviews of the four participants; quotes from the participants are included and parsed. The fifth chapter includes discussion of the themes emerging from the interview analysis as well as a discussion of the implications of the study along with future research recommendations closes the dissertation. Appendices contain copies of the internal review board approval, informed consent forms, and interview protocols.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

A hermeneutic phenomenological study seeks to create an interpretive understanding of participants' lived experience (van Manen, 2015). This chapter contains a literature review intended to orient the reader to the phenomenon under study with relevant literature and empirical research on school leadership specific to female school leadership in remote rural context. The understanding of phenomena is not isolated to one example in one study but is influenced by previous studies and each additional study (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). Therefore, an understanding of contemporary theories of effective leadership, leadership in nuanced settings as well as literature exploring the meaning of effective leadership of women and their work in the remote rural school context is necessary to situate the reader to the context of the current study.

Effective School Leadership Theories

Effective leadership evolved as the focus of research to determine leadership contribution to student outcomes, the goal of effective and successful schools. Effective school research has been ongoing since the 1960s (Lezotte, 1989) and has experienced renewed vigor periodically. An important dimension of effective schools is the site leaders. Research suggests that second only to the classroom teacher, the school principal largely shapes student learning (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Fullan, 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Wallace Foundation, 2006) making the principal position significant to student achievement. Much effort has been spent in the identification of

characteristics, skills, and competencies essential to effective school leadership in hopes that effective leadership can be emulated and disseminated from school to school (Duttweiler & Hord, 1987). Competing theories of school leadership have evolved in response to the press for school improvement using many different combinations of identified characteristics, skills, and competencies (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Yukl, 2012). This section of Chapter 2 discusses six leadership theories prevalent in the research literature in the last two decades: Transformational leadership, Instructional leadership, Distributive leadership, Sustainable leadership, Invitational leadership, and Constructivist leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Bass (1999) identified transformational leadership as charismatic-inspirational leadership using intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration toward followers. Burns (1978) introduced transformational leadership as a method of reading the followers' desires and needs to "engage the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents" (p. 4). Burns further claimed, "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation or morality" (p. 20). This transcendence beyond self-interest toward fulfillment of a higher calling or, at least the mission of the organization, develops commitment to organization that might otherwise be absent. Bass and Avolio (1997) proffered a number of behaviors to identify transformational leadership: idealized influence (attributes or behavior), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and

individualized consideration. These identifying behaviors depend on follower positive perception of leader intention, trustworthiness, and activities. As the title implies, transformational leadership transforms followers and prepares them to become leaders at some level within a shared or distributed leadership dynamic (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010).

Much of twentieth-century leadership can be categorized as transactional in nature, emphasizing work standards, focusing on task completion and employee compliance (Burns, 1978). To transform implies a movement away from the current status of a phenomenon- generally to a better state. Therefore, transformational leadership aspires to develop a more collegial and collaborative culture. Some would offer that transformational leadership is on the opposite continuum from transactional leadership (Bass, 1985). Others claim transactional elements (as managerial contributions) and transformational leadership can work in cooperation (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Transformational leaders have been preferred when compared to transactional leaders (Bass, 1997). Transformational leaders were promoted more often than transactional leaders and rated more highly by employees (Bass, 1997).

Conversely, leaders displaying cynicism about the job and the organization's mission were not likely to be transformative in their leader behaviors. Brommer, Rubin, and Baldwin (2004) studied two possible antecedents of transformational leadership behavior of 227 managers at different levels of manufacturing organizations: cynicism about organizational change and peer leadership behavior. Findings revealed that 1) leaders who displayed cynicism about organizational change were less likely to engage in transformational behaviors; 2) the level of transformational leadership behavior was

positively related to peers transformational leadership behavior; and 3) the presence of peers displaying transformational behaviors counteracted the consequences a leader's cynicism (Brommer, Rubin, and Baldwin, 2004).

Transformational leaders develop a vision or mission to inspire followers and endeavor to develop in them higher levels of ability and potential thereby increasing organization capacity. Transformational leadership behavior effects change in staff members' understanding of and commitment to the organization's mission and to colleagues. It is this function of transformational leadership that has interested school leadership researchers. Leithwood and colleagues have done a number of studies of transformational leadership in the school context to identify leader practices producing these effects (see Leithwood, Dart, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; 1999; 2005; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1991). To the following culture-changing dimensions - building school vision and goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support; symbolizing professional practices and values; demonstrating high performance expectations; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions –were added four managerial dimensions – staffing, instructional supports, monitoring school activities, and community focus (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Jantzi, &Steinbach, 1999). Transformational leadership has become a more rounded leadership theory incorporating the importance of both building a healthy school culture and managing the day-to-day functions of a complex organization.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership advocates assert that leadership efforts are most effective when they are focused on teaching and learning needs (Leithwood & Riehl,

2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Research indicates that school leaders who are open-minded and willing to learn from others are more successful in implementing meaningful change for school improvement (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). In addition, faculty and staff who place their trust in these leaders are willing to make changes, and feel comfortable expressing their views about the best way to approach the changes. Learning becomes a reciprocal activity with administration and teachers learning from each other. Hallinger (2003) also credited instructional leaders with creating positive learning climates where teachers can perform their duties and students can achieve at high levels.

The instructional leader's job is to foster and support the capacity and will of the individuals within the system (Fullan, 2014). The instructional leader may not be performing all these jobs himself but will trust in his capable faculty to carry out the vision they have created together. Pajak and Glickman (1989) suggested that the instructional leader may not be the principal but another leader whose "roles and positions were clearly defined as supporting and working primarily with teachers to improve curriculum and instruction" (p. 63). Shared responsibilities for the learning goals of the organization builds a unified and learning-focused environment for students and faculty.

Shared instructional leadership.

Marks and Printy (2003) described a shared instructional leadership in which the site principal collaborates with teachers on curriculum, instruction and assessment decisions. Principals and teachers work together to identify and solve problems for school improvement. This type of principal is the "leader of instructional leaders"

(Glickman, 1989, p.6). Through the collaborative work with teachers, leaders have greater impact on student achievement. Marks and Printy (2003) described instructional leadership- or the re-conceptualized shared instructional leadership- as "an inclusive concept, compatible with competent, empowered teachers" (p. 374) where teachers take responsibility for their own professional growth, inquire together, and interact with principals in the best interest of quality instruction. In comparing transformational leadership and instructional leadership, Marks and Printy (2003) held that, while transformational leadership is essential for reform and improvement efforts, shared instructional leadership makes a necessary complement for high quality teaching and learning. The resulting integrated leadership had the greatest effect on improvement in teaching and learning (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Distributive Leadership

Distributed leadership theory emerged as an alternative to the tired "heroic" leadership paradigm that has been popular for the last quarter of a century (Gronn, 2009). Recent scholarship has touted the benefits of distributed and/or shared leadership and organization styles. Sheppard, et al. (2009) has described distributed leadership as consisting of both formal and informal leadership roles with teachers performing in a more partner-like manner rather than as a follower. Gorton (2010) suggested power sharing among all staff at all levels of the school encourages creative thinking and problem solving as well as increased professional behavior.

Proponents of distributive leadership argue that individual positional leadership is less important in modern context than it once was. Administration can distribute leadership by changing the way they view others in the district. Spillane (2005) explains

that “rather than viewing leadership practice as a product of a leader's knowledge and skill, the distributed perspective defines it as the interactions between people and their situation” (p. 144). Harris describes distributive leadership as that which engages “expertise wherever it exists within the organization” (p. 13) rather than within particular roles. Leithwood (2005) explained that distributed leadership is more about leadership practice than roles, functions, routines, or structures. Harris and Muijs (2005) found that distributed leadership shares decision-making processes widely among adults in the school. Yet, formal leadership continues to be important to manage converging agendas of participating individuals (Harris, 2007).

Although distributed leadership efforts are meant to “flatten hierarchies and empower teachers by having them engage in high impact and enriched work,” (Murphy & Louis, 1999, p. 322) the need for the stabilizing role of the principal remains and, rather than decreasing the leader’s workload, may result in increased demands on time and resources. Harris and Spillane (2008) held that “distributed leadership is not necessarily a good or bad thing: it depends. It depends on the context within which leadership is distributed and the prime aim of the distribution” (p. 33). Adopting a distributed leadership style without carefully considering existing school context and leadership capacity among staff members would not necessarily lead to school improvement.

Sustainable Leadership

Sustainable leadership emphasizes the sustainability of school improvement efforts for the long run over those dependent upon charismatic leadership that tends to dissipate with the exit of the heroic principal (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Davies (2007)

described sustainability as “the ability of individuals and schools to continue to adapt and improve to meet new challenges and complexity, and to be successful in new and demanding contexts” (p. 2). Sustainable leadership can be defined as that which “preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future” (Hargreaves, 2007, p. 224).

Hargreaves and Fink (2004) described seven critical principles of sustainable leadership. Sustainable leadership (a) lasts- beyond present administration through preparation for leadership succession; (b) spreads- not only through succession preparation but also through the ranks in the form of distributed leadership; (c) is socially just- benefiting all students in the community being mindful of effect on neighboring schools and communities; (d) is resourceful- developing material and human resources, providing support, and encouraging self-maintenance; (e) promotes diversity- promoting innovation, adaptability, and continuous improvement; (f) is forward-looking- adopting even an activist approach to promoting change in the school/community/political environment; and (g) supports sustainable leadership- through modelling, distributing leadership, and careful planning (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Sustainable leadership places the bar high for school reform leaders to make a lasting contribution to not only the school and its immediate community but also to the surrounding communities, moving toward cultural change and social justice. Long-term planning and leadership capacity building is necessary for that type of reform to be successful (Fink, 2011).

Fink (2011) discussed the shift from the "replacement planning" strategy that seeks qualified individuals to fill current vacant positions to the "succession management" strategy which concentrates on the development of leaders from within the organization to fill future positions. This succession management approach depends upon thoughtfully distributed leadership among potential leaders, building human capacity within the school. In this way, sustainable leadership is distributed leadership; however, not all distributed leadership is sustainable or even beneficial (Fink, 2011). Formal leadership can delegate leadership tasks to individuals, technically distributing leadership, while still holding firm control of formal structure. Sustainable leadership does not stop with the transformation of the school organization, which often relies on the charisma of a particular leader, but invests in the future of the organization, envisioning a time when leadership change is inevitable.

Invitational Leadership

Purkey and Novak (1998) defined invitational education as a theory that promotes communication among school and community stakeholders and nurtures the untapped potential of individuals. With a goal of making schooling "more exciting, satisfying, and enriching experience for everyone" (Purkey & Strahan, 1995, p. 2), four tenets guide invitational education:

1. Education is a cooperative, collaborative activity where process is as important as product.
2. People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly.
3. People possess untapped potential in all areas of human endeavor.

> 4. Human potential can best be realized by places, policies, processes, and programs specifically designed to invite development, and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally (Purkey & Novak, 1988, pp. 12- 13).

Tenets 1-3 relate the philosophy held by the invitational leader about education and stakeholders. Invitational leadership depends upon the premise that motivation comes from within the individual, and "invitational leaders seek to unleash each person's intrinsic energy by summoning people cordially to see themselves as capable of tackling tough challenges, overcoming obstacles, and accomplishing great things" (Purkey & Siegel, 2003, p. 5). Tenet 4 enumerates the elements of the education organization which together nurtures the learner. *People* include students, staff, administration, and community members that are invited (or disinvited) to participate in the organization. *Places* are the physical environment of the school and community where the people interact. *Policies* are the rules and procedures regulating the interactions and functions of the organization. *Programs* refer to the plan of action for the organization. *Processes* denote the activities that lead to a specific organizational goal.

The goal of invitational education leaders is to develop a caring, ethical, and democratic climate based on four interactive and reciprocal values: respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. These values play an important role in maximizing social capital already existing within the organization and/or developing social capital among stakeholders. In *A Guide to Effective School Leadership Theories*, Matthew Lynch (2012) discussed these four values. *Optimism* refers to leader belief in the inherent

potential of individuals within the organization. *Respect* requires the recognition of the individual's worth. *Trust* depends upon the confidence each has in another person's abilities, integrity, and responsibilities fulfilled. *Intentionality* describes the individual's purposeful decision to carry out actions to achieve a goal. The given definitions of the four values of invitational leadership describe the assumptions leaders hold as they strive for a truly inviting environment.

Constructivist Leadership

The core belief of constructivism holds that knowledge is created by the learner. Constructivist leadership may be described as "the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a shared purpose of schooling" (Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Lambert, Gardner, & Ford-Slack, 1995). This definition of leadership necessitates cooperation and collaboration among the educational community members in establishing and pursuing a vision. Adults and children construct knowledge together through inquiry, participation, and reflection (Lambert, 2003). Conzemius and O'Neill (2001) linked constructivist leadership with leadership capacity building within the school to realize the shared vision focused on student learning. Lambert (2003) noted that development of the institution's community members to be reflective and skillful leaders has as its goal steady and lasting student performance and the development of sustainable organizations of learning.

Researchers emphasized reciprocal and interdependent processes in the social environment as being integral to constructivist leadership in an educational environment. Lynch (2012) defines reciprocity as "mutual and dynamic interaction and

exchange of ideas and concerns" (p. 172). In this way, constructivist leadership depends upon positive relationships and cooperation among stakeholders in a trusting, hospitable climate. Lambert and colleagues (2002) insist that all members of the school community can act as leaders as long as the following exists: a sense of purpose and ethics; facilitation skills for constructing meaning; understanding of constructivist learning; understanding of the processes of change and transition; understanding of context; and a disposition for courage, risk-taking, low ego, and a sense for possibilities.

Summary

In reviewing the aforementioned leadership theories, it is evident that there is some agreement in the types of leadership practices that will likely result in school improvement and student achievement. All of these leadership theories break away from the authoritarian, top-down leadership style that prevailed for most of the twentieth century in favor of a more distributive and collaborative leadership style and subsequent leadership actions. They also favor relationship building as well as development of staff to increase the human capacity of the school. Instructional, distributive, and transformational leadership specifically mention the presence and cultivation of positive climate as a key element in school improvement and student achievement. Although only instructional and sustainable leadership theories list teaching and learning focus as a key element, one might assume that the other leadership theories applied in a school context would also have teaching and learning as an ultimate goal. A more in depth discussion of effective practices can be found in the following section.

Practices of Effective Leadership: Five Key Responsibilities of Principals

A number of leadership theories have evolved in the last decades of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first century that highlight effective leadership practices. The one-dimensional, hierarchical leadership of previous decades can no longer adequately meet the challenges and needs of schools preparing highly diverse student populations to compete in a global society under the scrutiny of accountability measures. Although not all the theories presented agree in every detail of effective leadership components, they feature some key elements in common. From these research studies emerge common practices of successful school leaders, which are building relationships, positive school climate, leadership capacity, and having an instructional or student focus.

Leithwood and colleagues (2006) analyzed more than 40 published studies identifying four core leadership practices of successful school leaders: setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program (see also, Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The authors followed this study with a research project investigating schools with consecutive years of improvement under the same headteacher (Sammons, Leithwood, Hopkins, Harris, & Gu, 2010). This research added to the list of core practices of school leaders previously identified as: enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, building collaboration internally, and building strong relationships outside the school community (Sammons, et.al, 2010).

The Wallace Foundation set out over a decade ago to support efforts in public school leadership improvement. In addition to providing funding for projects, Wallace

conducts research and produces reports on the various topics concerning public school leadership including that of the principal's role and effective practices. In a recent report (2013), The Wallace Foundation reiterates five key practices or responsibilities of effective school leadership which have consistently appeared in the research since 2000: (a) shaping a vision of academic success for all students; (b) creating a climate hospitable to education; (c) cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision; (d) improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn to their utmost; (e) managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

Although each of these practices individually has shown little effect on student achievement, the influence is greater when all five are found together (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Below is a descriptive summary of these practices as reported by the Wallace Foundation (2013) in the context of recent research.

Shaping a Vision of Academic Success for All Students

The idea that principals have a responsibility to establish a vision or mission to focus efforts on student academic achievement is relatively new (Bass, 1990; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Yukl, 2012). In the past, principals have acted more as site managers than instructional leaders. Actively and equitably including all students has been an ongoing process since desegregation and PL 94-142 or the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). The Wallace Foundation cites researchers from Vanderbilt University who describe the importance of having high standards for all as one "key to closing the achievement gap between advantaged and

less advantaged students and for raising the overall achievement of all students" (Porter, Murphy, Goldring, Elliot, Polikoff & May, 2008, p. 13). In light of these findings, developing a shared vision based on standards and the success for all students is critical to effective school leadership.

Hallinger and Heck (1996), in a review of principal effectiveness research from 1985 through 1995, found the one consistent mediating variable is one related to sustaining a school-wide focus on student learning through a common vision or mission. Transformational Leadership Theory presents vision building as promoting the development of a "compelling vision, conveying high performance expectations, projecting self-confidence, role modelling, expressing confidence in followers' abilities to achieve goals, emphasizing collective purpose and identity" (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006).This understanding of vision appears to be focused on the relationship between leader and follower for the development of a strong and effective working environment. Hallinger (2011) described principals as value leaders whose "ability to articulate a learning focused vision that is shared by others and to set clear goals creates a base for all other leadership strategies and actions" (p. 137). Vision development and direction setting are particularly important for leaders in turnaround schools with involvement of the staff to encourage ownership of the new direction (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

Vision statements have been used not so much as a projection into the future but an act of the present to change the way people viewed schools, learning, and children (Burke, 2009). Vision establishment without action will fail (Tierny, 2000); without implementation, a vision is only so many happy words. Effective vision statements

impel action: “Beliefs and visions must play out in day-to-day results for student learning” (Fawcett, Brobeck, Andrews, & Walker, 2001, p. 409).

Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) equated vision with moral imagination, the ability to see the difference between what is and what could be. The leader with moral imagination can take the status quo and change it to resemble the imagined potential. Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) conducted a qualitative study employing in-depth interviews of four elementary principals (3 males and 1 female) and four secondary principals (2 males and 2 female); and they found that the principals’ ability to produce an effective work environment was dependent upon the development of a positive relationship with teachers. The study by Licata, Teddlie, and Greenfield (1990) confirmed the hypotheses that teachers associate a robust, effective principal with one who advances school vision *if* principals are perceived as developing and implementing a school vision as a public process, not a private agenda.

Creating a Climate Hospitable to Education

A positive school climate has been given credit for school improvements such as improved student behavior and fewer emotional problems (Fallon, O’Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012; Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006), reduced student violence (Johnson, 2009), improved student achievement (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; Hoy & Hannum, 1997) as well improved teacher performance (Freiberg, 1998). Promoting a positive school climate creates a safe and enjoyable atmosphere conducive for teaching and learning.

A shared vision focused on standards and success for all requires a climate that places the importance of teaching and learning at its center. Effective leaders can

construct a positive climate by focusing on a school community with characteristics that include respect for members, an "upbeat, welcoming, solution-oriented, no-blame, professional" environment (Portin, Knapp, Russell, & Samuelson, p. 59), and inclusive activities to encourage participation of students and staff. The leader who promotes collaboration and relationship building reaps a team ready to secure a supportive, responsive, and safe climate for students, parents, and staff.

School climate is related to the existence of trust between groups within the school and between the school and parents (Adams, Forsyth, Mitchell 2009). Encouraging a positive climate of trust was shown to moderate the disadvantages of contextual challenges such as high poverty, at-risk populations, and school size (Adams, et al., 2009). Research shows that the principal has influence over the development of trust within the school. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2005) conducted an empirical analysis of faculty trust in colleagues and trust in principal and found that the collegial leadership of the principal contributed to faculty trust in principal, which had the most effect on the healthy climate of the school.

Even though research has shown the importance of a healthy school climate, state education departments have been slow to encourage its development. Cohen, McCabe, and Michelli (2009) reported that less than half of U.S. states have integrated a climate policy in their school improvement and accreditation systems, and those policies mentioning climate did not relate the importance of positive school climate to school improvement or academic achievement. Although Cohen, McCabe, and Michelli (2009) argued for state programs and policies to address school climate, school

principals' practices through various leadership styles can promote healthy school climate locally without formal mandates and evaluation.

Cultivating Leadership in Others

Research from the universities of Minnesota and Toronto revealed that teachers gave higher marks to principals who not only created a positive climate for instruction but also promoted leadership development among faculty (Seashore Louis, et al., 2010). The study also showed that leadership from sources including principals, teachers, and others is associated with improved student performance. One explanation offered is that the more distributed the leadership, the closer access students had to the "collective wisdom embedded within their communities" (Seashore Louis, et al., 2010, p. 35). Teachers led by effective principals were encouraged to work with one another and administration on many instruction-related activities leading to a sense of shared responsibility (Portin, Knapp, et al., 2009). In this way, developing leadership capacity among staff strengthens the learning community and creates a positive learning climate. Lambert (2003) referred to cultivating leadership in teachers as a type of leadership coaching akin to instructional coaching with "mentoring into leadership [being] an even larger perspective than coaching" (p. 427).

The development of professional learning communities has been used to provide opportunity and support for shared leadership. The opportunity for teachers to collaborate, reflect on their own teaching, and share strategies with each other bring them closer to democratic practices (Cate, Vaughn, & O'Hair, 2006). A recent study by Williams, O' Hair, and Cate (2009) found evidence that schools that had functioning professional learning communities transitioning toward democratic learning

communities have the potential to “expand the boundaries of the school by considering student, parental, and then community needs” (p. 468). Shared leadership means shared power, reducing the barriers between administration and faculty and, in turn, between faculty and parents. The education community becomes more collaborative and inclusive, involving all stakeholders in the teaching and learning process.

