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Learning While Leading: A Multiple Case Study of Principals' Ways of Knowing

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LEARNING WHILE LEADING: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF PRINCIPALS'

WAYS OF KNOWING

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ABSTRACT

LEARNING WHILE LEADING: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF PRINCIPALS' WAYS OF
KNOWING

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Excellent school leadership is undeniably linked to improved student achievement. Due to the impact administrators have on school and student success, it is critical that current and aspiring principals receive high-quality training and support. Superior principal preparation programs and ongoing training opportunities are fundamental to fulfilling the need and improving student outcomes nationwide. A phenomenological case study approach was used to explore the factors contributing to the success of public school principals and examine from the practitioners' perspective how they learned their craft. Adult learning theory is situated within the context of social constructivism, and used to critically examine the learning of three elementary school principal's. Multiple interviews and observations were conducted for each participant, and the transcriptions of those events comprise the database. Qualitative data analysis procedures revealed that successful principal craft is dependent upon their knowledge of teaching and learning, understanding of emotional intelligence and the principal's ability to communicate effectively. Data also revealed that having a passion for student success, a determined spirit, and an approachable personality were also major contributors to principal success. The data also highlighted the value of socially constructed adult learning through job-embedded workplace training and peer interactions. Findings from the study contribute to the knowledge base surrounding principal preparation, continuing education and successful principal craft within context. The study also contributes to our understanding of adult learning and further solidifies the positive and substantial impact of workplace learning on principal practice.

Completing my doctoral dissertation marks the end of an era in my life. I have been a student for the better part of 30 years. Though I will always be a lifelong learner, completing this work formally terminates my status as a 'student.' It has been an emotional journey that I am proud to have taken. Arriving at this destination would not have been possible without the support of my family and friends.

First and foremost, I dedicate this work to my husband Wilson, who has been my biggest supporter, partner, and champion. Words cannot express my gratitude for all you have sacrificed to help me achieve my dreams. I love you with all my heart.

To my daughter, thank you for bringing so much joy to my life. No matter how difficult the day, your sweet smile and playful giggles make it better. I look forward to watching you grow and pursue your own life goals.

I also dedicate this work to my mother Sylvia, who has remained steadfast in her message, that I could accomplish anything to which I set my mind. Mom, You were right! Thank you for teaching me to persevere, no matter how difficult the challenge.

I extend my sincere appreciation to my parents-in-law Jerry and Sybil, for all they have done to support the completion of this project. Without your help, it would not have been possible.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the unrelenting support of my educator colleagues. Laura, thank you for making me your 'grasshopper.' Your wisdom and guidance continue to influence my practice every day. Danny, thank you for having my back and for pushing me to be a better leader. Toni, thank you for your heartwarming support these past few years. To my work families at WSES and WHS, thank you for the camaraderie, thoughtful dialogue, and reflective feedback. You have shaped the leader I am today, and I am privileged to serve among you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

There is considerable evidence suggesting student achievement is positively affected by the presence of high-quality principal leadership (Jacobson & Day, 2007; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Researchers believe the quality of principal leadership is the second most influential factor determining student and school success (Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al, 2010). Given the evidence that effective school leadership accounts for an estimated 10% increase in student test scores (Bush, 2009) having high quality leaders in every school is necessary to sustain system-wide success (Jacobson, 2011) and continued improvement in student achievement. The study that follows was designed to examine, from the principals' perspective, which knowledge, skills, and dispositions contribute most to the successful implementation of their craft, but also to gain a better understanding of *how* they learned to implement those knowledge-bases, skills, and dispositions identified as craft essentials. The findings contribute to the broader literature surrounding principal preparation and leadership development.

Principal Craft and School Success

In their multi-faceted role principals are responsible for leading a learning-centered, interpersonal organization with clear values, and a vision for high academic success (Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2010). Principals must be skilled at juggling the demands and managing the perceptions of various community members and organizations, maintaining the safety and security of the school, leading professional development, and exercising responsible human resource management (Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2010). Scholars agree, successful principal practice is contingent on two factors. Principals must have the knowledge and skills required to enact the four core practices of school leadership: setting directions,

developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program (Garza, Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson, & Merchant, 2014; Gurr, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2010). Principals must be able to navigate and implement these practices within the unique context of their school community (Bruckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Gurr, 2014; Liethwood et al., 2006; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). The depth and breadth of this position makes equipping school leaders with the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions that lead to successful practice, a daunting task.

Preparing Leaders for Successful Practice

It would be neglectful to discuss the qualities and practices of successful school leaders "without reference to leader development, or leader development without reference to what we know about why and how leadership works best" (Walker & Hallinger, 2013, p. 401). Literature points to preparation programs, ongoing professional development, and job-embedded experience as the means by which principals learn to perform the duties of their position. Aspiring leader development in the United States is largely the work of higher education institutions (Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2009; Møller, 2012). Continuing education and training beyond graduation from higher education institutions is equally important to developing high-quality leadership practices, particularly in the early stages of career development (Mitgang, 2012).

Graduate programs include courses that prepare candidates for licensure and work as a school administrator. Program delivery and content varies with each institution; some leadership preparation programs follow a more traditional approach whereas students receive information via lecture and independent practice, while other more innovative programs utilize an action-oriented, problem-based learning approach, cohort models, internships, and collaborative

district/university partnerships (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005;

Hallinger & Lu, 2013; Jacobson & Cypres, 2012; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). Researchers fear

that programs lacking stringent admission requirements and real-world experiences will lead to

an abundance of "'certified,' but not truly 'qualified'" (Davis et al., 2005, p. 1) candidates, ill

equipped to effectively lead schools. In light of the evidence touting the significant impact of

principal leadership on student outcomes, educational leadership program leaders have a moral

and ethical obligation to design and implement high quality programs that fully prepare adult

learners for the challenging task that lies ahead.

In addition to the challenges faced by higher education institutions, there are grave

concerns regarding principal's access to rigorous, meaningful professional development (Cook,

2015; Fenwick & Pierce, 2002; Mitgang, 2012; Peterson, 2002). Professional learning is as

important for principals as it is for teachers, but is an area that has been largely neglected as state

education officials focused more on increasing the professional knowledge of teachers in the

wake of high-stakes testing and accountability (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002). The majority of

formal principal training occurs in isolation, during pre-service preparation programs (Mitgang,

2012; Barth, 1986), leaving many school leaders inept and ill prepared to lead improved

instruction. Principal professional development opportunities have been referred to as a

"wasteland" (Barth, 1986, p.156) of