Transformational leadership talks of developing followers to their fullest potential (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1993) using idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Marks and Printy (2003) makes the argument for cultivating teacher leadership for school improvement. The concept of integrated leadership not only enhanced school performance but also eased the burden on leaders making them less susceptible to burnout. In addition, dispersing leadership within leadership teams has the potential to motivate and raise morale (Harris & Chapman, 2002), which contributes to a positive school climate.

Improving Instruction

As principals accept their roles as instructional leaders, they recognize the importance of developing and sustaining effective instructional practices. Therefore, effective principals not only promote leadership capacity within the school but also respect professional learning and instructional expertise. The Wallace Perspective (2013) records the practices principals almost unanimously endorsed in the Seashore Louis, Leithwood, et al. study (2010) including the awareness of teachers’ professional development needs and of their work in the classroom. The effective principal must leave the solace of the administrative offices and spend time in classrooms among the teachers and the students. The Minnesota-Toronto study (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, et

al., 2010) described effective principals as those who made many informal and spontaneous visits to classrooms followed by feedback to the teachers. In the study, principals who received lower marks might also make multiple visits to the classroom but were less spontaneous- informing the teacher ahead of time- and rarely provided useful feedback. Another important note from this study is that elementary school teachers were more likely to receive instructional guidance than teachers in middle or high schools.

A primary role of instructional leader is to provide and encourage opportunity for teachers' development. Research supports efforts by school and district leaders to not only provide quality professional development but also to ensure that all faculty partake in opportunities that supplies information about the most effective instructional strategies as well as provide support and follow-up for implementation of these strategies (Frick, Polizzi, & Frick, 2009). Educators who participate in continuous and life-long learning opportunities are best prepared to provide a learning-focused and positive school environment for students.

Managing People, Data, and Processes

While effective principals are promoting and supporting their existing staff, they must also be prepared to replace staff members who are not a good fit for the organization. Especially in the current climate of accountability and school improvement efforts, principals should be involved in "aggressively weeding out individuals who did not show the capacity to grow" (Portin, et al., 2009, p. 52). Data collection and interpretation plays a role in evaluating staff and in monitoring the progress of student achievement. Using the information from assessment and

performance data, effective principals work with teachers to identify problems, understand their causes, and brainstorm solutions. Finally, processes effective principals use to accomplish the responsibilities of the building or site leader include: planning, implementing, supporting, advocating, communicating, and monitoring. The following ideas from Porter, Murphy, Elliott, Goldring & Cravens (2007) provides a brief example of how a principle might employ each of these processes:

The school leader pressing for high academic standards would for example, map out rigorous targets for improvements in learning (planning), get the faculty on board to do what's necessary to meet those targets (implementing), encourage students and teachers in meeting the goals (supporting), challenge low expectations and low district funding for students with special needs (advocating), make sure families are aware of the learning goals (communication), and keep on top of test results (monitoring). (Wallace Perspective, 2013, p. 15)

The management skills of principals complement the other four effective leadership practices. Indeed, the management practices of principals provides the evaluation piece to allow principals to identify and address any weak areas within the school organization for improvement and sustainability.

Empirical Studies on Effective School Leadership

Much of school effectiveness research in the latter decades of the twentieth century was in response to the demoralizing findings in Coleman et al. (1966) and Jencks et al. (1972) declaring a lack of school effects on student achievement. Researchers began to search for school characteristics that contribute to student

achievement regardless of socioeconomic and student demographic factors. Effective school leadership research is a natural progression from effective school research.

Weber's (1971) study of four inner-city schools known for effective instruction revealed common elements. The schools had strong leadership with principals who set the tone for high expectations, were involved in instructional strategy decisions, and organized resource attribution and distribution. The schools had quiet and well-ordered environments and a focus on reading with periodic assessment (Weber, 1971). Madden, Lawson, and Sweet (as cited in Edmonds, 1979), conducted a similar study of 21pairs of elementary schools (21 high achieving and 21 low achieving) and sought school differences in achievement. From that study, effective schools were identified as having the following characteristics: (a) leadership focused on quality of instruction, (b) pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus, (c) orderly and safe climate supportive of teaching and learning, (d) teacher expectation of student achievement, and (e) assessment and program evaluation. Although not the only commonality, researchers took note of the role principals played in effective schools.

Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) sought to discover the role comprehensive professional development plays in school capacity building with a multiyear study in nine urban elementary schools serving low income students. A follow-up qualitative study involving the conceptualization of links between school leadership, professional development, and school capacity (King & Youngs, 2002) found effective principals could sustain school capacity through establishing trust and promoting teacher learning to the end of having knowledgeable and skilled faculty who shared a commitment to the school mission.

After identifying characteristics of effective schools and the leadership attributing to them, school effectiveness researchers turned to school improvement.

Grissom and Loeb (2011) found that principals' organizational management skills positively related to student success in this study that triangulated survey responses from principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parents with administrative data.

Robinson (2007) was able to isolate five leadership dimensions from a meta-analysis of empirical research that made moderate to large impact on student outcomes: establishing goals and expectations; strategic resourcing; planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. (2008) An additional review of the meta-analysis concluded that ‘‘the more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes.’’ (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008, p. 636).

The research shows that principal leadership practices and behaviors can and do effect student outcomes. Next, certain demographic information concerning principals and effective leadership is examined: gender and rural context.

Female School Leadership

It appears to be difficult for a discussion of women in leadership, both in schools and in general, to take place without a comparison to the leadership of men. Early research in female leadership sought to inquire whether women could lead as well as men. These studies identified leadership qualities apparent in the male dominated role

and checked for them in female leaders. A review of research on gender equity in educational leadership found that, "male behavior was the measuring stick against which all studies of women were to be compared," (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007, p. 116). Researchers reported similar behaviors and characteristics between male and female leaders (Bass, 1981; Bartol & Martin, 1986; Kanter, 1977; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Nieva & Gutek, 1981; Reay & Ball, 2000), which reassured those in charge that women are competent in the leadership role. Andersen and Hansson (2011) hypothesized that similarities in male and female public managers were found because certain personality types, whether male or female, aspired to leadership roles. Others speculated that women aspiring to the leadership position adopted "male" characteristics (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Wilson, 2004) to fit expectations better especially in roles dominated by men. However, as women's presence in leadership roles increased, researchers began to look for differences that would describe the feminine leadership style.

Loden (as cited in Eagly & Johnson, 1990) identified masculine leadership characteristics to include competitiveness, hierarchical authority, high control for the leader, and unemotional and analytic problem solving while presenting feminine leadership characteristics as cooperative, collaborative, lower control for the leader, and problem solving based on intuition and empathy as well as rationality. A meta-analysis of 50 studies comparing leadership styles of school principals also noted differences between the sexes (Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992). Findings revealed women principals as more democratic in their leadership, seeking collaboration in decision making (Eagly, Karau, & Johnson 1992). Women supervisors are more likely than men

to extend empowerment to teachers, focus on instructional priorities, and develop the social and emotional development of students (Shakeshaft, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007). In addition, women tend to be more transformational than men in charisma and individualized consideration as well as inspiring followers toward extending extra effort in their jobs (Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996). Since Shakeshaft (1987, 1989) chastised the research community, as well as leadership preparation programs, for ignoring the "female world" and the contribution that their views and practices would make, several research studies have been conducted. Recognizing that women have a unique approach to leadership, researchers turned to studying women in school leadership without necessarily comparing them to men.

Shakeshaft (1989) endorsed the observation of women administrators whose "perspectives will help to expand the knowledge base of practice…document how women administer and how their gender helps or hinders their work" (p. 235). A number of qualitative studies endeavored to chronicle the lived experiences of women in school leadership positions. Fennell (1999) interviewed four women principals of urban Canadian elementary schools, and the study revealed themes of empowering others and using positive power to resolve issues. A later study (Fennell, 2005) described female principals' efforts to overcome barriers through nurturing feelings of trust and positively working with others. Nomore and Jean-Marie (2008) studied four secondary women principals in a southwestern state with a shift in focus from 'what do leaders do' to 'what is leadership for.' In this case it was determined that leadership is for social justice. These women principals endeavored to create democratic schools by

building relationships, increasing awareness of equity issues, and establishing programs for diverse learning styles (Nomore & Jean-Marie, 2008).

Brunner and Grogan (2007) shared the voices of goal oriented and determined women who decided, against societal and political pressures, to lead school systems as superintendents. However, the majority of women who are qualified for leadership positions never apply. Fisher (2010) examined factors that contributed to potential female candidates for principal positions not to pursue those jobs and found that they found the position to be demanding, with social, political, and professional expectations contributing to stress**.**

After decades of studies evaluating female leadership with comparison to the 'standard' of male leadership, female leadership has emerged as worthy of exploration in its own right. The representative literature concerning female leaders has found women use their relational skills to empower others in distributive leadership. In addition, female leaders lead with a mind for social justice. However, the literature also revealed that many qualified women do not even apply to leadership positions for many reasons including the demanding social, political and professional responsibilities that lead to additional stress.

Effective Rural School Leadership

The principal role in rural schools is a public role; the principal is recognizable to all students, faculty, parents, and community members. In addition, the principal is expected to be accessible to stakeholders beyond school hours (Budge, 2006; Cruziero & Boone, 2009; Iron Moccasin, 2012). Taking this kind of central role in the rural community and the school requires a leader who is an adept manager of school

resources but who is also a school and community leader with opportunity to influence life-long learning and even community renewal (Pitzel, Benavides, Bianchi, Croom, Riva, Grein, Holloway, & Rendon, 2005).

Applying Relational Skills

Effective rural school leaders exhibit much the same characteristics as do effective leaders in other school contexts. However, research shows a few nuances pertinent to rural contexts, such as the important role of community (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Clark & Wildy, 2011; Cruzeiro & Boone; 2009). Clarke and Wildy (2011) identified certain leadership practices as particularly relevant to rural contexts: building "positive relationships among students, families, schools and community; knowledge of teaching and learning involving strategies leading to improved literacy and numeracy; and well-coordinated inter-agency collaboration to deal with the needs of students and their families" (p. 30).

Barley and Beesley (2007) included principals' support and close supervision as important contributions to success in high-performing, high-needs rural schools. The researchers identified other important leadership factors influencing school improvement: high expectations, focus on student learning, use of data, individualization of instruction, teacher retention and professional development, and alignment of curriculum. An important key to school improvement success was the close relationship with community, which aided the school community in enacting high expectations and facilitated principal leadership.

Cruzeiro and Boone (2009) in a qualitative study of essential principal characteristics for rural schools found that superintendents looked for qualities that are

often mentioned in research. These include potential for leadership, motivation of teachers and students, removal of ineffective teachers as well as "self-confidence, the ability to act independently of the superintendent's direct supervision, the capacity to act as a team member, strong verbal and written communication skills, and the ability to perform a number of tasks competently and simultaneously" (p. 7). However, a major concern these rural superintendents revealed was principal-community fit. Superintendents looked for candidates with the capability to understand and fit into the local, rural community. The principal's effort to take part in community events and activities "demonstrates genuine respect for the community's cultural, social, and political values" (Cruceiro & Boone, 2009, p. 7).

Klar and Brewer (2013) recommended a core set of leadership practices accompanied with comprehensive school-wide reform was a beginning but not enough in itself after a study of three high-needs rural middle schools. Leaders also needed the wisdom of how to lead within one's local context to bring about successful school improvement. Wright's (2012) dissertation research interviewed six principals of rural schools in New Zealand and found that rural school leadership practices were more likely to focus on monitoring student achievement and school curriculum. In addition, the research showed "the interrelationships of the important triad of leadership, curriculum, and community that was perceived to lead to the development and maintenance of effective schools in a rural context" (Wright, 2012, p. 235). In addition, rural leaders are expected to be highly visible, accessible, and approachable (Budge, 2006); must have an understanding of the values and attitudes of the rural community as well as the ability to "fit" (Schuman, 2010).

Balancing Competing Values

Another element factoring into rural leadership is the balancing of competing values (Budge, 2006; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2010; Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra, Angelidou, 2011). A phenomenological case study of a rural elementary principal who successfully supported his faculty through school change (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2010) discovered that this effective principal sought "to nurture and care for his staff and to invest personally in his teachers while simultaneously attempting to buffer them from external high-stakes accountability pressures" (p. 253). Rural school literature repeatedly insists that programs and policies created for the more populous urban and suburban schools do not fit well in a rural context (Bauch, 2001; Hardre, 2009; Hodgkinson, 2003); yet, rural school leaders are bound by legislation to implement and assess as if there were no differences. Complying with state and federal mandates while providing what is needed or wanted by local constituents creates an addition burden for rural school leadership.

Employing Principal Management Skills

Effective principals realize that much of their leadership responsibilities are managerial in nature: planning, implementing, supporting, advocating, communicating and monitoring (Wallace Foundation, 2013). This is particularly true in small, rural schools where principals have limited staff and may be in a dual leadership role. Unique to small, rural schools are administrators who fill the dual role of superintendent/principal. Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, and Slate (2008) examined the effective leadership behaviors of 37 superintendent/principal participants. Data from the participants, school board presidents, and teachers ranked tolerance of freedom (allow

followers the scope for initiative, decision, and action), representation (leader ability to speak and act for the group), and consideration as the top three behaviors of effective leaders. Recommendations from this study recognized the importance of time management, prioritization of responsibilities, and stress management.

Research disagrees about the role management skills should play in effective leadership. A recent dissertation study (Childers, 2013) explored the motivation of principals who sought to become more effective leaders rather than mere managers as well as the elements contributing to that process. Interviews with four principals yielded four themes around principal knowledge and self-efficacy beliefs including the influence of mentors; real life experiences; university administrative certification programs as well as state, local, and independent leadership development programs; and, finally, personal motivation and tacit knowledge.

However, a contrasting study triangulated principals' self-assessed task effectiveness with data collected from parents, teachers, and assistant principals identified five areas of principals' task effectiveness: instructional management; internal relations; external relationships; administration; and organization management (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). Organization management skills proved to be the dimension with the greatest difference in schools assigned an 'A' by the state accountability system and those scoring lower. In addition, the study showed similar relationship to organization management for teacher satisfaction and parent ratings.

Multidimensional or Integrated Leadership

Findings from case studies of rural primary schools in Cyprus (Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra, &Angelidou, 2011) formed the basis of a framework for successful

school leadership. The "people-centered leadership and clearly communicated values and visions combined with a strong emphasis on the promotion of learning, the use of networked leadership, as well as the creative management of competing values" (p. 551) emerged from a combination of leadership strategies making a multi-dimensional leadership style likely to be successful. Particular to the topic at hand, the principals in this study found or invented ways to meet the needs of their students when the centralized educational system failed to do so even if they had to bend the rules, making flexibility and creativity important characteristics of effective leaders of rural schools (Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra, &Angelidou, 2011).

A rural school study by Chance and Segura (2009) revealed that developing collaboration among teachers and supported by the principal led to student achievement. Leadership behaviors contributing to successful collaboration included both organizational structures (i.e., scheduling time for collaboration) and instructional leadership (i.e., focusing collaboration on improving instruction). Leadership behaviors focused on student-centered planning and accountability. Studies show that the development of trust among members of staff and between staff and administration to be critical in small school effectiveness (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Iron Moccasin, 2012; Wright, 2012). A "people-centered leadership and clearly communicated values and visions combined with a strong emphasis on the promotion of learning, the use of networked leadership, as well as the creative management of competing values" (Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra, & Angelidou, 2011, p. 551) emerged from a combination of leadership strategies making a multi-dimensional leadership style likely to be successful.

Although certain “idealized” leadership styles, such as transformational, instructional, and shared instructional leadership, have garnered researchers’ attention of late, a recent study by Urick and Bowers (2013) concluded that principals simultaneously employ behaviors associated with multiple leadership styles. The study identified three types of leaders- integrating, controlling, and balkanizing- to describe different combinations of leadership behaviors from transformational leadership and instructional leadership styles. The researchers explained the use of the term ‘balkanizing’ to refer to principals who reported lower instances of instructional or transformational behaviors but reported high levels of teacher influence and shared leadership. The study revealed balkanizing principals were most often male principals of rural schools (Urick & Bowers 2013).

Female Leadership in Rural Schools

The limited research focusing on female leaders in rural schools tend to address one of two prominent topics: 1) career progression and existent barriers or 2) leadership characteristics of female leaders and whether they differ from male leaders. Wallin (2005) compared contextual effect of rural Texas and rural Saskatchewan, Canada on female administrators’ career paths finding rural locales in both countries affected women’s efforts to become administration through the complication of time and financial expenditure. In addition, the study found that Texas female leaders were more likely to find entrance into central office administration than into the high school principal position due in part to stereotypic beliefs about physical size and the capacity to maintain discipline (Wallin, 2005).

Some researchers found a difference between female leadership styles and male leadership styles in rural schools. A 2002 study by Kerber interviewed fifteen female superintendents of rural school districts in a southwestern state and noted that these women found success in a male dominated position as much through internal beliefs as learned managerial skills. Bartling (2013) studied the leadership style of four female high school principals in the rural Midwest. Qualitative interviews with the principals revealed their predilection toward relational leadership, care-focused decision-making, empowerment of stakeholders, and the fostering of collaboration (Bartling, 2013). Sherman (2000) conducted interviews with 21female school administrators of rural Nova Scotia to "increase awareness and appreciation of the knowledge, values and contributions of women in rural settings as they struggle to establish alternative management styles which facilitate the full participation and contribution of women" (Sherman, 2000, p. 134). Administrators self-identified management styles that set women administrators apart from male administrators as relationship-oriented, instructional leadership, communication-focused, and maintaining connections (Sherman, 2000). However, a quantitative research study surveying 462 rural high school principals in the Great Plains states found no noteworthy differences between male and female leaders neither in daily activities nor leadership styles (Chance & Lingren, 1989). These conflicting results indicate further study is necessary to fully understand the leadership of male and female administration in rural schools.

Lived Experiences of Female Principals

Female principals' lived experiences are not often included in the research; however, what is available adds to the knowledge base about school administrators

(Mertz & McNeely, 1995). Early examples include narratives of beginning principals in relation to gender issues (Dunshea, 1998) and women principals' experience relating to power (Fennell, 2002) The first revealed that women met covert sexism but did not let it derail them from pursuing their goals. The second found women's attitudes about power ran along post-structuralist lines, willing to share power yet reserving legitimate power to establish an effective and conflict-free environment. Portraits of and storytelling from African American women principals meeting the challenges of race, gender, class, and culture revealed beliefs that gender was the challenge to overcome in the principal position (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Hutchins, 2002). A 2008 (Nomore & Jean-Marie) analysis of female secondary principals' interviews found diverse leadership styles embracing social justice and democracy agendas.

The perceptions of female principals in remote rural Australia about leadership were collected pre- and post- first year experience (Gilbert, 2012). Five out of eleven participants discovered their ideas of primary concern had changed. Prior to the first years' experience, the principals identified essential leadership skills as good communication, equitable treatment, time management, flexibility, and familiarity with school documents and education initiatives. At the conclusion of the year, one of the main discoveries was the need for confidence as one participant noted: "I didn't think it took as much self-confidence, but it does. I wouldn't have thought it, but that makes me question if I'm cut out to do it. Maybe I'm second in command type" (Gilbert, 2012, p. 158). Another participant stated that confidence was particularly important when unpopular decisions were necessary: "…be firm in the decision and stand by the decision. You can't please everyone" (p. 159). The end-of-year accounts continued to

express the new principals' realizations about their initiation into leadership and what they learned. Participants voiced regret about time spent on administrative paperwork and away from students and teaching. The participants expressed appreciation for the reflection opportunity that the interviews provided.

Four female high school principals in the rural Midwest shared experiences of support and informal mentorship to aid them with the leadership role and expectations of the rural community (Bartling, 2013). Participant 'Andrea' worked in a district that had frequent administration turnover, which she worked to her advantage: "When I was taking courses in an administrative program, I would connect with various administrators that I had worked with for guidance" (p. 38). Participant 'Barb' listed people who mentored her at the different levels of her career, "Each of these experiences, while it wasn't a formal mentorship, blessed me with people who felt it was necessary to share their experiences and give me a greater opportunity to expand and define my role, learn, and grow" (p. 43). Participant 'Connie' credited the actions of a practicing principal who was willing to allow her access to the job duties as she trained, "Knowing that I wanted to be a principal, he also took his approach with me that it was his job to kind of prepare me. And that's something I think I've kept as I've worked with my two assistant principals' (p. 46). The final participant, 'Darlene', identified the high school principal in the school where she assumed her first administrative role as mentor, "When I was dean of students, I felt the principal took me under his wing and taught me a great deal. Even after I left that district, I remained in contact with him" (p. 49). All four participants specified informal mentors who were in

the principal position and were male. Participants Andrea and Barb indicated having multiple informal mentors at least one of whom was female.

Participants in both the Gilbert (2012) and the Bartling (2013) were described as principals of rural schools. However, there were a lot of differences in their schools besides their locations on opposite sides of the world- Gilbert's study took place in Australia and Bartling's in the American Midwest. The participants in the Gilbert study lead schools with populations as few as ten and no more than eighty students in remote areas that may be up to 200 km from a business center. The Bartling study featured principals of four high school classified as rural but with larger populations-375, 1134, 860, and 257. The communities of all four schools in Bartling's study had been historically agricultural with traditions to match but all but one had transitioned into communities of mixed economy. Despite the differences of the contexts of the Gilbert study and the Bartling study, both studies recorded the challenges of female principals in a traditionally male role.

Participant "Connie" described frustration about service to special education students and her efforts to improve them: "I think early on, I was a little too progressive. This is a very traditional community; I mean very traditional. So my ideas of equity and social justice were not easy for some people to accept" (Bartling, 2013, p. 62). Darlene also cited obstacles with traditional viewpoints: "I at times have difficulty convincing parents that my decisions regarding discipline are the most appropriate. Some of them still support more of the eye-for-an- eye, tooth- for- a- tooth type of thing." (p. 63)

Participant 'Andrea' shared feelings of gender stereotypes being a factor she had to deal with. "One of the male teaching staff members came and mentioned that he

thought it was perhaps because of the female principal that some of our students were acting differently. He said that he told them they were acting like jerks and if they had a male principal they wouldn't be doing this" (Bartling, p. 65). The same participant described her efforts to socialize with fellow principals who were male in spite of the inability to play golf: "I think as a female, at times, you get left out of those social circles. It's a role [high school principalship] that is still for the most part dominated by a lot of men. If you're ever going to crack that you better find a way to fit into that social circle so you can be accepted." (Bartling, p. 68).

In the Gilbert (2012) study, anticipation of acceptance as principal in rural schools at the beginning of their experience addressed concerns about gender stereotypes. Participant 'Jil' opined, "If he is male and walking in he is a principal, while females have to earn stripes and in some communities really have to earn them…Women have to be more careful what they do than men." (Gilbert, p. 145) However Participant 'Nan' felt it would be less about gender and more about upbringing based on her experience as a teacher: "One of the fathers went to school here and has sent four kids through the school and he said I was the only teacher he could have a conversation with because I talk cattle prices and wheat. I don't talk school in social contexts." (Gilbert, p. 146) Post-experience interviews found problems with negative school culture as well as gender stereotypes in the community. Participant 'Nina' bemoaned the rejection of her efforts to provide a welcoming culture: "Some people were openly racist and other said things like, 'those poor aboriginal kids'…It's hard to create a culture of acceptance. It's difficult to set up if they are not hearing it from home." (Gilbert, p. 169). Another described her efforts to connect with staff: "I sat

down with one of the staff one afternoon and made so many attempts with her and said team work is valuable, but I feel sometimes we are playing different games. She said 'You're not on the team, are you?' And I asked how can I get you on and she said 'No, you can't.' She acknowledged we are playing different games." (p. 170).

The women principals did meet attitudes of male superiority as they suspected. It was clear that the rural communities largely preferred males in the principals and the teacher role. Participant 'Jil' found it surprising that the attitudes were supported by the women of the communities: "Bush women are funny women. They have the perception that a man will do it better; it belittles themselves, but they are indoctrinated that way. We have young women who want to go into the role with good vision but the community does not want them there just because they are females, so they are fighting a losing battle before they even start." (p. 178). Participant 'Ann' offered an explanation, "Men get more acceptance than women in places like this; the assumption is they will be good. Perhaps it's because there is a scarcity of males." (p. 178)

At the end of the initiating year for the women principals in Gilbert's (2012) study, only one of the eleven participants indicated a willingness to stay at the remote rural school; although three others later agreed to stay another year. Most participants left the remote rural schools citing isolation, negative work environment, and problems with parents and community members as well as their own feelings of not meeting expectations for their desires to leave.

> You need three years to change something for the better and know it will benefit everyone. Which is why I can see why they want principals to stay, but unfortunately, if people don't treat them the right way why

> would you stay? If they are not prepared to do anything to support me why would I stay? (p. 171).

Participant 'Eve' reflected on her time in the remote rural school, providing additional evidence for the difficulties new principals face in a remote area.

> …small school principalling [sic] is not about how well you can run a school – it is how your staff and community felt that their perceptions of your role are being met… every community is different and a hot bed for rumour [sic] and judgement. This makes walking into a small school job fraught with unforeseen and unfounded judgement calls – especially if you are a woman… (Gilbert, p.274).

Others were more positive about the experience including the following sentiments about how it: provided a 'huge learning experience' about how schools work; produced fond memories of the people met; and offered ideal opportunity to develop leadership skills (Gilbert, 2012).

Literature Summary and Importance of Current Study

The research continues to prove that school leadership matters in the daily activities of leading successful and effective schools. Schools led by effective principals were known for effective instruction (Weber, 1971). The Wallace Foundation (2013) identified five (5) key responsibilities of effective principals: (a) shaping a vision; (b) creating a hospitable climate; (c) cultivating leadership in others; (d) improving instruction; and (e) managing people, data, and processes. The presence of these practices may be more important to school improvement success than any particular leadership style.

Female representation in school leadership continues to lag behind male representation, especially considering the higher percentage of female teachers (76.3%) compared to male teachers in the profession (16.3%) according to the Schools and Staffing Survey (2011-2012) conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics. The female perspective of school leadership has historically been under-represented in education research (Shakeshaft, 1987, 1989). Recent years have seen some gains in research featuring female leadership in general; however, research focused on school leaders in the rural context remains sparse. Therefore, additional research on female leaders in the rural context is needed. This research study specifically aimed to provide empirical data to illuminate a further understanding of the work of female school leaders and to provide rich description of female leadership in rural contexts as a means to inform both school leadership practice and extend the research knowledge on female school leaders.

CHAPTER 3

The purpose of this study is to research and analyze the lived experiences of women in high school principal positions in remote rural districts. This study investigated this phenomenon through intensive interviews with participants meeting these criteria. This chapter describes research methods the researcher used to obtain and analyze the data for the study. The chapter includes a restatement of research questions, the rationale for selecting participants, the forms of data collection, how the data was analyzed, as well as a discussion of the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, including the limitations of the research design.

Methodology for Research

The specific methodology used in this study is phenomenology for the purpose of investigating the meaning of the lived experiences of women principals involved in the phenomena of leading remote rural high schools. Phenomenological research involves the study of a small group of participants using extensive interviews from which meaningful patterns emerge (Moustakas, 1994).

This study assumes that meaning is socially constructed, which corresponds with an interpretivist view (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2005; Washam, 1993). Knowledge is gained through a thorough and empathetic understanding, or Verstehen (Weber by Tucker, 1965) which is, in usage, closer to interpretation than simple understanding. Creswell (2013), however, specified that research in interpretivist paradigm relies as much as possible on participants' perception through open-ended questioning. In addition, the constructivist researcher focuses "on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings

of the participants" (Creswell, 2013, p. 8). In particular, the use of a phenomenological approach selected for this study achieves understanding of the participants' experiences as female high school principals in a rural context, revealing the essence of the experience.

Qualitative methodology is appropriate for a constructivist paradigm in which constructivists prefer to "interact and to have a dialogue with the studied participants" (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 71), working with qualitative data rich with descriptions of social constructs. The best way to hear the voices of these women in this study and truly understand their lived experiences is through interview in the style of phenomenology research.

A qualitative, phenomenological inquiry provides a glimpse into the commonalities across the individual participants in the natural setting of the phenomena under study to discover a universal essence (Creswell, 2012; van Manen, 1990). The goal for this research is to understand participants' perceptions of their own experiences as female principals and the part rural context plays in the principals' choices of leadership behaviors. Husserl (1927) defends this approach to capture the essence of the participant's experience:

> Through reflection, instead of grasping simply the matter straight-out – the values, goals, and instrumentalities – we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become 'conscious' of them, in which (in the broadest sense) they 'appear.' For this reason, they are called 'phenomena,' and their most general essential character is to exist as the 'consciousness-of' or 'appearance-of' the specific things, thoughts

(judged states of affairs, grounds, conclusions), plans, decisions, hopes, and so forth." (Husserl, 1927, p. 75)

As the participants reflected upon their experiences and composed them into narrative responses during the interview process, the participants created and communicated meaning for their lived experiences as female principals of remote rural high schools.

"Lived Experience," as a term used in phenomenological research, was borrowed from the German philosophers of the late 19th century who coined the term *erlebnis,* from the verb *erleben* meaning 'to live through' (Burch, 1990; Nelson, 2011). The concept was developed to express the different approach needed for human sciences as opposed to the abstract laws of natural sciences (Makkreel, 2012). The researcher elicited from the participant the experience of the phenomenon as it was lived through the participant's perception.

Regardless of the phenomena under study, people can only know what they experience (Husserl, 1962); therefore, it was paramount that the researcher guide participants to "reconstitute their lived experiences" (Seidman, 2013, p. 18) to understand their lived experience. The role of the researcher was to provide open-ended prompts and encouragement to the participant serving as an active listener to the participant's life narrative. The researcher used open-ended questions to allow each participant to freely express thoughts and impressions (Bogdan & Bilken, 1984). In-depth interviews not only gave voice to the lived experiences of each individual but also provided a method to understand behavior in the context of the individual (Seidman, 2013, p. 10).

Phenomenology research depends on the relationship of the researcher and the participants to communicate the participants' lived experience authentically. However, the researcher continued to maintain a distance for objectivity. As the interviewer, the researcher showed respect, interest, attention, and good manners, but avoided too close a relationship, which could bring a danger of exploitation of the participant (Seidman, 2013).

Since it is true that only the female principals themselves could know and express their experiences of leading a high school in a remote rural school site, the researcher's job was to elicit the participants' lived experience and to present it without tarnishing it with preconceived ideas. In this study, as the researcher encouraged the participants to reconstruct their experiences, attention was drawn to individual experiences, allowing the participants to consider their meaning (Seidman, 2013). Hence, this study drew on the phenomenology methodological approach as noted by Seidman (2013) and the use of a three phase in-depth interview series. The first phase focused on the life history of individual participants. The second phase focused on the details of their professional experience. The third phase focused on participant reflection on the meaning emerging from relating their experiences.

Hermeneutic phenomenology

The researcher employed a hermeneutic approach to the analysis of the data collected from participants' interviews. Max van Manen (1997) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as using "modes of discourse that try to merge…ways of knowing. [N]ot only do we understand things intellectually or conceptually, we also experience things in corporeal, relational, enactive, and situational modalities" (p. xiv).

Hermeneutic phenomenology offers reflective and insightful analysis of the lived experience of a phenomenon rather than a procedural structure for analysis (van Manen, 2015). Through hermeneutic phenomenology the researcher attempts the interpretation of the lived experience of participants even though the actual experience is more complex and indefinable than any language used to communicate it. van Manen further explains that while "phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'texts' of life" (p. 4). van Manen continues to explain phenomenological approach to understanding lived experience "without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it. So, phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights" (p. 9).

Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative study explores the lived experiences of female school principals working in remote rural high schools and illuminates their work experiences. This study seeks to inform both school leadership practice and to contribute additional empirical research on understanding the practice of female principals.

This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of female principals of remote rural high schools in one southwestern state. The overarching question asks: What are the lived experiences of female high school principals in the context of remote rural school districts as they reflect upon their experiences and the influence their leadership has upon students, school, and community?

Research focused on school leaders in the rural context remains sparse. This research study specifically aimed to provide empirical data to illuminate a further understanding of the work of female school leaders and to provide rich description of female leadership in rural contexts to inform both school leadership practice and extend the research knowledge on female school leader.

Study Population and Sample Selection

This study used purposive sampling as the preferred method for selecting participants for interviews from a smaller sample size (Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2012). The sample size in this study was indeed small: of the 127 high school principals in remote rural schools in this southwestern state, only 8 were identified as fitting the criteria for this study. Maxwell (2005) discusses four goals for purposive sampling to (a) attain a sample typical in setting, individuals, or activity; (b) represent the heterogeneity of a population; (c) select cases critical to test a developed or developing theory; and (d) with limitation, compare differences between settings and individuals. In this phenomenological study, it was imperative that participants be selected who were engaged in the experiences relevant to the study at the time of the study.

The purpose of this study, to explore the experiences of female high school principals leading remote rural high schools, naturally limited the sample size. Using the Elementary/Secondary Information System (ELSi), a custom table was generated from the National Center for Educational Statistics to filter for remote rural designated schools in the selected Southwest state resulting in 127 high schools. Principals' names were obtained from the Principal Salary Listing, Oklahoma State Department of Education. No database exists to filter for female principals; however, from the state's

public listing of principals, female principals were identified by their first names and verified through their school websites. During the potential participant selection process, one principal was found not to fit the criteria, and a second had left the position of high school principal for the position of superintendent and therefore no longer fit the criteria.

Eight female principals of remote rural high schools were identified as possible participants. Principals' contact information was obtained from their respective school web pages. Recruitment letters (see Appendix A) were sent to these purposively-selected principals via email. A phone inquiry was made to potential participants who did not respond to the email inquiry within a two-week window. Upon communicating an overview of the research study during the telephone conversation, four of the potential participants agreed to participate. Allowing for in-depth interviews and ample description of each participant's context, the researcher determined that four was a manageable number and a good representation of the total.

Participants, as well as their schools and communities, varied somewhat in their demographics. Some demographic information was referenced by one or more of the participants, therefore, providing that information for each participant became beneficial. The researcher has included only the pertinent demographics with some information intentionally vague to protect the identities of the participants since the sample size was so small. Please refer to the tables below. Table 2 (Participant Information), gives relevant background information for each participant, including her pseudonym., Table 3 (Community Demographics of Each Participant), provides relevant information about each participant's community and school.

Table 2. Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age: Older or Younger than 40	Level of Education	Years as Principal	Years of Service as Teacher	School Level of teaching experience
Mary Wollstonecraft	Younger	Masters in Administration	2	7	High School
Lucy Montgomery	Older	Masters in School counseling	2	3	High School
Marian Evans	Older	Masters in Special Education	1	5	Elementary
Charlotte Bronte	Older	Masters in Administration	1	1	High School
			5	0	
			6	5	

Table 3. Community Demographics of Each Participant

Pseudonym	District Population	Percent White	College Degree	Household Income	High School enrollment	Student Mobility	Average Absences	Number of Subjects offered
Mary Wollstonecraft	1,832	92%	42%	$74,000	79	6%	8.3	35.5
Lucy Montgomery	1,825	79%	29%	$47,000	66	11%	10.9	21
Marian Evans	613	64%	9%	$48,944	56	22%	10.5	22
Charlotte Bronte	1,108	83%	17%	$63,572	63	9%	8	22
State	7,387	59%	24%	$62,871	374	10%	9.8	35.3

The participants represent half of the female high school principals whose schools fit the designation of remote rural (NCES) in the southwestern state under investigation. Each of the four participants accepted the principal role in the same district in which she taught. All possess a Master's degree but only two in administration. One participant has a master degree in special education, another in school counseling. Two participants had been in the position for less than 3 years, and two participants had been in the position for more than 15 years.

Research Approval Process

Prior to contacting any participants and beginning human involvement in the research, the researcher successfully completed online training regarding the ethical treatment of human participants and obtained approval from the institutional Internal Review Board (See Appendix D).

Interview Process and Protocol

The researcher contacted by telephone participants to arrange the initial interview who responded positively to the invitation to participate as volunteers in the study. Through the telephone communication with potential participants, the researcher secured initial interview appointments with four female principals of remote rural high schools. Two participants preferred to meet with the researcher in their offices during the course of the regular school day. Two participants preferred to meet in their offices early before school started. Details of the study, a copy of IRB approval, and the consent form to participate in three phases of interview had been delivered to participants via email prior to the start of interviews. The signed informed consent form was obtained in person at the first interview session. The researcher followed the three-phase interview process recommended by Seidman (2013) with the following emphasis for each phase: 1) focused life history, 2) details of experience, and 3) reflection on the meaning. The three-phase interview process allowed the researcher opportunity to gain insight into the participant within the context of their lives.

This researcher conducted the interview sessions herself, and followed Seidman's (2013) protocol in completing the three interview phases. Both Phase 1 and Phase 2 topics were covered in the first face-to-face interview session. The third

interview session took place at least a week, but no more than two weeks, following the first interview session (See Appendix C for interview questions). Audio recordings were made of each of the interview sessions with consent of the participant. In addition, the researcher took notes during the interview sessions and reflection memos immediately following each interview session.

During the first interview session, the researcher established rapport with the participant then collected demographic and background information including the participants' path to the principal's position to complete Phase 1 of Seidman's protocol. The researcher asked open-ended questions to encourage each participant to share how she came to the position she currently occupied as principal of a remote rural high school. The researcher then transitioned into Phase 2 with "how" questions rather than "why" questions, allowing the participant to reconstruct experiences in the context of their own lives (Seidman, 2013). Phase 2 interview questions focused on participants' perception of their role as high school principal in the school community and the remote rural community at large. The researcher encouraged the participants to share illustrative details rather than opinions about their experiences as high school principal. The participants were encouraged to share details of their lived experiences as female leaders in a remote rural context and to share narrative examples of situations that illustrate their leadership experiences. The researcher strove to allow the participant to steer the course of the discussion with conversational prompting of the researcher following advice from Seidman for exploration rather than probing questions (2013). Finally, dates and times for the remaining Phase 3 interview was set before concluding the first interview session with each participant. The researcher accommodated the

wishes of two participants for face-to-face interviews for Phase 3, while the remaining two participants elected to interview via the telephone.

The final interview session, Phase 3, asked participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. As Blumer (1969) indicated, the meaning people perceive in their experience and behaviors influences the experience itself. Seidman (2013) further explained the necessity of the researcher to understand the context of the participants' lives to fully understand their behavior. The final phase in the interview protocol allowed each participant and the researcher to participate in meaning making together, having first reconstructed the details of the participant's past and present experiences in Phase One and Two respectively. Each participant was prompted to reflect on details of the previous interview session to assist in verbalizing the meaning of her experiences.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis took on three distinct stages. Stage one covered what took place during each interview session—the collection of data. Stage two included the activity of transcribing the audio data from the first interview session and preparing for the next interview session, with possible follow-up or clarifying questions between interview sessions. Finally, stage three involved the deep analysis of data upon completion of all interviews from all participants.

Stage One

Data collection was aided through the audio recording of interviews as well as researcher notes and memos during and after each interview session. Vysgotsky (1987) as well as Seidman (2013) promoted the use of recording devices and word-for-word transcription to capture the consciousness of the participant. The researcher interviewed

each participant in their respective offices immediately before or during the school day. The audio recordings on the recording device were carefully secured in a locked case. In addition, the researcher wrote notes during the interview process and immediately after the interview. These handwritten notes were also secured in a locked case.

Stage Two

The researcher transcribed by hand a word-for-word script from the audio recordings soon after each interview with each participant. Knowing that the immediacy of transcription to the interview process would both decrease the problem of data overwhelming the researcher and allow clarity of memory (Maxwell, 2012), the researcher began to transcribe the data the day following each interview. Participants were immediately given a pseudonym for the transcription which was continued to be used in all writings from that time forward. The interviews were transcribed verbatim with notes describing nonverbal signals such as coughs, sighs, pauses, and laughs as well as background noises (Seidman, 2013). The researcher avoided modifying text by inserting punctuation and paragraphing that was not intended by the speaker in the initial transcription. Researcher hand-written notes from the interview session were typed up and kept in a password protected computer file as were the word-for-word transcriptions. Initial analysis of the data was ongoing as data was collected through each of the three interview phases and transcribed into a Word document. The researcher made use of memos and interview notes during review of the transcripts to inform composition of follow-up questions, especially for Phase 3 interviews (Seidman, 2013). Initial color coding marked sections of interest from each interview transcript.

However, the researcher waited until all interviews were complete for deep analysis as recommended by Seidman (2013).

Stage Three

The analysis of the collected data can be described as a multiple step process also. The initial analysis step was the creation of a vignette for each participant. After all three phases of interviews were completed for all participants, the researcher began the reduction process, the analysis of statements and themes for all possible meaning (Creswell, 2008). Repeated readings of researcher notes and interview transcripts provided the familiarity of the data the researcher needed to complete the reduction process. The researcher used brackets to mark data from interview transcripts to build a narrative vignette profile for each participant. As storytelling is a major method humans use to make sense of themselves and the world, it is an appropriate method to make sense of the participants' lived experiences. Crafting profiles from the participants' own words, allowed the interviewer to "bring the participant alive" (Seidman, p. 120) as part of the analysis and interpretation process.

Seidman (2013) recommends following a process for compiling the profiles or vignettes of participants. By using the participant's own words, the researcher allowed those words to reflect the participant's consciousness (Seidman, 2013). Creation of the vignette was part of the analysis process. The process the researcher used to create the vignette is described here. First the researcher used a second copy of the transcript for bracketing and coding, always leaving an unmarked and intact copy of the transcripts for reference (Seidman, 2013). The researcher marked the interesting portions of the participants' transcripts. Next, the researcher created a new transcript including only the

marked portions. The researcher read through the new transcript marking passages that seem to tell the story most compellingly. Seidman (2013) encourages the researcher to use the participants' own words as much as possible and to make it clear when the researcher is inserting words not from the participant. This process allows the researcher to reduce the data while maintaining the words and the consciousness of the participants (Seidman, 2013). Minimal changes were made to the script when the researcher created vignettes for each participant, including adding punctuation and organizing thoughts into paragraphs in a more chronologically accurate narrative. The researcher then presented each participant with her own vignette for review to ensure that the edited version of the interview was consistent with what the participant intended to convey. The researcher made adjustments as indicated by participants.

The researcher used a copy of the original transcript along with the vignette to look for emergent themes from the selected passages across participants. While Seidman (2013) recommends simply marking with brackets sections of interest, the researcher also used color coding, as prescribed by Creswell (2008), to make identifying categories/themes apparent. Marking the hard copy transcription with brackets by hand was used during stage two, and further reduction activities were used in stage three. Color coding was used in this study as a method for organizing similar information into categories (Maxwell, 2012) as the researcher read through the word-for-word transcript of the interviews.

A new document was created, organizing the reduced selections in a chart with category headings. The researcher cut the highlighted and bracketed selections from a printed copy of the category chart and manually placed each selection into physical file

folders, each representing a different category. Each selection was marked with the participant's pseudonym initial, and corresponding selections for each participant were taped side-by-side inside the category folder. Seidman (2013) recommends organizing data from hard copy rather than the digital image on a computer. The researcher found this advantageous, allowing selected statements of all participants to be visible simultaneously within the category folder. Folders were used in place of a wall or bulletin board for the mobility factor. As the researcher moved into the next step in analysis and identifying and labeling themes across participants, only the selected text was considered.

Identification of Themes and Sub-Themes

When applying hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen) to the analysis process, the researcher uses emergent themes to structure the lived experience of participants in the effort to understand the phenomenon under study. Further, Siedman (2013) promotes two ways of reducing and sharing interview data: (a) developing profiles from individual interview transcripts, and (b) marking passages to place in categories from which themes are identified. Moving into the theme identification process, the researcher adopted a perspective advocated by van Manen. According to van Manen (2015) hermeneutic phenomenological research to unveil the lived experience of participants should not be a mechanical exercise to breakdown content in search of text frequency to reveal themes. Instead, understanding lived experience "is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery, or disclosure…thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of 'seeing' meaning" (van Manen, 2015, p. 79). Themes in hermeneutic phenomenological research describes the

lived experience of the participants of a phenomenon and is a structural tool to guide the reader through the experience. The researcher employed methods of meaning making through the identification of experiences important in the participants' reflection and retelling of their lived experience as a school principal in a remote rural context.

Being mindful of Siedman's (2013) recommendation for immersion in the interview data to ensure that the information presented accurately the participants' experience, the researcher read and reread excerpts within each category folder seeking themes across participants. In the multiple readings, certain excerpts and quotes stood out as significant in relation either to the other participants' experience or to the existing literature. Like excerpts were grouped together and a thematic label was chosen to organize the information to aid the reader. Rather than discuss gender factors and rurality factors as separate themes, these two factors are presented within the emerging themes given the context of the participants work and life experiences in being a female school leader in a rural school. Five (5) significant themes emerged through the analysis of the data generated from the participants' interviews about their lived experiences: (a) Transitioning to Principal, (b) Complexities Inherent to the Role of Principal (d) Incidents in the Experiences of Principal, (e) Relationships Important to the Experience, and (f) Family-like Climate. Within two themes, sub-themes emerged which further illuminated the participants' experiences working and living in a rural community as a high school principal. Within the theme Transitioning to Principal sub-themes regarding the participants' past experience in a rural context and as a teacher of the same district emerged to further illuminate the manner in which the participants were able to transition to the principal role. In addition, the support and encouragement the

participants received from administration and/or peers emerged as another sub-theme supporting the theme Transitioning to Principal. Within the Relationships Important to the Experience theme, three sub-themes describe the participants' interaction with students, faculty, and community. Chapters 4 and 5 contain the findings and discussion of the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Credibility and Integrity

The data under analysis in this study originated with the narratives of the participants. The three-interview process used by the researcher supported the validity of the interview process and data collection method used. The existence of internal consistency over the multiple interview sessions and over a period of time lent credibility to the responses given (Seidman, 1998). Providing a minimum number of extracts from every participant's interview and for every theme as the researcher did (see discussion in chapter 4), lends trustworthiness to the researcher's efforts (Smith, 2011).

Some concern in the phenomenological approach to research is in the ability of the researcher to provide a detached and unbiased representation of the participants' experiences. The researcher made conscious effort to separate prior knowledge and experiences from the information provided by participants in the interviewing process. Moustakas (1994) interprets Husserl's Epoché, meaning to abstain from, as an admonition to "stay away from everyday habits of knowing things, people, and events" (p. 85). In avoiding suppositions about the phenomena of female high school principals in remote rural districts, the researcher was able to look with "fresh eyes." The process

of acknowledging the existence of possible bias allowed the researcher to put it aside and see the thing for itself without prejudgment. Discussion of possible researcher bias is described in its own section following.

Minimizing Researcher Bias

Seidman (2013) encourages phenomenological researchers to acknowledge the interest that drew them to the topic to "minimize distortion such interest can cause in the way they carry out their interviewing" (p. 35). Since the researcher is the instrument for qualitative research, the values and expectations of the researcher may influence the conduct and conclusions of the study (Maxwell, 2012). It is important for the researcher be cognizant of that in order to avoid influencing participants and the study.

This researcher's experiences in remote rural schools have resulted in certain assumptions about these schools and the communities in which they exist. The researcher/interviewer attended a remote rural high school. She also worked as a teacher and counselor in several remote rural high schools, two of which were led by female principals. The researcher was working in a remote rural high school at the time of the study which was not led by a female principal. The researcher acknowledges the possibility for bias or reactivity based upon prior experience in similar contexts. However, the researcher's experience in multiple remote rural schools broadened her views about remote rural schools and their communities. Although similarities existed among the researcher's experiences in the different remote rural high schools, the particulars of each school and community were different.

The researcher used open-ended questions to draw out the participants' experience and avoided asking leading questions based on her own experience in

remote rural schools (Maxwell, 2012). Recording thoughts and impressions in analytic memos throughout the interviewing and analysis process promoted reflection and allowed the researcher to clearly determine impressions that came from her experiences and those of the participant. This activity curbed possible assumptions and biases of the researcher from becoming part of the research data. In addition, the three-phase interview sequence allowed an opportunity to check for internal consistency of the participants' responses from one interview session to the next (Seidman, 2013). The third phase of the interview sequence acts as a member check as participants reflect on responses to prior interview questions and make meaning of the connections of their work and life. In addition, the researcher sent each participant her own vignette created from the interviews to review before proceeding with the study. Furthermore, the transcripts and notes of the interview sessions and the interaction of participants and researcher document the researchers care to avoid undue influence (Seidman, 2013).

Confidentiality

All personally identifying information was removed from data for the protection of the participants. Every effort to maintain confidentiality and anonymity was made. Pseudonyms have been used in place of participants' names to protect their identities. All participants were fully informed about the parameters of the study and completed an informed consent form before continuing in the study to acknowledge their understanding of the use of their information and masking of their identity in the dissertation and any research report.

Research Study Boundaries

The research study is bounded in scope by the specific sample pool from which the participants were drawn. The focus of the study being remote rural high schools of a particular Southwest state limited the sample to less than 150 schools. Of these schools, eight had female principals leading at the high school level. With this narrowed focus, the findings will not be generalizable to all high school principals. Nor will the findings necessarily be generalizable to all female principals. The findings could, however, provide material for theory building and certainly informs practice to further understand school leadership; and specifically informs both practice and research on understanding female school leadership experiences in a rural school.

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 3 explained the overarching phenomenological method for conducting the study. Specifically, a hermeneutic approach was followed to analyze the data to reveal emergent themes across participants. Again, the study focus was on understanding female high school principals' lived experiences as they lead schools in remote rural areas and their perceived influence upon students, school, and community. Open-ended interview questions after the three-phase style of Seidman (2013) were used. The researcher categorized excerpts from participant interview transcripts for close analysis and as a means to generate findings pertaining to this study's research questions, which is discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter, the researcher describes the rich data findings from each participant's lived experience as a female high school principal in a remote rural context. This study investigated the lived experiences of female high school principals in the nuanced context of remote rural school districts as they reflected upon their experiences and the influence their leadership has upon students, school, and community. The research question and the open-ended interview protocol (see Appendix C) guided the conversation with each of the four participants and was useful in organizing the participant's responses about their lived experiences as a high school principal in a rural school.

This chapter explains the emergent themes that resulted from the study examining the experiences of female high school principals of remote rural districts. As described in Chapter 3, each participant was given a pseudonym to protect her identity and to facilitate the discussion of her unique experiences. Five (5) significant themes emerged through the analysis of the data generated from the participants' interviews about their lived experiences: (a) Transitioning to Principal with subthemes of district/rural background and Encouragement/Support, (b) Complexities Inherent to the Role of Principal, (d) Incidents in the Experience of Principal, (e) Relationships Important to the Experience with subthemes of student, faculty, and community, and (f) Family-like Climate. Excerpts from the interviews of each participant have been illuminated to provide support for each of the themes identified.

The following sections present the themes and stories that support the significance of finding as impacting each of the principals' understanding and

explanation of their role as a high school principal. Each theme is first introduced with a discussion on the key ideas that undergird the lived experiences of the participants as related to the theme. Thereafter, each participant's own experiences are highlighted individually to support their own lived story in support of the overarching theme.

Since the current study is specific to female school principals in the rural setting, the participants' lived experiences described are couched within their view of being female and working and living in a rural community. Rather than discuss gender factors and rurality factors as separate themes, these two factors are presented within the emerging themes given the context of the participants' work and life experiences in being a female school leader in a rural school.

Transitioning to Principal

All four participants spent their entire career as educators in the district of which they now serve as high school principals. Only one participant, Principal Evans, taught at a different school site at a different level before becoming the high school principal at her current building; the three others taught in the same building where they are now principals. That being the case, none of the women were faced with uprooting family and household to accept their principal position since all reside and work in the rural community in which they were teachers prior to school leadership. All participants were familiar with school stakeholders and community expectations and culture. However, the nature of the principal position in small rural schools required other life adjustments as each of the participants explained unique circumstances of a rural community that has much of its social and informational needs met through the school. Each participant describes here how her transition to the high school principal position was eased or

complicated by (a) her own district experience and rural community background and (b) encouragement and support from colleagues.

District Experience /Rural Community Background

The first sub-theme described here is the stories of participants' lived experiences in the school district and their rural community background. The participants in this study gave credit to their experience within the district and familiarity with the community as key to their receiving the opportunity to serve as high school principal. In addition, the participants felt their background in the unique manner of remote rural living gave them both insight into the expectations of their stakeholders as well as key skills that assisted them with the complexity of being a high school principal.

Principal Bronte

Principal Bronte had been a teacher for 15 years in her rural community prior to accepting the position as high school principal, and she expressed that this experience was the bridge that connected her to her community and aided the transition to the principal position. She admitted some adjustment in her relationship with and behavior toward the students and community was necessary for school leadership decision making. She described going from "a teacher teaching a class that the community really enjoyed and really liked and then step[ping] into a role as a principal where you had to make disciplinary decisions…You're going to make some of the community or parents not happy." However, she felt the fifteen years as a teacher in the community gave her an advantage, also. She expressed, "I think it helped that I'd been here for so many years beforehand. People knew me." Principal Bronte was able to utilize the prior

relationship established between the community and herself as a teacher to assist her in the new administrative role.

Principal Bronte offered her rural background as an equalizing factor as far as gender consideration. She explained that she learned many life skills traditionally linked to men while growing up in the rural context.

> I grew up in [a] rural place where we drove a tractor. I drove a truck in the summer time. When a delivery comes [to the school] and you have to get the tractor out and get the fork lift and get it off the truck [I can do it]. But that's because I grew up in a rural area. If I hadn't grown up in a rural area on the farm where I had to do things, I probably couldn't do all those things.

Principal Bronte presented her familiarity with the district and its people as well as a specific skillset, which she contributes to her rural upbringing, in aiding her transition from classroom teacher to high school principal.

Principal Evans

Principal Evans explained her connection with the rural district in which she is now a high school principal. She also explained that she had experience, although briefly, in a larger district.

> I was familiar with that area, because I just live about 25 miles from here just in the southeast portion. I'd done some subbing in a larger school…
> It wasn't like I was looking for a job at a small school or large school.
> It's just kind of the way it unfolded.

Principal Evans worked in the elementary school of the district for five years prior to transitioning to the high school principal position. It was that experience that she credited with her success in transitioning to the high school. “I didn’t have all the high school students when they were in elementary, but I had some. I got to know the families.” She opined that having an affinity for a small rural community was helpful. “A person needs to understand the community’s expectations and know how to communicate effectively with them. You’re going to see the same families, same people, year after year.” Therefore, her experience not only with small town living and community expectation in general but also with specific families assisted her in the transition from teacher to principal.

Principal Montgomery

Principal Montgomery gave insights into the bond of rural community when she shared that the reason she sought the principal position was her concern for school-community relationship. “I feel like I know this community. I was raised here, went to school here, taught here my whole teaching career, and I felt like our administration was not presenting our school well to the community. I just thought I could do better.” From Principal Montgomery’s perspective, the individuals who had filled the principal position in recent years prior to her leadership had not been from the community and these individuals seemed out of touch with the rural community values and concerns. Principal Montgomery believed her insider knowledge about school and community needs was essential for a successful tenure as high principal.

Principal Wollstonecraft

As with the other three participants, Principal Wollstonecraft was a teacher in the district prior to her move to the high school principal position. Her teaching experience had been at the high school level, and she was familiar with many of the students. She found this advantageous because she had established a relationship with the student body already. She credits the positive relationship with the students in helping through a rough first year.

Principal Wollstonecraft explained how she came to the district in which she is now high school principal. “I moved out here with my husband; we met in college. He was from here. His mother was a teacher here.” Through marriage, she had a connection to the community and to the school district. She continued her story by describing her overestimation of her experience with the rural context. “I always thought that I was from a small town, rural area, but we were a town of about 10,000. So, when you move to a *county* of about 3,000 you really figure out what rural is.” She further expanded on that statement, noting, “It was getting used to driving 45 minutes to a Wal-Mart or a place to eat. And having to plan [ahead for shopping trips].” She laughed softly when she considered the differences in the schools. “And schools this size and the class size! I thought I graduated in a small class; it was 73. My largest class here is 29. So, big difference.”

Principal Wollstonecraft had the least amount of background in the rural community and as a teacher at the school site. She had been in the community just over ten years and was a teacher in the high school for seven years prior to moving to the high school principal position two years previous. She acknowledged that what she had

viewed as small and rural from her experience as a child was not the same experience as a *remote* rural school and community. Her knowledge and expectations of remote rural working and living did not synchronize as closely to her childhood community and school as did those of the other three participants. Principal Wollstonecraft also noted that her transition to a remote rural area took some adjustment.

Summary of District experience /Rural community background

Participants' knowledge of and rapport with their respective rural community and the community members' comfort with the participants eased the transition from teacher to high school principal. However, two of the participants, Principal Bronte and Principal Montgomery, had significantly more familiarity with the rural community having been raised in a remote rural area. One of the remaining two, Principal Wollstonecraft, who had the fewest years of service of the four, seemed to have more difficulty with establishing rapport with the community but intends to persevere.

Encouragement/Support

The second sub-theme of 'transitions' is encouragement/support. The participants of this study acknowledged their hesitation to accept the high school principal position knowing the responsibilities of the office. Encouragement from others solidified their resolve to accept the challenge of the high school principal position. Three of the four participants were encouraged to apply to the high school principal position by the superintendent of their respective schools. The solitary exception, Principal Montgomery, relied on the support she received from the community and her fellow teachers in spite of a less than encouraging response from her superintendent.

The participants described their efforts to seek support of colleagues as they transitioned to the principal position in the absence of formal mentoring opportunities.

Principal Bronte

Recalling her path to becoming a high school principal, Principal Bronte stated that her male superintendent at the time encouraged her to prepare for the high school principal position. In the excerpt following, she described the conversation she had with her superintendent that convinced her to accept the high school principal's position while she was working on her Master's degree in school administration, and while still working as a high school teacher in a remote rural school. She recounted:

> I was a teacher for, let's see, fifteen years, and seemed like I was doing a lot of the little things that it takes to be a principal. So, the superintendent here at that time came to me and said, 'You really need to work on your administrative degree. There will be an opening here and you're already doing some of the things that are things that administrators do...' I said, 'but I don't have time. I have three little kids at home. I don't have time to do that.' And he said, 'you'll have more time right now while they're little than when they are older and get involved in all their after-school activities and stuff.' So, I said 'okay.' It took me about 3 years to get it going to school in the summer and taking a class on Wednesday night each semester.

Principal Bronte expressed that she might not have attempted the move to the principal position without the encouragement from her superintendent. At least not at

that time while she was trying to balance work-life issues with her small children at home.

Although Principal Bronte identified her superintendent as her primary mentor in the early days of her tenure as principal, she also found networking with area rural principals and administrators helpful. “It’s good to have someone to bounce something off of. ‘How did you handle this situation?’ Or ‘what did you do?’ Or- ‘Oh, gosh, this report is due- How did you do that? Where did you find that?’” She continued to explain the importance of the network of administrators in schools of similar demographics and context. “It’s good to have those people to go to, to talk to, to visit with, to see what’s going on. Whether they are male or female…You pick up a phone and call each other or see each other or go by and see ‘em [sic].” Principal Bronte explained that it was a reciprocal relationship. “In turn, they’re doing the same thing. They’re giving you a call - ‘Hey, what did you do here?’ or ‘help me out here’ or something like that. To me, it’s very important to have a relationship with your area administrators.”

Principal Evans

Responding to a double vacancy in the school district -both the superintendent and high school principal position were open, a female veteran teacher approached her with a proposal and encouraged that they should fill the vacancies themselves- the fellow teacher, being more experienced, applied to the superintendent position while Principal Evans applied to the high school principal position. Principal Evans describes her mindset on the day she and her then fellow teacher, now superintendent, both took their respective school administration certification tests. She described,

> If I pass fine, if I don't that's fine too. Needless to say, history says I passed the test. What was really funny is that I didn't study at all for it. I'd been in New York City for nine days at a workshop. Well, I flew into Dallas, flew to Oklahoma City; she [my teacher friend] picked me up at the airport on Friday afternoon at 6 o'clock. We went Saturday morning. I took the principal; she took superintendent. And that's the reason I'm here.

Her description illustrates that, although she was not reluctant to take the position, she was not seeking to advance to the position of high school principal. If it had not been for the coaxing and support of her colleague, she may not have transitioned to the principal role at that time.

Principal Evans and her female superintendent made the change from elementary teachers to administration together without a more experienced administrator on staff to support them. Principal Evans emphasized the partnership that existed between the two female administrators sustained both of them as they learned to lead in a remote rural school. And it was the support and encouragement of her teacher friend that prompted her to apply for the principal position.

Principal Evans also acknowledged gaining support from outside the district. "There was a group of principals that were meeting in the county with some people that would come down from a university program. They would, once a month, come down and [present] things that were significant for principals to know." Principal Evans elaborated on the benefit provided to her from the meetings. "It was the most beneficial thing I've ever had in my life, because we would just sit there and talk about issues and

I would pick up more information just listening to those other principals." Almost as an afterthought, Principal Evans tacked on the following comment about gender. "[The principals] were all men; they were all guys. There eventually got to be one other lady who was in middle school. But for the most part it was just me and everybody else." In response to the interviewer's query regarding whether it presented a problem that she was the only female in the group, Principal Evans replied, "Nah, not for me. I don't know if it was for them. They would ask me about my ideas because I put some things in place, and I would share them. I don't think that they were intimidated or put off by that [her being female] at all." She summed up her appreciation for the support she received from this group early in her tenure as high school principal this way: "I couldn't put a value on what that that little group that once a month meeting did for me. It was a lifesaver." However, she did not feel the same about the male high school principals in her immediate surrounding area. She described them as being unwilling to change and less than sympathetic or compassionate toward student needs.

Principal Montgomery

Principal Montgomery, reported support from the community and her fellow teachers in her transition to the principal position, but did not experience any support let alone encouragement, as described by the other participants, from her district administration. After teaching under two high school principals who were not vested in the community, Principal Montgomery evaluated her life situation and determined she could invest time and energy in the high school principal position. Once that decision was made, she persisted until the school board gave her the opportunity she needed to become the high school principal in her district. Principal Montgomery explained why

she thought the school board was receptive to her move to the principal position: 'I think they like having a principal that's out there [in the community]. I'm in our churches; I have civic duties; I'm in other things besides the school. Most of the community knows me." Principal Montgomery expressed confidence that she now has the support of her superintendent as well. She expressed it thus, "I know he has my back if it comes down to it."

Principal Montgomery regrets that her brief tenure as principal has allowed her little time to attend professional development beyond the occasional area principal meeting. She offered her multiple roles as the main obstacle to professional development or training attendance. She felt she could not be spared during any school day.

Principal Wollstonecraft

Principal Wollstonecraft had completed a Master's degree in education administration, but while having a young family and only five years of teaching experience, she thought she would wait to make the change to become a principal. However, shortly after completing her degree in administration, a position opened at the elementary school in her district; she decided to apply. Before school started that year, the high school principal position opened. Her superintendent wanted her to take that position and encouraged her to apply. She recalled:

> I had prepared for elementary [principal] for a year; I had all these ideas for elementary kids. And I just thought, 'You gotta be kidding me! I can't do high school!' I just [pause] felt unprepared. But my superintendent said, 'no I know you can do it. You know the kids.

> Everything is going to be great.' So, I said okay. And now looking back I can't even see myself in elementary.

Even though she had experience working with high school age students as a high school teacher, she needed the extra confidence and support offered to her by her male superintendent to feel comfortable taking the high school principal position. Principal Wollstonecraft described the support she received from her superintendent in the absence of a local network of high school principals.

> I didn't know a lot of the administrators [in the area] especially high school. I trained under the elementary principal and I knew that I could call him. But the scenarios were so different over here, and he'd never been a high school principal. My super was my mentor and has still helped train me and go through situations and, um, help me understand that first instinct is not always how you should act. Just sit back and look at things. You know, talk to the parents the next day versus the day of the incident. If this is a problem in two weeks, then it's a problem. You know, that sort of stuff.

Principal Wollstonecraft also gained support from a regional group of administrators who communicated virtually more often than face to face. The group were assembled through a vendor they all have in common; however, the schools are somewhat larger than Principal Wollstonecraft's and not geographically close. "But they are more progressive than the administrators around here, and I like that."

Summary of Encouragement/Support

Each participant credited the encouragement they received from their administrators and/or peers to advance to the high school principal position as key to their transition from teacher to high school principal. Three out of four of the participants worked with the support of a male superintendent. Principal Evans was the only participant who had a female superintendent. In addition, each continued to seek out the support they needed to be successful from formal or informal groups willing to share ideas and lend support.

Complexities Inherent to the Role of Principal

Each participant described the complexities that arise in the role of being a school principal. All four principals expressed difficulty in being able to perform at an ultimate level the responsibilities of the principal position because of a lack of separation of duties in a small school. These remote rural principals did not have assistant principals to share the administration duties. All four principals have performed the duties of another job as well as that of high school principal at least temporarily if not for several years. Having the duties of more than one job also made the work-life balance ungainly, in some cases requiring late working hours during the school term. The participants described their respective efforts to manage the job complexity caused by performing multiple roles required of a high school principal in a remote rural school.

Principal Bronte

Principal Bronte was a teaching principal for most of her 15-year tenure in the high school principal position. “It’s only been within the last few years, maybe 3 or 4,

that I've not been in the classroom half the day." She laughed at this statement and added, "Well, I'm still in the classroom for half the day or more if a teacher is gone- lots of times." Principal Bronte went on to enumerate the duties that might fall to her at any given time.

Principal Bronte's day begins early and ends late especially on home game nights when she assists in preparing for games and runs the clock during the games. Her description of a typical day illustrates how flexible a rural school principal must be to ensure the efficient functioning of the school.

I get there about 6:30 in the morning to open the school up. Then I usually go over to the cafeteria of a morning about 7 am to help get breakfast ready and then serve breakfast to the kids. We start having kids show up about 7:15. Come back over here [return to the administrative offices] then you start your day.

Here the participant speaks in incomplete sentences as if to demonstrate the hectic pace the day can assume.

> And… uh, from there you never know how the day's going to go…one morning last week there was a busted pipe over in the new building. I had to go over there and mop up water in addition to doing your curriculum and- why the kid wasn't at vo-tech [sic] that day and - gosh, ordering textbooks. Since I'm in a different building now than what the teachers are- they're over in a new building- I make a sweep through the new building every morning to make sure everything's going over there. Then usually between every hour when the bell rings, I try to walk over there and so about the time you make a 10-minute walk over there and

then get back to your office then you've only got about 40 more minutes until you make another sweep.

At this juncture in Principal Bronte's story, she explained how multiple managerial duties pull her away from her office that delay her efforts to complete administrative duties.

> There's never any set time really to get paper work done. That's the hardest part [of the work day] is finding time to get paper work done because there's always something else going on. So, [pause] I work from about three-thirty till six-thirty on things that I needed to do during the day…if we happen to have a ballgame then I put on the role of an apron [for helping in the concession stand] …And I usually keep the clock for that [the home ballgame]. It's just something all the time.

Whenever Principal Bronte was satisfying multiple duties in other parts of the building, her principal responsibilities were still waiting for her extending her day well beyond normal working hours. Principal Bronte expressed,

> If you're going to be a rural school principal, you might as well plan on working in the evening and the weekend. Because during the day there's not time to take care of the things I think a principal ought to be doing like working on curriculum or pre-code or teacher evaluations or things like that.

Principal Bronte's comments illustrate the balance principals must maintain between manager and academic leader. The complexities of the day to

day management of facilities and organization of events could take away from the ability to perform instructional leadership activities.

Principal Evans

Principal Evans filled a double role in her school building to ensure the school had the resources needed without incurring additional cost. She explained, "I'm not only the principal, but I am also the special-ed [sic] person for this building [the high school]. You see all these files …" indicating a foot-high stack of files on her desk. She supplied another example of multiple roles. "My superintendent was off for six weeks for surgery, so I had her building and my building for [some time] right before Christmas until after we came back from the break."

Principal Evans did not elaborately present a recounting of a typical day but, rather, supplied a metaphor to express how she experienced the struggle to meet the challenge of spontaneously occurring problems. She illuminated the experience as "handling whatever comes in and covering for absent staff or faculty. That's just what you do -keep everything going- all those plates circling. Sometimes I think 'uh-oh, I'm losing them!' But they come around eventually." The analogy provided by this participant not only paints a picture of what it is like to be constantly multitasking but also implies the level of anxiety that comes with it. Principal Evans equally exemplified persistent optimism about her abilities to meet the unexpected work demands as well as the routine work situation with the declaration that "they [all the plates in the air] come around eventually."

Principal Montgomery

Principal Montgomery described what it is like being a remote rural high school principal as far as time commitment to the job and home responsibilities. She commented, “You have very few nights at home…You have very little free time even after school.” She spent most of her time the last several years filling more than one position in her school building. She explained, “I was teacher and dean of students. Then the next year I was teacher, dean of students, and counselor. Then I was principal and counselor.” Speaking of a time when a couple of support staff members were out, she shared, “We didn’t have anybody. Mr. B [the superintendent] and I were down here cleaning the rooms. Some of the students came by and asked, ‘Are you the janitor now?’ and I said, ‘For a little while I will be.’”

Principal Montgomery no longer carries a multiple job title, but that does not necessarily mean that her job duties have simplified. “I’m no longer in the classroom. Well, I am in the classroom. Because of budget cuts, we can no longer afford substitutes. If someone is gone, I may have to cover.” And, as the interview was ending, she shared that she was on her way to meet with seniors to help them with college applications and scholarships, a job often assigned to the counselor.

Principal Wollstonecraft

Principal Wollstonecraft’s school is the largest of the four in this study. The school employs several more staff members than the other schools, but this principal still had to cover for another position when the school unexpectedly lost the services of the school counselor during her first year as principal. She expressed the relief to be relieved of the extra role this year.

> Last year I didn't have a counselor. My counselor left me in January. So, I had to finish up the school year doing scholarships and counseling. I'm not a counselor, but I had to be someone they could talk to. I just know several times I had female [students] come in and talk to me. You know, teenage pregnancy. And things going on in their lives that they would never have come to a male principal about.

Principal Wollstonecraft explained that, at least in her experience, the male principal did not really understand the need to encourage students to express their feelings to him. At first, she spoke only of the opportunity having a female principal gave female students, "You know, we have the conversation, and I give them guidance and support sometimes." Then she included the male students, "Even male students [have a need to confide]. I have that relationship too. I don't feel like there is a gap there because of gender. They can still come talk to me about things like- well- it's a very open door policy."

Now in her second year as high school principal and having filled the vacant counselor position, Principal Wollstonecraft expressed her relief at giving up the extra responsibility. She explained,

> But this year only getting to do my job as a principal – not having to do the testing and scholarships and all of that- it's pretty well as I expected- the discipline and dealing with parents. I've been able to get a lot more accomplished.

Although she is not performing the extra duties of being the counselor now, Principal Wollstonecraft continues to juggle the complexities of the high school principal

position. She described in detail the process of complying with teacher observation and accountability. “In September, I start observing with this many teachers as I have. And I have several who are probationary teachers, so they have to have more. I feel like I’m constantly trying to get in the classroom.” She explained how she learned to manage the observations. “I try to get in one or two a day. Then, of course, meeting with the teacher to go over the observation. I can email it to them [before the meeting] and they can look at everything I put in.” She expresses her appreciation for the streamlined process. “That doesn’t take near as long [as it had previously]. I’m thankful that that process is simplified through technology.” Although this task is not unique to remote rural principals and is one that Principal Wollstonecraft appreciates, it adds to the load of tasks that threaten to overwhelm her.

In sharing the events of a typical day, Principal Wollstonecraft described a busy day with variable duties. She described several purposeful interactions with students. “Tuesday through Friday I run a study hall for kids on my ineligible list …They have to report at 7:45… Of course, I do eligibility on Mondays.” At lunch, she interacts with students in a more informal atmosphere outside the confines of the building. “I bought some picnic tables and some footballs and stuff for them so they can enjoy the nice weather. So, I go down there and let them outside so the teacher on duty can still watch the other kids inside.”

It was clear she enjoyed the time she spent at all of these tasks, but she was nearly breathless at just the retelling of the efforts, “Some days I just don’t know when I can catch my breath!”

Summary of Complexities

Although each participant reported an unpredictable and overloaded schedule with variable duties complicated by the reduced staff of remote rural districts, they seemed to accept this as a reality of the high school principal job, especially in a remote rural area. The workload of the high school principal position can be overwhelming to an individual not prepared for the demands it entails. Principal Bronte's story along with the other participants' comments illustrate the need for a principal in a rural school to assume multiple school roles to keep the school functioning. The principals assisted to keep the school running smoothly without any additional cost which could not be supported in small districts and illustrated the complexity of the principal role in remote rural high schools.

Incidents in the Experience of Principal

Each participant described the often-difficult decisions that must be made to ensure the operations of the school when the occasional incident arises that disrupt the normal operation of school as usual and must be managed effectively. Three of the four principals described their response to incidents that they considered to be critical in nature, any event which has the potential to create chaos in an organization and interfere with an individual's ability to psychologically cope with the event. The fourth principal, having been principal only two years, had not encountered a situation which she would describe as a critical incident but rather complications to her normal routine. She did express concern about difficulties that could arise because of the remote rural location in the event of a critical incident.

Principal Bronte

Principal Bronte described her efforts to coordinate resources to handle an unforeseen and highly emotion event which she interpreted as a critical incident at her school. A student died during one weekend. The school being the primary way the whole community could be reached, Principal Bronte sent out a message on the group calling service to alert faculty, students, and community members.

"I think I just said, 'It is with great sadness that I am- I am informing you of this but I thought you'd like to know.'" Principal Bronte called her school counselor who contacted a network of counselors who support local schools when tragedies occur. She then coordinated a group of teachers to out to the family's house with her on Sunday. She explained, "I feel like that helped the teachers and helped the family to know that the school was aware of it and that the school was very supportive of them."

Principal Bronte described in detail the events of the Monday after the death. She described her role in organizing and facilitating the events of the day which included area counselors meeting with teachers and students. She reported, "It was my role to help see to it that things carried on throughout the day as normal as possible." As is not unusual in small rural towns, the funeral was held at the school auditorium which called for additional planning and preparing. The particulars of this retelling not only demonstrated Principal Bronte's competence in managing an emotionally charged situation but also underscored the quality of compassion she referenced earlier. Principal Bronte also acknowledged the help she received from her counselor and the area counselors was irreplaceable.

Although Principal Bronte admitted she could not be sure how a male principal might have handled a similar situation, she expressed her assumption that she, as a woman, was more comfortable showing and sharing her emotions with the family, students, and faculty.

Principal Evans

Principal Evans explained how she cooperated with her superintendent to solve an unusual problem affecting members her student body. An incident had occurred over a weekend which resulted in restraining orders among several students. "Five different parents came in with restraining orders (for their children) against other students in this building. Before it was said and done, I had to get authorities here because I had restraining orders going in every direction possible."

Principal Evans consulted with the superintendent and came up with a plan to obey the court order and keep her students safe. "We hired a guy who walked with two students who were primarily the focus [of the protective orders]. He stayed with them all day long." Principal Evans further commented on what she considered a very unusual case:

> That situation was a little weird [slight pause] for a school this size! I couldn't transfer someone to different school or even a different class. We have to walk down the same halls. I can't ... I can't begin to monitor a hundred yards or hundred feet, whatever the restraining order requires. I can't physically do that…It was pretty hostile around here for a little while. It's not in the handbook! It's not even something that they teach you at school.

Principal Evan's comments emphasized that high school principals have not and cannot be trained or instructed about how to handle every situation. They had to come up with a plan on the spot that would accommodate the orders with the resources they had available to them.

Principal Montgomery

Principal Montgomery had not witnessed a critical incident during her short tenure as principal. However, she described how the remote location of their rural school made it difficult to have a quick response of emergency services should they need one. Remarking upon a training session given on critical incident plans, she pondered,

> What is the plan? Go into lockdown. Call the sheriff or call the police? We definitely don't have the resources if that ever happened. We don't have the resources to take care of it. I mean, we would have to call for outside help… I'm sure we could get somebody here, but it wouldn't be as fast as you'd want it to be.

She continued by voicing a concern of many remote rural school leaders about the reality of living in remote location and the probability of death without timely response to an incident. "I think we'd be on our own as far as what you [are] going to do about it. I mean, you can't let someone run around with a gun for 10 minutes and come out unscathed. Something is going to happen [before help has time to arrive]."

Principal Montgomery's words underscore the reality that remote rural living has not only inconvenience but can also involve increased risk of harm in case of emergencies. Principals in these remote rural areas have an obligation to plan

adequately for the safety of their students in preparation for a critical incident, despite lack of access to the immediate response of emergency personnel.

Principal Wollstonecraft

Principal Wollstonecraft described a lock down situation that occurred in her school during the first year as principal while the superintendent was away. Her response to the incident demonstrated her ability to act independently from her superintendent.

> In the seven years, I was in the classroom, we never had to initiate a lock down. My first year as administrator and my superintendent out of the building for the day … brand new elementary [female] principal and myself had to initiate a lock down. There were some escaped inmates that were evading the law and were here in town. We had to make that call on our own- But we did it; we handled it. I feel a lot better now that I've been through that, you know. If something happens now, I feel much more confident in myself in handling it.

Her skills as a leader was tested early, and she proved to herself, her faculty, and the community that she possessed the skillset necessary to be successful as high school principal. The confidence the incident instilled in Principal Wollstonecraft benefited her as she managed other more routine challenges. "I feel like that [the critical incident] re-affirmed my decision-making ability. So, when I have to decide on a discipline action or even give a report to the school board, I feel solid in my decisions."

Summary of Incidents

The participants of this study reported a feeling of increased confidence in themselves and perceived an increased confidence from the community through their management of incidents in their role as high school principal. They did not consider their gender as female to be a major challenge but rather another reality that required a certain finesse to work with the conservative rural community context of their schools. The participants believed that, as female principals, they brought certain advantages to the leadership position, in particular, a greater capacity for compassion and communication. The participants' perspective of being female and understanding the nuanced context of the rural community seemed to help both the principals and the school address the needs of students and the community during critical incidents.

Relationships Important to the Experience

Each participant spoke of the importance of establishing a relationship or maintaining a relationship with students, faculty and the rural community upon accepting the role as principal in the rural school. Although the participants' discussion of relationships with students, faculty, and community was often entwined with each other and other themes, a subsection is devoted to each individually for ease of understanding.

Student Relationships

Discussion with each of the rural high school principals of this study centered around the students and emphasized the need for the principal to have a positive relationship with the students. In this section, each participant explains her efforts to relate to the students and emphasizes one of the benefits of remote rural school setting,

the ability to know the students on a personal level. In addition, the participants described the effect being female had toward building relationships with students.

Principal Bronte

Principal Bronte described her motivation in serving breakfast was, in part, to get to know the students in a more social environment where she could joke with them and not always be the 'drill sergeant.'

> The reason I do that [serve breakfast] number 1- just to help out and number 2- I don't see the elementary kids; I'm the high school principal and so I don't see the elementary kids a lot. That's where I see them, in the cafeteria in the morning for breakfast. So it helps me to see and know and meet the elementary kids. Plus, it helps me to see the high school kids kind of in a different role rather than just in the classroom or me as the principal here. Helps me see them more in their social setting- kind of helps just to understand the kids better. They see me more and lets them know that you're human if you're in there serving them breakfast and kind of joking with them. It helps them see that you're a little more human than [sic] the drill sergeant as the principal.

Principal Bronte believed that the time she spent serving the students would save her time later when the student was in need or in trouble.

Principal Bronte explained an advantage she might have over a male principal, which is really a benefit for female students that had been absent before.

> [In my experience,] women seem to be more caring on certain issues…I feel like maybe they [female students] can come in and talk and discuss

> more being a female than they would a male. Sometimes they just come in here and visit more [whereas] with the superintendent [who is male] they don't. I don't know if it's the difference in superintendent and principal or male vs female.

Principal Evans

Principal Evans explained that when she was a new principal, she had to relate honestly to the students and apologize on occasion when she was wrong. Her words follow:

> I made my mistakes (laughs). I had to go back, and I had to apologize to students because I was wrong. 'You know what- I was wrong, I was wrong. So, I'm sorry'. I was never afraid to admit when I did something wrong. I have done some things that were not right when it comes to dealing with students. 'You were right; I misjudged that.' To me it was more important for them to know that I was human; I made mistakes; and I didn't put myself up here as somebody in perfection. 'You know, I messed up. Let's fix it, and let's have school. That's what we're here for'.

Principal Evans shared this story to illustrate her efforts to establish trust with her students particularly in the beginning of her career as high school principal. She explained that since she had previously taught in the elementary and did not have much contact with the high school students, she needed to build rapport with them. "The best way to do that is with honesty."

Principal Montgomery

Principal Montgomery stated that she benefitted from having built relationships with students when she was in the classroom. She expressed, “I still have some kids here that I taught; I had them in the classroom. They’re probably more familiar with me than they would be with someone who came in as principal that they didn’t know at all.” She explained how her established rapport with the students when she was a teacher continued when she became principal. “They still feel like they can talk to me. I have kids come in a lot. They just drop in to tell me something, or they want to complain about something. I get a lot of input from the kids.”

Principal Montgomery was aware that maintaining the relationship with her students had reciprocal qualities as well. She valued the ‘input’ she received from the students.

Principal Wollstonecraft

Coming from the classroom to the principal position provided Principal Wollstonecraft an advantage to building relationships with her students. “I have a good relationship with the students. Um, personal relationship because I did teach a lot of them.” However, Principal Wollstonecraft expressed her concern that she would lose the close contact she had as a teacher with students when she moved into an administrative role. The following excerpt illustrates how she overcame that problem.

> One of the things I did when I first started last year was that I started a leadership council, and we call it PLC, principal’s leadership council. We meet once a week on Monday mornings at 7:30. I didn’t hand pick the kids. I just told that this is the time we’re going to meet 9-12 grade-

> love to have you. And we have 22 that come in every week at 7:30. We meet and discuss what's going on. We do a mentoring program with our 7th graders. We do a ton of community service. We work with the teachers. We do teacher appreciation week. Back to school things. And um I love it. Because that's my connection with the kids. We are working and doing. It's really helped close that gap, I guess, as an administrator.

Principal Wollstonecraft created a version of a Principal Leadership Council that is unique in that it has no membership boundaries. Students can participate regardless of GPA or any other selection criteria. "I believe it is more democratic that way and more representative of the student body. And we are small enough to do that. I don't know if I'd have that luxury at a larger place."

Principal Wollstonecraft continued to describe her relationship with students. "I have a good relationship with students. That doesn't mean I don't have kids that get in trouble. But we have mutual respect and can come to an understanding." Even with the proactive efforts on the part of Principal Wollstonecraft, she acknowledged that not all was perfect.

> When my super recommended I move to high school [principal], I know that even some of my board members were worried: 'She's young; she's female; will she be able to handle those big ol' boys and discipline?' and this and that. I proved them wrong. I mean, I have a good relationship with students. That doesn't mean I don't have kids that get in trouble. But we have mutual respect and can come to an understanding. Last year

> was kind of a rough year. I had several suspensions I think it was kind of I had to prove my point and I had to lay it down as this is what is going to happen. You're not going to run all over me. But this year…. It's been smooth sailing and not nearly the issues.

Principal Wollstonecraft expressed her optimism in a growing mutual respect between herself and her students. Her ability to resolve the issues she had with some students reassured her school board as well.

Summary Student Relationships

Three of the four participants described their efforts to actively promote positive relationships with their students. The exception, Principal Montgomery did speak of her relationship with students but seemed to take that relationship for granted. All participants listed the remote rural high school's small numbers as a benefit to developing positive and individual relationships with students. Two participants, Principal Bronte and Principal Wollstonecraft, mentioned that their capacity for compassion, typically associated with the female gender, aided them in establishing a relationship with students and provided a service to the students that had been absent with male administration. Both being a female school leader and the rural school context contributed to the participants' ability to nurture student relationships.

Faculty Relationships

Participants' account of their lived experience included principal – faculty relationships couched within the description of service to students and their administrative duties. Although the participants did not focus specifically on efforts to promote positive relationships with their faculty, most of them indicated appreciation for the faculty.

Principal Bronte

During Principal Bronte's retelling of her lived experience as high school principal, she included statements about her faculty mostly within the context of her role as administrator and staff manager. Principal Bronte noted her staff worked with her going above and beyond to meet the needs of students with their limited numbers. Principal Bronte credited her teachers' efforts to reach out to students and their families adding to the family-like school climate. "We have a teacher who has Thunder tickets. She'll invite a student and take them… she knows they haven't ever gone and maybe not have the opportunity ever again. She'll use her extra ticket and take them." Principal Bronte encouraged her teachers to develop a positive relationship with students. "You're not their friend, per se. You've got to keep that student-teacher [professional] relationship but still let them know you're human in there too." She also described her efforts to counsel her teachers to be aware of the 'fishbowl' phenomenon of small town teaching. "That just comes with the territory. That comes with what you chose to do. So, that's just something you have to understand… that's the way it is." Notwithstanding that her comments about her faculty was limited and brief, Principal Bronte spoke more about her teachers than any of the other three participants.

Principal Evans

Principal Evans included her faculty and staff in her description of the school as a community acting as a family to care for the students and their families. However, she did not speak about the faculty separately nor refer to her relationship with them.

Principal Montgomery

Principal Montgomery seemed to be struggling with her new role as supervisor to the teaching staff. Principal Montgomery spoke about her surprise at what other teachers were actually doing, or not doing, in their classrooms. She explained that as a teacher, she performed her duty as she understood it and assumed all the other teachers did the same. “I’ve seen some different… um … teaching methods, maybe? I don’t know what you’d call it. Lack of teaching methods? You know and I - I’m not a dragon slayer. I can’t change all this.” Her words expressed her frustration at a problem identified without experience to rectify it. She had been confronted with another status quo problem but did not feel the confidence or, perhaps, the authority to address it as she had done with student absenteeism.

On the other hand, Principal Montgomery observed that female teachers benefited from having a female principal who could sympathize with the difficulty of classroom management in the high school. Principal Montgomery surmised:

> Nearly all my teachers in the core subjects are women, and I think they’d prefer to talk to me about what’s going on- some things they are facing. In that respect, I feel like they are more apt to come to me than if a man was sitting in here. Because men don’t… they have such a different way of looking at things. ‘Well, you just shouldn’t put up with that

> [misbehavior in class].' 'Yah, I don't want to put up with it, but how do I not; what do I *do*?'

Principal Montgomery's words recalled an earlier discussion about discipline and suggested she possessed an empathy for female teachers having difficulty managing classroom behavior.

Principal Wollstonecraft

Principal Wollstonecraft described the importance of having a good working relationship with her faculty, recognizing her own limitations as a new principal and the content expertise of her teachers.

> I'm just getting my feet wet in curriculum and mapping and alignment. That's new for me. As a classroom teacher, I focused on my area. Now to take a broad look at are we mapped all the way through? That's new for me. So, I feel a little unsure of myself there. Thankfully, I have really good lead teachers in different areas who can take the lead in the mapping process.

Principal Wollstonecraft expressed appreciation for the good relationship she had with her colleagues before she became principal. As a new principal, she understands she needs the assistance of the teachers to help her fill in the gaps of her knowledge base. Principal Wollstonecraft's identification of "good lead teachers in different areas" indicates that teachers are involved in some distributive leadership activities.

Summary of Faculty Relationships

Three of the four participants spoke briefly about their relationship and interaction with their faculty. Two of these three spoke only about positive interactions, praising their hard work and expertise, which they can daily observe in the compressed rural school. In addition, Principal Bronte acted as advisor and mentor to her faculty in their role as teacher in a remote rural community. Principal Montgomery was the only participant who voiced concerns about her faculty, pointing out some less than desirable teaching practices. However, she also noted that as a female principal she could assist female principals to overcome some of their classroom management problems.

Community Relationships

In the rural context of the current study, high school principals fill one of the very few leadership roles in the community. Maintaining a positive affiliation with the community is important to the cooperative spirit needed for both the community and the school to flourish. Participants of the current study participate in community leadership outside of their role as high school principal; however, as one participant pointed out, she was likely included in the community leadership position because she was the high school principal and could provide insight about the condition of the community's youth and their needs better than anyone else. In describing the symbiotic relationship with the community, each participant recognized that though they had decision-making authority concerning the school and the students, each also needed at least the cooperation of community members and better if she could count on their support and assistance.

Principal Bronte

Principal Bronte expressed a long and well established relationship with the community. “Being a principal, you guide and direct the students in the school but kind of the community also. It may not be that way in a large area, but in a smaller rural area it’s … you’re one of the leadership people in the actual community.” She explained one of the reasons for her leadership role in the community. “Really the school [pause] in a community like this the school is the community. The community activities take place here at the school. Very few other activities in the community that are not school related.”

Principal Bronte expressed sadness about changes that might affect her relationship with the community,

> Fifteen years ago, when I first started, I probably knew every students’ parent and every students’ grandparents and their siblings and everything. Times are changing and a lot of the kids you don’t know as well as you used to just because they are more mobile.

She regretted that the remote rural community was losing one of the things that made them unique with the breakdown of the family unit and increased mobilityk. She continued,

> (T)he attendance at your [rural] schools (is) declining unless there is some kind of business or industry in that community. [It’s] a challenge to keep students in your school…Another challenge is I see a lot of things [problems] that you used to see…in urban areas moving out to our rural areas. Issues with the students’ family lifestyles, things like that; we

> never saw in our rural schools, we are now beginning to see on a daily basis.

Principal Bronte struggled to put into words the reality of a changing culture and a loss of a sense of place.

Principal Evans

One participant, Principal Evans, described a situation in which she needed to consult community members about a significant change taking place with the school calendar. She related, "Our school was one of the first schools to change from a five-day week to a four-day week. … In order to avoid any complications, we sent out surveys and information to the parents prior to even discussing it." She conveyed that they had made a good faith effort to involve the community in the decision and the change process. She continued, "We found it was better to confront the parents, deal with their issues, so we don't have to deal with their complaints after the fact. We felt that approach worked in our favor." Although her actions in reaching out to the community was commendable, the connotation of the word 'confront' suggested that she anticipated some pushback from the community. She need not have worried. She reported,

> Only one [made] a complaint that was about child care. But the validity of that complaint was diminished because this person was a stay at home mom. Theoretical instead of a real logistical issue for her. We decided, the board voted, and we put it in place the next year.

However, Principal Evans constructed a plan to accommodate that need should it arise. Compensation was arranged for a teacher to provide day care on Fridays for any

working parents who might require that service. After a couple of weeks, the service was discontinued because no need for it arose.

Principal Montgomery

Principal Montgomery expressed her confidence that her long history in the community was an asset in the principal position she now holds. However, she also admitted that her familiarity with the community, and they with her, could complicate the relationship when matters of school decision making arise. She expressed,

> Some people might consider it a drawback that the community does know me well enough that they are more apt to come talk to me than they would someone who is a stranger here. I think mostly because they just need a sounding board. They are frustrated, and they want to talk to someone about it. If they didn't know me I don't think they'd go to someone they didn't know to talk to about it.

She described her accessibility to the community as a benefit to the school in that she acted as an intermediary between the school and the community. In this capacity, Principal Montgomery believes she can defuse situations before they become problems and thereby improve the school-community relationship.

Principal Wollstonecraft

Principal Wollstonecraft also described the relationship needed with the community when implementing a policy change. After evaluating in-school suspension as an ineffective discipline technique, Principal Wollstonecraft initiated Saturday school in its place. All community members did not well receive this decision. Being a farming/ranching community, parents were concerned that Saturday school would

interfere with work and family time. However, Principal Wollstonecraft persisted for the best interest of the students. “I feel like it’s cut down on the amount of discipline and we also give it for tardies and that’s helped that out a lot.” Students were missing less school and discipline issues had decreased.

She explained why she persisted, “I think change is hard for people in remote areas that are kind of set in their ways and have done it this way for 50 years.” She recognized the community’s reluctance to accept change as a protective response. Rural residents are proud of their rural roots and would like to maintain them as much as possible. Principal Wollstonecraft insisted some change brings improvements needed for the best educational experience for the students of the community.

Principal Wollstonecraft summarized her developing relationship with the community this way,

> Living in this community for 7 years before I was an administrator, I kind of knew the feeling toward women and leadership roles. And it wasn’t always positive. So, for the board to trust me and my superintendent to trust me and now the community to trust me means a lot to me. Because I don’t think that was there in the beginning. And I feel like we worked toward that mutual respect and I can do this job. I think it’s really important. They’d never had a female principal here and to be the first and be well received it and accepted. It means a lot to me. And I think it’s important. My mom always taught me that I could do whatever I wanted and not let anything hold me back. So it would be very disheartening to get in this position and not be able to be successful.

Principal Wollstonecraft believed by being firm in her convictions she was leading the community to accept changes that were against community tradition but in the best interest of the students. Principal Wollstonecraft believed she had made some progress in her relationship with the community since her first year as high school principal. “I think it just takes earning their trust and their respect. Knowing that I am going to do my job, and I’m not going to let emotions get in the way. I can still run the school.”

> Um, I think so. Because I think change is hard for people in remote areas that are kind of set in their ways and have done it this way for 50 years. Well, there might be a better way but you know they’re not really open to that. I feel like that’s a challenge to get the community behind something, your school board, your kids, your teachers even. But I feel like we are moving in that direction. I’ve made a lot of changes that the school hadn’t seen in several years. And haven’t had a lot of backlash from it. Didn’t try to come in and try to change everything. That’s a smart move. But you know little steps at a time. And I feel like they’ve gone over very well. And so um …I would see that as a challenge though because most people in these rural areas are pretty set in their ways as far as their families have been here for several generations, this is how it’s always been done.”
>
> I think I had some parents flat out tell me that they had a problem with a woman in this position. And I said, Well, I hate that you feel that way, but I can do the job just like anyone else can. And um, last year again. I

think was kind of rough in that aspect. This year… nothing. You know, I think it just takes earning their trust and their respect. Knowing that well I am going to do my job and I'm not going to let emotions get in the way or things like that. I can still run the school.

Principal Wollstonecraft came to realize that she had some adjustment to make in her expectations and the reality of working with a remote rural community and school district. "The community [here] is a lot more involved… And I wasn't used to that. We didn't have a lot of parents [coming in] my school [where I grew up]- here it's unusual to have a day when there aren't parents in the school." She appeared to appreciate that aspect of the close-knit relationship between the community and the school while remaining hopeful of their accepting some positive change. Principals Bronte and Montgomery had the advantage of being long-time residents and teachers within the district and knew quite well the patrons and the culture of the school and community.

Summary of Community Relationships

Three of the four participants emphasized timely communication and the principal's accessibility to community members as fundamental to their relationship with the community. In addition, Principal Bronte commented that, as high school principal in a remote rural school, she often fills the role as a community leader. The fourth participant, Principal Wollstonecraft, reported a tense relationship with the community in response to some of the changes she has implemented and blames the conservative nature of the remote rural community.

Family-like Climate

Two of the participants used the term ‘family’ specifically and all described a supportive relationship within the school and between the school and the community that one would expect from a family dynamic. A ‘family-like’ culture is related to an organizational theory description of a ‘clan’ culture in which leaders “act as mentors or parent-figures, and people share their personal values and goals” (Herzog & Leker, 2010, p. 228). The descriptions below from the participants illustrate their ‘parent-like’ actions which encouraged a ‘family-like school culture.

Principal Bronte

Principal Bronte related a story that illustrates the family-like connection she made with a particular student that was sustained long after the student had graduated. “I always think about a student who came to us here when he was in 6th grade. I had him from 7th through 12 grade. Pretty rowdy little student is what he was.” Principal Bronte described the student’s progress toward graduation with numerous visits to her office for discipline. “I implemented corporal punishment on him a couple of times.” Then she shared how he showed his appreciation.

> He brought me a flower at graduation and told me, ‘thank you for not giving up on me, for helping me to get through.’ To this day- he probably graduated at least ten maybe twelve years ago- he’ll still put things on social media. When there’s a little poem or something, he’ll tag me and he’ll put a picture of a paddle and say ‘thank you for using that on me and for keeping me in line and helping me be who I am today.’ And, as he passes through town, he’ll always stop and see us. And I

> think the school and the people here at this school had such a positive impact on his life…If he hadn't been at this small school where we took an interest in him personally even though he was a mess- He was a mess! -I don't think he would be where he is today.

Principal Bronte enthusiastically related the success story of a student that, in her view, may not have graduated without the support and personalized attention available to him because of the remote rural school small size and family-like school climate.

Principal Evans

Principal Evans explained the dynamic within the school by comparing it to a family. "I always tell new people who want to come in here, We are a family here: teachers, students. We know things that are going on in the family. We send flowers to a funeral. We take food to people's houses." She continues to express the importance of strong family connections in a rural community. "So, we're a family- Families don't always get along, and families sometimes have to deal with issues. I've said this several times. I don't know that I'd be a principal in a larger school." Giving an example of the family-like care, she shared how exceptions were made to accommodate a student who would not graduate without that consideration.

> We are small enough that we can be flexible for students. I had a young man last year who moved way up in the mountains about 30 miles. He just needed an accumulation of credits which I couldn't fit into the schedule. He needed alternative school so he could graduate, but he didn't have a vehicle. He couldn't go to alternative unless we provided transportation which as a rule we didn't. [The alternative school was

> housed in a neighboring town]. So, we made arrangements so he could. He would ride the bus to the school. We had to make arrangements for maintenance person to take him to alternative school, to drop him off up there in the morning. Then someone else would pick him up, and he would go to vo-tech and then catch the bus back out here and ride the bus home. We just had to put all that in place so he could graduate. And he did. We're flexible.

Another example from this principal illustrated the long-lasting ties that are developed and maintained between the school and the community.

> We had a couple of students who died. We put a team in place for counseling- we had pastors here for about a week to deal with that issue. What we ended up doing – the class that they were a part of planted a tree out here in front of our building in memory of that student. Every time I see the grandparents they ask me how I'm doing, and I ask how they're doing. Of course, that's small town too. But it did develop a bond between her family and us.

Respecting community mores about appropriate and caring responses in times of loss allowed Principal Evans to build rapport and trust with the community and to establish a family-like climate.

Principal Montgomery

Principal Montgomery described a family-like relationship with her students, teachers and with community members. Her former students felt welcome to come in to visit with her informally. "They still feel like they can talk to me. I have kids come in a

lot. I mean just drop in, and they want to tell me something; they want to complain about something. I get a lot of input from the kids." When she describes her administration's relationship with teachers, it is reminiscent of parents trying to resolve children's problems. "They felt free to come talk to me if they had any concerns. And usually when a teacher has a concern they do need to talk to me. I mean that's who they need to talk to. And if I can't make them happy they can go to Mr. B [the superintendent] and see what he can do." Although this comfort that the community and students felt with her caused her superintendent some concern, Principal Montgomery seemed to enjoy it.

Principal Wollstonecraft

Although Principal Wollstonecraft did not specifically speak about the close community ties as 'family-like', she commented on the interconnectedness of the community with the school and vice versa. "There isn't anything [happening in the community] that the school isn't involved in. There isn't anything that happens at school that the community doesn't hear about, either." She added the last comment with a knowing smile and explained that secrets were impossible to keep in a rural community.

Summary of family-like climate

The family-like climate of the remote rural community and school provides a wrap-around support for students and their families. The small school environment sometimes provides support for the student in place of the family. The school building serves as a central location for school and community activities including solemn occasions and celebrations. All four of the participants indicated that they would not

trade the life-style and work experience of the remote rural context for the conveniences of living and working in or near an urban area.

Chapter 4 Summary

In Chapter 4, the researcher described the findings from in depth interviews evoking the lived experiences of four (4) female high school principals of four (4) remote rural school districts. The researcher found the description of the lived experiences of the participants to depict female leadership and/ or leading in a remote rural context in the following emergent themes: (a) transitioning to principal, (b) complexities inherent to the role of principal, (c) incidents in the experience of principal, (d) relationships important to the experience, and (e) family-like climate of remote rural schools. Further discussion of the implication of these themes as well as suggestions for future research is described in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

To recap, the purpose of the study was to collect the perceptions of female high school principals located in nuanced context of remote rural areas. This study evoked the lived experiences of four female high school principals located in one Southwestern state. The researcher refers to each participant by their pseudonyms: Principal Bronte, Principal Evans, Principal Montgomery, and Principal Wollstonecraft. Although female leadership in schools has increased in the last twenty years, female leadership in remote rural areas continues to lag. Empirical research has been conducted in rural school districts; however, very few studies have been completed on the context of remote rural schools especially those led by female high school principals. This study endeavored to allow the voices of this subset to be heard.

Extensive interviews using Seidman's (2013) three-phase interview protocol with four female high school principals of remote rural districts answered this study's overarching question: What are the lived experiences of female high school principals in the context of remote rural school districts as they reflect upon their experiences and the influence their leadership has upon students, school, and community?

The purpose of this chapter is to provide discussion of findings to promote a holistic understanding of the data. In addition, implications of research findings are discussed in relation to school leadership practice and suggestions for further research.

Discussion of Findings

Although the experience of each of female principal is unique, similar themes emerged across participant interview data which aids to further understanding of female school leadership in the nuanced setting of remote rural high schools. The findings from

the study are discussed here with consideration to established literature. The literature is discussed around the analytic categories stemming from the overarching research question and presented by the five (5) emergent themes from participant interviews which were described in the previous chapter. The five (5) themes emerging from the interviews indicate that the principals are impacted by facets of their identity and the nuanced setting of remote rural school districts specifically. The descriptive themes depicting female leadership and/ or leading in a remote rural context are (a) transitioning to principal, (b) complexities inherent to the role of principal, (c) incidents in the experience of principal, (d) relationships important to the experience, and (e) family-like climate of remote rural schools

Transitioning to Principal

District experience /Rural community background

Findings of this study suggest that coming from a rural background improves the ability of teachers to transition to the rural high school principal position successfully. Cruzeiro and Boone (2009) and Schumann (2010) reported that superintendents of rural schools considered school-community fit to be important in the selection of a principal. Applicants who have spent a number of years teaching and working in the community have established important district and community connections. Even more so, the applicant who grew up in a remote rural area has the intimate understanding of rural community mores and traditions that allow the applicant to fit into the leadership role with fewer impediments than an applicant not acclimated to the rural context.

The expectation that the principal candidate has connection to the community and the rural context could be a benefit to a teacher rising within the district to the

principal position as was found to be the case with the participants of this study. However, it could also act as a deterrent to applicants outside the district even in districts of similar context. That may be, in part, the explanation as to why three of the participants in this study had not considered the move to the principal's office until after a position came available. The fourth participant, Principal Wollstonecraft, had thought about searching outside the district if she was not hired for the in-district principal position.

Encouragement and/or support

The participants in the study found encouragement and support as they transitioned to the principal position both from inside the district from their peers or the superintendent and to a lesser extent from informal network of rural high school principals. It is interesting to note that none of the participants spoke about encouragement from family members; although, it cannot be assumed that none was received since the participants focused on their school life and experience during the interview sessions.

A 2016 study (Kruse & Krumm) of female high school principals also reported the influence of male administrators' encouragement as contributing to the female educator considering an application to the high school principal position. They describe one participant's experience, "She did not follow her mother's recommendation to get her doctorate and move into administration, but did follow the same advice from her male principal" (p. 35).

Students, teachers, and school climate benefit from the continuous development of school leaders' learning and practices. The participants of this study recognized a

need to have support from colleagues in the high school principal position, preferably in a remote rural context, but found it difficult to obtain. Research reporting that one of the most frequently listed challenges of rural leaders is professional isolation (Browne-Ferrigno & Allen, 2006; Cruzeiro & Boone, 2009) supports the efforts of the participants in this study who sought out professional colleagues for encouragement and guidance towards becoming principal and support following the acceptance of the principal position.

Searby and Tripses (2006) defined a mentoring relationship as "a personal learning partnership between a more experienced professional who acts as a guide, role model, coach, teacher, and/or sponsor and a less experienced professional" (2006, p. 182). Formal mentoring programs were nonexistent for the participants of this study; however, three of the four participants described at least temporary informal mentoring relationships that assisted them with their transition to and management of the high school principal position. Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan (as cited by Searby & Tripses, 2006) discussed the differences between formal and informal mentorships. Traditionally, formal mentorships have a tendency to to reinforce the dominant white male leadership rather than providing support for smaller groups of minority and female leaders. For this reason, informal mentoring relationships are important for minority and female leaders. Searby and Tripses (2006) encourage women to seek out their own mentor and to be more "deliberate about teaching other women who aspire to leadership positions about ways to effectively engage in mentoring relationships" (p. 45).

Principal Evans participated in a mentoring network that consisted of all men early in her fifteen-year tenure. She attested that she benefitted from the contact with

other professional colleagues and was not bothered that they were all men. The fact that she had a female superintendent with whom she collaborated may have ameliorated the sense of isolation from other female professional colleagues.

Networking is another method for education professionals to access additional resources and develop a culture of support (Searby & Tripses, 2006). A network of women leaders serve as a method of developing talents, building relationships, and contributing to equal job opportunity and success for women (Wellington, 1999). According to Wellington, male administrators participate in traditional informal networks involving social activities that that women are hesitant or not invited to join.

Principal Bronte indicated that the informal network activities of her male colleagues did not bother her. She stated that she and her colleagues spent the majority of their time outside of school hours supervising athletic events. Having participated in athletics during her school days, she felt comfortable joining her colleagues, even the former coaches, in sports discussions. She pointed out that farming and hunting were the only other topics emerging in informal conversations both of which she was quite familiar from being raised on a farm. Although Principal Bronte went to great lengths to demonstrate her ability to fit in with her male colleagues, she did say she is happy to have a couple of female high school principals in the area now. Principal Bronte added that when she first started as principal she would have had to travel to the other side of the state to meet with a female colleague.

Complexities Inherent to the Role of Principal

Complexities exist in the role of a remote rural principal in ways different from urban high school principals. Many role complexities in the remote rural area stem from

the small staff and increased administrative demands from state and federal mandates (Starr & White, 2008). Although the student count is much smaller in remote rural high schools, the same need exists for clean and safe facilities, transportation, athletic scheduling, community relations, accountability supervision and reporting that exist as in urban schools as well as the assumption of other roles such as classroom teacher, transportation director, parent leader, and others. Principal Bronte's story illustrated the varied tasks the principal may find necessary to address during the school day. Three of the four principals carried the title and responsibility of multiple roles through at least part of their tenure as principal. One continues a dual role of special education teacher as well as high school principal. It can be understood from participants' stories that being forced out of necessity to fill more than one job role could result in inferior performance at either or both roles, which certainly increases stress levels for the high school principal contributes to principal turnover (Preston, Jakubiec, and Kooymans, 2009).

The complexity of the rural principal role requires a variety of leadership skills and behaviors, (Canales, TejedaDelgado, & Slate, 2008), a greater reliance on teacher leadership and community connections (Clark & Wildy, 2004), and sufficient education and knowledge regarding research-based practices (Cortez-Jiminez, 2012). At the same time, the multiple role dynamic of being a principal can interfere with principal-parent communication efforts (Masumoto & Browne-Welty, 2009), instructional leadership development (Renihan & Noonan, 2012), and negatively influences principal morale due to greater job expectations and less job satisfaction (Starr & White, 2009). This research seems to indicate that while the role of principal has need of more instructional

leadership knowledge and activity, the managerial responsibilities remain and demand immediate attention creating conflict for the principal. As we can see from Principal Bronte's story, filling both expectations requires work outside the school day.

Some of the complexities of a remote rural high school principal role comes from the community being 'school- centric'. In a rural community, the school is the main source of communication and entertainment for the community (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Preston, Jakubiec, Kooymans, 2013). As a community leader, the principal is expected to be accessible to community members whether school is in session or not which puts an extra level of complexity to the role (Budge, 2006). However, these rural principals seemed to accept the complexities of the role in stride by adapting their lives around the demands of the rural high school principal and counting the blessings as much as the sacrifices. Principals Bronte and Wollstonecraft noted the lower incidence of student behavior issues. All four participants acknowledged close ties with and support from the community. The participants also counted as a benefit the ability to know all the students by name and have daily interaction with them.

Incidents in the Experience of Principal

Findings of the study illustrate that participants used characteristics indicative of female relational leadership as described in the literature to manage difficult incidents as the high school principal (see further: Bartling, 2013; Kerber, 2002). Female high school principals rely on communication and connectedness with community members and students (Sherman, 2000) to manage incidents. The need for confidence in decision-making and leadership is mentioned in the literature as well (Gilbert, 2012). Principal

Wollstonecraft, in particular, spoke about the confidence needed and the confidence gained in managing a critical incident successfully early in her tenure as principal.

All the principals spoke of crisis planning and training in the event of a critical incident. Three of the participants described how they met the challenges of specific incidents. Principal Bronte reached out to a regional crisis team to facilitate grief counseling with students and faculty after a student's death. Principal Evans collaborated with her superintendent to solve a dilemma involving students with protective orders with a temporary addition to the staff. Principal Wollstonecraft put into action a lockdown plan that was part of their crisis response plan.

Rural schools should consider their unique context distant from first responders when creating a crisis response plan (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Even remote rural communities are not devoid of resources; however, they differ from community to community. The remote rural principal should become acquainted with possible resources that can be called upon to meet the needs of particular incidents.

Relationships Important to the Experience

Students

Women in leadership roles are reported to be nurturing, exhibiting qualities of compassion, empathy, and caring in their dealings with students (Jones et al., 2009). The participants in this study exemplified these characteristics with their focus on student achievement and well-being. The principals sought out opportunities to have positive interactions with their students. The two participants who had only recently transitioned from teacher to principal continued to reap benefits from the relationship they had built with students in their previous role as classroom teacher. Remote rural

high principals have a unique opportunity to form personal relationships with every student under their care, often to the benefit of the student.

Faculty

Female principals are known to be democratic and collaborative in leadership style (Brunner, 2000; and Mertz & McNeely, 1998). Participants in the study described their relationship with teachers as being advisory in nature. Principal Bronte advised teachers to maintain a professional relationship with students and to be aware of their behavior being observed closely by the community. Principal Montgomery counseled her female teachers regarding discipline issues with problem students. Principal Evans and Principal Wollstonecraft encouraged their teachers during implementation of significant policy change. Research supports participants' advisory role toward faculty. However, Stewart and Matthews (2015) found that small rural school principals spent less time in collaboration or mentoring activities with teachers than did their colleagues in medium-sized schools. Yet, it is important that rural high school principals pay attention to the relationship with faculty because the quality of relationship has a great effect on teacher retention in rural schools (Haar, 2007).

The participants of this study did not spend much time discussing their relationships with their teachers during interview sessions. When they did speak about their teachers they were supportive and appreciative of their efforts. Most of the comments about their teachers were parenthetical to the participant describing her own duties and activities. Had the research question specifically asked about teachers, the participants would likely have shared more about them.

Community

Characteristics of rural communities can be counted as a benefit and challenge. Barley and Beesley (2007) reported that routine interaction between the principal and the community outside of school hours increased a feeling of trust within the community. Further, rural principals need to be able to navigate with diplomacy long-standing and emotionally charged prejudices and resistance to change (Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra, & Angelidous, 2011). Participants acknowledged that their understanding of rural dynamics and values aided their transition to the principal position. However, their obligation to provide a college and career ready curriculum for all students, stay within budget, and provide a safe and secure environment sometimes came into conflict with the community status quo as many participants related a sense of frustration at the community's lack of support for necessary changes. Remote rural principals benefit from the ability to balance these competing values (Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra, &Angelidou, 2011).

At least one participant, Principal Wollstonecraft, met with reluctance to accept her authority as high school principal based on gender stereotypical beliefs of some community members. In her experience, only a few community members verbalized having a problem with a woman in the high school principal position, but she did not know how many were silently in agreement. They seemed to question her ability to harness the leadership power of the position in the same way a man could. Brunner (1999) explained that the principal position is a community leadership position that was viewed as masculine and powerful. The participants of this study have hope of adjusting that perception.

Family-like Climate

The participants in this study used the term 'family' to indicate the level of caring and connectedness that exists within a small community. This is one of the benefits of small community working and living. Larger communities and schools strive to artificially create the family-like climate that small communities and schools have naturally.

Positive school climate contributes to healthy development of student learning, moral and character education, and feeling of well-being as well as a host of other benefits for the education environment (Fallon, O'Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012; Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006). A positive school climate has been described as an educational environment demonstrating "norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe" (National School Climate Standards, p. 2)

The National School Climate Council, (2007) and researchers Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, (2013) include school connectedness, the degree of engagement in school activities, as an essential ingredient for positive school climate. The remote rural school has an advantage in this respect. Although the centrality of the school in the community events and activities can be burdensome on the high school principal in terms of time investment, it also provides the connectedness. The participants of this study found their presence at extra-curricular events as an opportune time to communicate their care and concern for the students in a more personal way. If the students were not participating in the extra-curricular event, then they are present as part of the audience. Principal Bronte expressed her belief that the students appreciated

her attendance at their events. She smiled when she described the reaction of the students: “They each think you are there just to watch them- not the whole team, not because it’s your job- because you care about them as people, or like a parent would.” Principal Montgomery stated that her presence at extra-curricular events allowed her to mingle with community members and parents. It was during these informal times that relationships and networks of resources and information were built.

Implications of Intersectionality: Gender and Rurality

The purpose of this study being to reveal the perceptions of four female principals of remote rural high schools, the discussion naturally turns to the intersection of gender and rurality. Intersectionality as a theoretical framework has long referred to the intersection of race, class, and gender as a mechanism to understand subgroups who are marginalized in multiple categories (Crenshaw, 1991). Although rurality was not at first included as a consideration for intersectionality (Pini, Brandth & Little, 2014), feminist scholars began to challenge the notion that rural is masculine beginning with a focus on farming women (see Shortall, 1999; Whatmore, 1991). Scholars of the intersection of women and rurality purport that rural women have been disadvantaged in that they have been basically ignored in favor of their urban sisters. Although rurality is not homogenous -- Thurston and Meadows (2003) concluded that “if a simple notion of rurality was ever useful, it is now obsolete”. Further, the experiences of women have some similarities across rural contexts including the conservative views, low education attainment, and frequent underemployment (Pruitt, 2007).

The participants of this study experience the intersection of gender and rurality on multiple levels. The participants exemplify being female and working and living in a

remote rural context. Although they sought higher education and were able to avoid two of the characteristics described by Pruitt (2007) -low education attainment and underemployment- they continue to be influenced by rural conservative ideas and practices. The researcher must reiterate here that, although the stories of the participants revealed difficulties stemming from rural conservatism, they felt the benefits of living and working in rural communities outweighed the difficulties.

One difficulty that was mentioned by Principal Montgomery and Principal Wollstonecraft was the real, imaginary, or exaggerated problem female educators have with managing the behavior of high school boys. Principal Montgomery expressed dismay that some of the high school boys did not respect their mothers let alone female teachers.

Morris's 2008 study on hegemonic masculinity could offer a beginning to an understanding of some male students' confrontational behavior toward female teachers. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the idea of an ideal masculine figure who is representative of white, upper- or middle- class, and demonstrating power over others, while men who are disadvantaged in one or more of these ideal qualities strive to 'prove' masculinity in other ways (Kimmel, 2005; Pyke, 1996). The 2008 Morris study identified economically depleted rural areas and a cultural history of "redneck" culture and values as an environment where men and boys may be attempting to compensate for a loss of the ideal hegemonic masculinity. Pyke (1996) identified aggression and dominance over women as one of the compensating behaviors. In addition, Morris (2008) acknowledged problematic male high school student behaviors could include

"fighting as a display of physical masculine dominance, or viewing academic work and striving as feminized and lower status" (Morris, p. 746).

This researcher notes that both fighting and lack of academic effort could be the cause of disciplinary action at school. This researcher further postulates that the male student's reaction to correction for behavior intended to demonstrate his masculinity as described above could result in a confrontational interaction between student and school authority. The findings from Morris (2008) considered with that of Pyke (1996) about hegemonic masculinity suggests that the confrontation might be heightened when the authority figure is a female teacher or principal. Paired with a cultural expectation of male dominance over female, the potential of confrontational interaction is increased. It is possible that community members considered these nuances when doubting the ability of a female principal to discipline a high-school-aged boy.

As school leaders in nuanced remote rural contexts, the participants witnessed the effect of gender and rurality on their students and community. In this study, the participants perceived rural women, who are products of the intersection of gender stereotypes and rural conservatism, as having the characteristics described in the literature- undereducated and underemployed. The sons and daughters of these rural women are students in the participants' charge. In the best interest of the students, the participants must balance educational ideals and state standards with the students' personal needs as well as community expectations- the balancing of competing values (Budge, 2006; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2010; Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra, Angelidou, 2011). Principal Bronte expressed the conflict as she was mourning the decline of the close community with traditional values and a strong sense of place as the children of

the long-established families leave for further education and better opportunities while more mobile families are moving in and may only stay a few years.

Implications of Leadership Theories and Effective Leadership Practices

The literature review in Chapter 2 discussed six leadership theories evident in leadership research as well as the Practices of Effective Leadership identified by the research conducted by the Wallace Foundation (2013). Although this study is primarily interested in the voices of participating female principals relating their own lived experience, this section of Chapter 5 discusses the possible leadership theories that may be seen at least in part in the stories shared by participants. The researcher reiterates that a semi-structured interview was conducted with open ended questions geared toward evoking a) the life story of participants leading to role of principal; b) details of the lived experience as principal in a remote rural high school; and c) reflection on the meaning of the experience. Participants were not asked to relate specific leadership behaviors or skills they used nor identify traits or characteristics of effective leadership to their self-reflection of their lived experience being a principal in a remote rural context.

Leadership Theories – Implications from Participants' Perceptions

Because the interview sessions were not organized around leadership theories, participants did not directly present their preference for or usage of any particular dimensions of the leadership theories (reviewed in Chapter 2) to their lived experiences of their school leadership practice. Therefore, the researcher is not presenting this discussion as evidence that the participants' stories give definitive proof of particular leadership theories practiced. Rather, in this section the researcher provides particular

quotes from participants that are suggestive of certain leadership theories. The purpose of the discussion in this section is to introduce the idea of the flexibility of the remote rural high school principal to lead with a variety of leadership skills as the situation and context calls for them. Table 4, Participants' Quotes to Theories, illuminates that certain leadership theories may be seen as exhibited in their practice. Abbreviations used in the table for the theories are noted as: Transformational Leadership- TL; Instructional Leadership- InstrL; Distributive Leadership- DL; Invitational Leadership- InvL; Constructivist Leadership- CL; and Sustainable Leadership- CL.

As this discussion centers around leadership theories discussed in Chapter 2, a brief orientation to the leadership theories and the dimensions related to them are described in this section to illuminate participant quotes as presented to the theories. Transformational leadership behaviors (see: Bass & Avolio, 1997) referenced in this discussion as dimensions, are *Idealized Influence (*attributes or behavior*), Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration*. These identifying behaviors depend on follower positive perception of leader intention, trustworthiness, and activities. Instructional leadership (see: Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008) dimensions consist of *High Expectations for Teaching and Learning, Coordinating Curriculum & Monitoring Student Outcomes, Organizing & Monitoring Activities for Staff Development, Being Visible & Modeling Values of the School's Culture*. Distributive Leadership (see: Harris, 2007) involves behaviors demonstrated by *Involving Many in Leadership Activities, Maximizing Human Capacity, Provide Time & support for Collaborative Activities, and Establish Strong Sense of Shared Values and Norms*. Distributive Leadership Theory describes a leader who shares

leadership responsibilities with a number of stakeholders. Sustainable leadership theory dimensions (see: Hargreaves, 2007) include *Developing Human & Material Resources, Enabling Ability to Adapt & Prosper under a Changing Educational Environment, Create & Preserve Sustained Learning*, and *Prepares for Successor*. The goal of Sustainable Leader ship is just that- sustaining the positive leadership and objectives over time even through leadership changes. Invitational leadership dimensions (see: Purkey & Novak, 1998) is demonstrated *by Maximizing or Developing Social Capital in the Organization, Promoting Communication among Stakeholders, Exhibiting Trust & Intentionality Behaviors*, and *Developing Caring, Ethical, and Democratic Climate*. Invitational Leadership is inclusive in its practices inviting all stakeholders to participate in decision-making and support activities of the school. Constructivist Leadership dimensions (see: Lynch, 2012) pertain to *Establishing a Climate of Community, Establishing a Shared Vision & Belief System,* and *Constructing Meaning and Knowledge Together*.

Three selected quotes from Principal Bronte suggest Transformational Leadership Individual support (or consideration) dimension as well as the dimensions of *Inspirational Motivation and Idealized Influence*. Although Transformational Leadership dimensions are generally describing the leader's relationship with and attitudes toward followers who are employees, students and community members might also fall under the follower distinction in the case of strong school leaders. *High Expectations For Teaching and Learning* can be seen in her attention to teacher evaluations. Regarding the Instructional Leadership dimension of *Being Visible & Modeling Values of the School Culture*, Principal Bronte's story of her lived experience

suggested her as being highly visible to the students, teachers, parents, and community members as she served breakfast among other extra duties and community service activities. The same quote about serving breakfast suggests her desire to build trust intentionally as described in Instructional Leadership Theory based on four interactive and reciprocal values: respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. Her intentional efforts to mingle with students in a convivial atmosphere shows her respect for them as people, as individuals. (Marks & Printy, 2003) Principal Bronte's efforts to fulfill her own expectations for herself as principal evoke other Invitational leadership dimensions of *Promoting Communication among Stakeholders,* and *Developing Caring, Ethical & Democratic Climate*. The quote describing the commitment of teachers toward students suggests that a climate of community as described in Constructivist Leadership theory has been established. The reciprocal and interdependent behaviors of the staff toward each other and, in this case, the students build positive relationships and cooperation (Lynch, 2012).

Selected quotes from Principal Evans did not cluster around one particular leadership theory but was spread out over several. The only theory that was suggested more than once was Constructivist Leadership, once for *Establishing a Climate of Community* as suggested by the quote about calling the bereaved family to check on them every day and once for *Constructing Meaning & Knowledge Together* as she did with her superintendent. One of her quotes suggests a dimension not found in the other participants' selected quotes, Sustainable Leadership- *Enabling the Ability to Adapt to & Prosper under a Changing Educational Environment* (Davies, 2007) suggested by her description of adapting to climate of high-stakes testing. Two of the selected quotes

for Principal Evans centered on the circumstances of student transfers and ‘second chances’. One quote described making arrangements for a student without transportation to make up needed credits in an alternative education program some distance away- an implication of Transformational Leadership individual consideration dimension (see Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). The other quote expresses Principal Evans’ expectations of students who transfer in to take advantage of a second chance- an implication of Instructional Leadership *High Expectations for Teaching and Learning*. The researcher selected the quote in which Principal Evans describes her confidence that she could pick up a phone and talk to a parent any time as an indication of Invitational Leadership dimension of *Promoting Communication with Stakeholders*. Invitational Leadership focuses on the value of stakeholders and encourages an open and respectful communication between the school organization and stakeholders in the community including parents (Purkey & Strahan, 1995).

Principal Bronte					
[H]elps me see them more in their social setting kind of helps just to understand the kids better you know they see me more and lets them know that you're human there if you're in there serving them breakfast and kind of joking with them and things like that a little bit it helps them see that you're more a little more human than the drill sergeant as the as the principal.	May talk about discipline a little bit but you have two roles you have compassion feel for them on the other hand you're like a parent too. Maybe a little more diplomatic with people…'let's try to work through this. See what we can do to help correct this or something like that.	I've been here thirty years we've lost several students. It plays a different role when you're a teacher as far as a principal because when you're the principal you are … you feel like you've gotta help everybody out not only your teachers you gotta help them out you gotta help out help out the students also.	In a rural school, as far as a family environment like we said earlier, everybody pretty well knows everyone and their families. Maybe not so much now as they used… we have a teacher who has Thunder tickets, you know. She'll invite a student and take them…She's got two tickets and so she'll invite a different student	[Y]ou have to caution your teachers on though you know is to keep it still the student-teacher relationship. You know, you're not their friend, per se. I mean, there still the student teacher relationship. You've got to keep that student teacher relationship but still let them know you're human in there too and are their friend. But still it's the student-teacher relationship.	I really like our TLE (teacher/leader evaluation) I really do. I like the observation instrument. I like that really well, but that does take a lot of time I think its forced administrators to be more accountable to their teachers also. The process of evaluating your teacher
InvL-TI; InstrL-BV	TL-Indv; InvL-PC	TL-Indv; TL-II; InvL-DC	CL-ECC	TL-Indv; TL-IM	InstrL-HE

Principal Evans					
[W]hen I first became a principal the testing wasn't as predominant in your thinking for the first years. then and that it's just gradually become primarily focused unfortunately and that's probably one of the biggest changes the change to me for me is the value and importance they put on those for the students and trying to resolve that in students' lives	We're a school of second chances. If they want to come out here, we'll give them a second chance. But they have to prove to us that they want that second chance. Because if they don't want it, they don't have to be here.	We are a family here: teachers, students. We know things that are going on a family flowers for funeral we take food to peoples' houses. I had one a couple of weeks ago who lost his mother a seventh grader. I called them every day.	This guy just happened to be one of those situations where he didn't have a vehicle he was a senior he couldn't graduate if he didn't do this. he passed all the EOIs; he just needed the accumulation of credits which I couldn't give him in a day and so we had set that in place for that to make that happen for him to graduate. And he did. We're flexible.	[E]ven though she [female superintendent] had been teaching for 15 years you know she's was a new superintendent so I spent the first couple years I mean really visiting with her and feeling her out as to you know what was her thinking on this issue and trying to understand from her perspective on that…She and I think differently; she saw things totally different from me which I use that	[F]or the most part I have a pretty good working relationship with most the parents. I can call them on the phone and say Okay here's the problem I got, make a suggestion.
SL-AA	InstrL-HE	CL-ECC	TL-Indv	CL-CM	InvL-PC

Table 4: Participants' Quotes to Theories

Principal Montgomery					
I think they like having a principal that's out there. I mean I'm in our churches; I'm in civic duties; I'm in other things besides school. Most of the community knows me but that's been a plus and a draw back at the same time, because everybody think they can come and tell me	I've only been a teacher with one teacher that is still here… We just had a really good relationship. They felt free to come talk to me you know if they had any concerns.	Nearly all my teachers in the core subjects are women and I think they'd prefer to talk to me about what's going on some things they are facing. In that respect, I feel like they are more apt to come to me than if a man was sitting in here. Because men don't… they have such a different way of looking at things. "Well, you just shouldn't put up with that."	We have a very active parent company. They volunteer at grade school … they go in and listen to kids read. And I think during testing they will probably come down and help us by being monitors… We have some really good people in the community that are willing to do that. And they have the time. They're stay at home moms. And some of them who even do have full time jobs but they can adjust their hours so that they can be here.	[W]hen a teacher explains to me what they are doing in class I know exactly what they are talking about because I've been there with that exact student… That's why I have a real empathy with the teacher with some of the students that we get.	The kids who are absent the most are the ones on the failing list. They really don't think there's a connection… I already have a kid now that is at 10 days and we're in February. I'm going to let him make up some days by staying at. We have after school detention for an hour. I told him 'you stay 2 days at after school detention, I'll knock off ½ day of absenteeism.
InvL-PC; Instr-BV	TL-Indv	InvL-TI	InvL-SC	TL-Indv;	TL-Indv; InstrL-HE; InstrL-CC

Principal Wollstonecraft					
I mean, I have a good relationship with students… we have mutual respect and can come to an understanding. (InvL-TI)	You know, I think it just takes earning their (community's) trust and their respect I kind of knew the feeling toward women and leadership roles. And it wasn't always positive. So, for the board to trust me and my superintendent to trust me and now the community to trust me means a lot to me. Because I don't think that was there in the beginning. And I feel like we worked toward that mutual respect and I can do this job.	I feel like that's a challenge to get the community behind something, your school board, your kids, your teachers even. But I feel like we are moving in that direction. I've made a lot of changes that the school hadn't seen in several years. And haven't had a lot of backlash from it. [I] Didn't try to come in and try to change everything. But little steps at a time.	I'm just getting my feet wet in curriculum and mapping and alignment. That's new for me. As a classroom teacher, I focused on my area. Now to take a broad look at are we mapped all the way through? That's new for me… Thankfully, I have really good lead teachers in different areas who can take the lead in the mapping process.	I run a study hall. It's for kids that are on my ineligible list… Just to have an adult making sure they're doing what they're supposed to do. So, I do that (InstrL-HE) (Instr-BV)	[W]hen I first started last year was that I started a leadership council, and we call it PLC, principal's leadership council. And we meet once a week on Monday mornings at 7:30.
	InvL-TI	TL-IM) (InvL-TI	InstrL-CC		SL-DH; DL-IM/ InvL-DC

Table 4: Participants' Quotes to Theories

Three selected quotes from Principal Montgomery's interview suggest Transformation Leadership in one dimension- *Individual Support (or Consideration*). Two quotes describe her availability and support of her teachers, and the third shared an individual consideration she showed toward a student in danger of losing credit. As the literature notes Transformation Leadership seeks to inspire follower (in this case, the teachers and students) to higher levels of ability and potential through personal attention to individual needs (Bass & Avolio, 1993). The selected quote describing Principal Montgomery's participation in community activities and availability to community members suggest *Promoting Communication among Stakeholders*, a dimension of Invitational Leadership, as well as Instructional Leadership dimension of *Being Visible & Modeling Values of the School Culture.* Both leadership theories describe the positive interaction of school leaders with stakeholders as inspiring trust and positive relationships (Purkey & Strahan, 1995; Hallinger, 2003). One quote described Principal Montgomery's empathy toward female teachers having trouble with disruptive students and apparent lack of support from male principals suggesting Invitational Leadership dimension of *Trust & Intentionality*.

Principal Wollstonecraft's selected quotes identified with dimensions of all six leadership theories discussed here. The leadership theory that was suggested most often was Invitational Leadership Theory for *Trust & Intentionality* and *Developing Caring, Ethical, & Democratic Climate* dimensions particularly as she described building trust with students, superintendent, community members and board members as well as establishing a student leadership organization. Next, Instructional Leadership Theory was indicated three times within the selected quotes: *Coordinating Curriculum &*

Monitoring Outcomes indicated by her description of her transitioning role from teacher participating in her own curriculum development to principal overseeing all curriculum (also suggesting Constructivist Leadership- *Constructing Meaning and Knowledge Together*). Principal Wollstonecraft led early morning study hall suggesting High expectations for teaching and learning and *Being Visible & Modeling Values* of school culture. Dimensions from Transformational Leadership- *Inspirational Motivation* suggested by Principal Wollstonecraft's ability to get support for considerable changes, Distributive Leadership- Involving many in leadership implied by the student leadership organization as is Sustainable Leadership- *Develops Human and Material Resources*.

Distributed Leadership dimensions were identified in only Principal Wollstonecraft who leads a professional learning community (PLC) school. The stories of the other three participants focused more on the complexity of their role in keeping the school running smoothly than distributing leadership activities among the faculty. Distributed leadership requires some investment of time and human capital both of which is in short supply in many remote rural schools. That may explain in part the absence of distributed leadership dimensions.

The discussion and presentation of selected quotes from the participants own retelling of their lived experiences as they suggest contemporary leadership theory dimensions applied in practice, possibly indicates that female remote rural high school principals practice multiple leadership theories in order to carry out their school leadership role in serving their school community.

Effective Leadership Practices – Implications from Participants' Perspectives

The Wallace Foundation's 2013 research findings identified five key practices

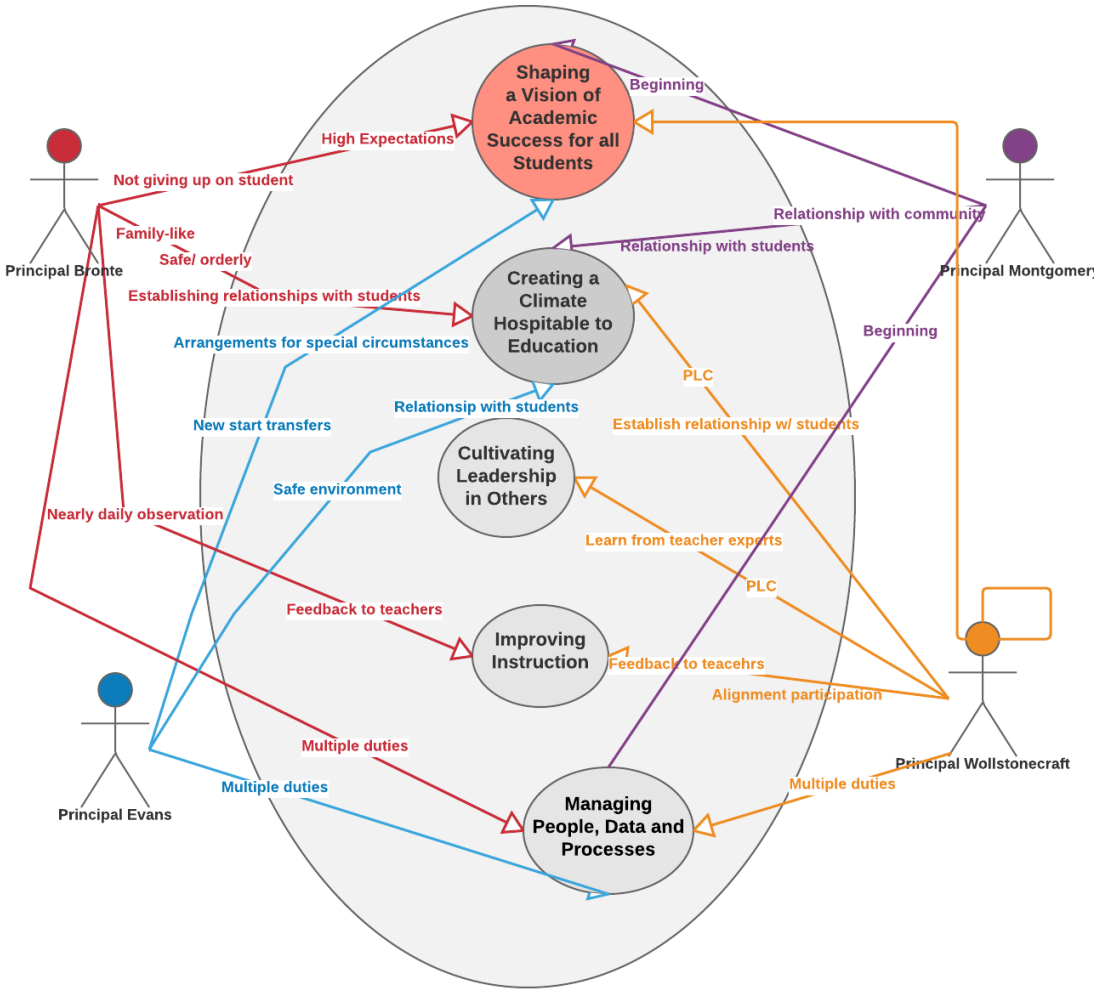
found in effective school leaders: *shaping a vision of academic success for all students*, *creating a climate hospitable to education*, *cultivating leadership in others*, *improving instruction*, and *managing people, data, and processes*. These leadership practices were evident among this group of female remote rural high school principals. Figure 2, participant connections to effective leadership practices, provides a visual of the practices evident in the participants' discussion. All four participants demonstrated three practices: *shaping a vision of academic success for all students*, *creating a climate hospitable to education*, and *managing people, data, and processes*.

Only Principal Wollstonecraft exhibited all five practices, adding c*ultivating leadership in others*. The professional learning community in practice at her high school and her willingness to rely on teacher expertise established the existence of that practice. Still relatively new to the position, Principal Wollstonecraft demonstrated knowledge of best practice literature and verbalized a desire to improve her school by adopting those practices. Principal Montgomery, also relatively new to the position, was beginning to develop some best practice considerations through experience with the school leader role and influence from her superintendent and monthly area principal meetings.

Managing people, data, and processes is the practice with the strongest evidence from all four participants. The participants described their involvement in this practice as part of their daily lives as remote rural high school principals. Of the five effective leadership practices, it is one that is more easily identified by and visible to stakeholders. Teachers and students observe and experience the principal in their daily activity of managing people and the processes of leadership. The community has

opportunity to witness the principal's management during visits to the school and community events. The participants of this study credited their competence in this area to earning the trust and support of the community members and school staff. The activity of data management is more limited in visibility, being most available to teachers and school board members than the community at large. Participants of this study spoke only about the duty to use data to complete required reports to the state department of education.

Figure 1: Participant Connections to Effective Leadership Practices



Along with *managing people, data, and processes***,** all four of the participants also described practices of *shaping a vision of academic success for all students* and *creating a climate hospitable to education*. The fact that all four participants participated in three of the four effective leadership practice suggest that the schools and the high school principals of the study are making strides toward effective school status.

Implications for Practice and Research

Building-level Leadership

This study serves as an encouragement to potential female high school principals to persevere with inclinations to lead despite intimidating job description and possible skepticism of the community. In addition, potential and new principals should reach out for a network of support from other rural principals. Female rural principals would benefit from a network of other female rural principals if possible. The rural female principal may have to continue her practice of ingenuity and resourcefulness to find the supportive network even if the school district does not encourage it or provide compensation time to participate.

District-level Leadership

District superintendents take note from this study that the practice of encouraging teachers of the district to fill vacant principal positions is positively accepted by the community and provides the fledgling principal a level of comfort and established trust to begin the administrative experience. Additionally, it remains true that female teachers may not actively pursue the principal position without encouragement from building and district leadership, which can potentially reduce the

pool of qualified and talented school leaders. Superintendents might consider encouraging talented teachers to train for building level leadership roles before a position comes available and be willing to promote qualified teachers to rural district colleagues when no position exists within the same district. Although professional development resources are limited and generally focused on teaching staff, the district would benefit from making it easier for principals to participate with colleagues in professional development and mutual support.

School Leadership Preparation Programs and Professional Networks

Leadership preparation programs need to acknowledge the nuances existent in geographical areas and address those with aspiring principals. Leadership preparation courses could contain modules about the management of job complexities in urban versus rural districts. In addition, leadership preparation programs in regional universities should promote the importance of developing a network of support and learning to potential high school principals and provide school districts assistance in establishing such.

Female principals would benefit from a professional organization focused on promoting and supporting the endeavors of female school administrators as do female members of other professions enjoy. The National Rural Education Association could provide support for its female members by encouraging a special interest group to provide support and encouragement for this subgroup.

Contributions and Suggestions for Further Research

This study contributes to growing the empirical literature on rural schools and rural school principals. Just as Karen Eppley (2009) noted the need for policy makers to

allow rural schools to communicate what determines a highly-qualified teacher in the rural school context, so the same need exists in determining effective leadership practices in the remote rural context. This research study provides empirical evidence on further illumination of the lived experience of female high school principals in remote rural contexts. The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of the whole picture of school leadership and specifically to the lived experience of female leadership in the nuanced setting of remote rural high schools. The intersection of rural context, gender, and high school level creates a nuanced subset in school leadership research where there exists an important need to conduct more empirical studies on this sub-group of leadership in the context. To truly understand the significance of the contributions and the perceptions of this subgroup in a more generalizable way, future studies of this kind are needed throughout the United States. Additional suggestions for future research are discussed below.

The findings of this study suggest that at least female school leaders need self-confidence in their ability to meet challenging incidents effectively and obtain that through every successful exchange and decision. Palladino, Haar, Grady, and Perry (2016) note the need for self-efficacy research in understanding its role in rural female superintendents' resiliency and self-sustainability toward long-term service and success. Arguably, the same research need exists for female principals of rural schools. *Do female rural principals possess self-efficacy and resiliency beliefs leading to self-sustainability? If so, how?*

The participants in this study described experiences that correspond to and extend extant literature concerning the success of rural school leaders dependent at least

in part on understanding and accommodation of the uniqueness of the rural community and school. Preston, Jakubiec, and Kooymans (2013) description of rural school leadership as "multifaceted, place-conscious, and relationship-dependent… [requiring a principal] who is knowledgeable about educational policies, yet receptive to the distinctive needs, perceptions, and culture of educational stakeholders of that rural community" (p. 10). Whether the principal is from the community or not, the successful rural principal will adapt leadership traits to work with the values and sensibilities of a small rural community (Harmon & Schafft, 2009). A question that can be further pondered from the results of this study is: *Can the culture of small communities effect the leadership style principals of rural schools employ?*

Findings of the study contribute to understanding implications of female remote rural school principals employing behaviors consistent with more than one leadership style. In addition, the findings reveal that female principals of remote rural schools employ effective leadership practices as identified by the Wallace Foundation (2013). Other research has shown that women in leadership positions exhibit leadership characteristics consistent with effective leadership practices (Shakeshaft, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007). At least one study (Bartling 2013) of four female high school principals of Midwestern rural districts exhibited care-focused decision making and relational leadership, which are aligned with typical female leadership styles identified by Eagly and Carli (2003). Further research of female high school principals in the nuanced context of remote rural areas is needed. Specifically, questions posed to explore: *How do female principals of rural high schools exhibit effective leadership practice compared to female rural elementary principals, to male rural high school*

principals? Are the effective leadership practices as identified by the Wallace Foundation (2013) effective in remote rural schools?

Notwithstanding female educators outnumbering men in obtaining bachelor's master's and doctorate degrees, Kruse and Krum (2016) note the under-representation of qualified women in high school administration positions. The researchers speculated that lingering stereotypes and sex discrimination may be at fault. The analysis of this study found that these female principals were hesitant to identify gender stereotypes and sex discrimination as factors in their lived experience; however, upon reflection and during the retelling of their lived experiences both were clearly evident. Their relating of how they seemed to overcome stereotypes and possible discrimination contributes to the literature to further understand for female school leadership practice specific in rural context. Future studies might include student, teacher, and stakeholder perceptions of female high school principals in remote rural context, and question: *Do stereotypical beliefs concerning the need for a male in the high school principal position persist in rural areas?*

The findings of this study concur with the literature concerning the lack of female administrator networks and collaboration opportunities. More so, the findings resonate the importance that more research specific to this particular school leadership population is essential to informing both practice and the preparation of school leaders to oversee rural schools. In a 2010 study of rural school administrator networks (Hite, Reynolds, & Hite), female administrators were found to be only peripherally active among in district and across district networks. It was noted that far fewer female administrators were existent in the rural districts under study. As stated previously,

people tend to network most frequently with people like themselves or with whom they have had a previous relationship, which could explain the paradox of female leaders who are known for relational traits having fewer and weaker network ties. Future research focusing on networks of support for female administrators in remote areas could further inform whether that need is being met in other locales. Specifically questioning: *How do female high school principals in remote rural contexts connect with similar colleagues?*

The findings of this study point out the need for research and assistance for rural communities and schools as demographics change and economic distress. Although a perception of the rural idyll is persistent within the rural community and with the participants themselves, future studies of the changing demographics and social mores of rural communities and schools are needed to inform state and local education planners. In addition, future research on remote rural location and school safety is needed to address critical incident management and emergency personnel response time. A question could be asked and related study specific to: *How do female principals face challenges in the remote rural context?*

Much can be learned about the nuances of leading in a remote rural school from further study in this area. The strengthening of rural school leadership effectiveness will not only benefit the teachers and students of these schools but entire rural communities, and strengthening rural communities overall where can be found the "vast majority of food, energy, and environmental benefits" as well as declining economic growth and increased child poverty (NAC, 2017) can bolster the economic health of each state. The

success of rural schools and their communities is vital to the success of the country as a whole.

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Appendix A: Invitation Letter

Dear Principal _____,

My name is Sheryl Craig. I am a doctoral student and the University of Oklahoma in the Educational Leadership and Policy program. I am conducting a qualitative phenomenological research study about the experiences of female high school principals in rural school districts in the Southwest. Few research studies explore the lived experiences of female high school principals especially in rural school districts. The goal of my research is to fill the gap in knowledge and to expand the research base.

This study will be conducted through a series of interviews during the spring and possibly summer of 2015. Our meetings will be arranged with your schedule and convenience in mind. Interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed for analytical purposes. Your identity and the identity of your school will be kept confidential and protected at all times. You will be assigned a pseudonym as will your school.

The information gained from this study will be shared with a supervising committee of university professors and will become part of my dissertation. The dissertation will be place in the University of Oklahoma Libraries.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please contact me at Sheryl.d.craig-1@ou.edu at your earliest convenience. I will then contact you by phone to speak directly to you in order to answer any questions you may have and schedule the initial interview.

I appreciate your time. Thank you,

Appendix B: Informed Consent

University of Oklahoma

Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title: Lived Experiences of Female High School Principals in Remote Rural School Districts of a Southwest State

Principal Investigator: Sheryl D. Craig

Department: Educational Administration, Curriculum, and Supervision

You are being asked to volunteer for this research study. This study is being conducted at your school and three other remote rural high schools. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a female principal in a remote rural high school.

Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the lived experiences of female principals of remote rural high schools and to understand their leadership experiences.

Number of Participants

Up to six people will take part in this study.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to partake in two interview sessions to answer questions about your school and community. In addition, you will be asked to review and comment on the transcripts of the interviews. Specifically, you will be asked to note corrections, addition, and deletions as well as any statements you do not wish to have quoted.

Length of Participation

The first interview session will take approximately 90 minutes. The second interview session will take approximately 45 minutes. The two sessions will take place as few as two days and as much as two week apart.

Risks of the Study

Risks that you may experience from participating are considered to be limited. Questions asked will not be of a sensitive nature. There is no cost involved in participation in the study.

Benefits of the Study

There are no tangible benefits of participating in this study; however, there is an opportunity for you to reflect on your experiences as a school leader and perceptions of being a principal in a rural community.

Compensation

You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this study.

Confidentiality

In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you. Pseudonyms will be in place of your name and the name of your school Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers will have access to the records.

There are organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis. These organizations include the OU Institutional Review Board.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you withdraw or decline participation, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the study. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer any question and may choose to withdraw at any time.

Audio Recording of Study Activities

To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews will be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording. ___ Yes ___ No

Contacts and Questions

If you have concerns or complaints about the research, please contact

Sheryl Craig by (phone) 580-923-7909 or (email) sheryl.d.craig-01@ou.edu or

Dr. Kathrine J. Gutierrez (phone) 405-325-0549 (email) kjgutierrez@ou.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

_____

Participant Signature Print Name Date

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

_____

Print Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Phase One (life history)

How did you come to be a high school principal?

How did you come to be at a remote rural high school?

Phase Two (lived-experience; details of the experience)

What is it like for you to lead a high school?

What is it like for you to lead a high school in a remote rural area?

What is it like for you to lead a high school as a woman?

What are the details of your life as a high school principal in a remote rural area?

Have you experienced any critical incidents as a female school leader, either a specific challenge or opportunity or both?

Phase Three (reflection on meaning)

Given what you have said about your experiences in education before you became principal and given what you have said about your experiences as a principal, how do you make sense of your role as a high school principal in a remote rural area?

What does it mean to be a female principal of a remote rural high school?

Additional Probing Questions

Phase 1

1. Please describe a key experience that led you to become a high school principal. (Note: This question may be used to 'dig deeper' for participant meaning about life history as a school principal.)

2. Are there other turning points in your career leading to this decision you'd like to share?

Phase 2

1. How has your experience as a high school principal of a remote rural district been what you expected? How has the experience been different from what you expected?

2. Can you describe a difficult situation you have faced since becoming principal? How would you describe your interaction with that situation? (Note: This question may be used to 'dig deeper' for participant meaning about a critical incident experienced as a female school leader.)

3. Can you describe a positive experience since you became principal? How would you describe your interaction with that situation? (Note: This question may be used to 'dig deeper' for participant meaning about a critical incident experienced as a female school leader.)

Phase 3

1. Upon reflection of your experiences as a female high school principal in a remote rural district, what additional thoughts would you like to share about your leadership experiences?

Appendix D: IRB Approval

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Continuing Review – Expedited Review – AP0

Date: October 13, 2016 **IRB#:** 6106

Principal Investigator: Sheryl Diane Craig **Approval Date:** 10/13/2016 **Expiration Date:** 09/30/2017

Expedited Category: 6 & 7

Study Title: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN REMOTE RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF A SOUTHWESTERN STATE

Based on the information submitted, your study is currently: Active, closed to enrollment. On behalf the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and approved your continuing review application. 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.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- 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.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

You will receive notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date noted above. You are responsible for submitting continuing review documents in a timely fashion in order to maintain continued IRB approval.

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

Cordially,

Lara Mayeux

Lara Mayeux, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board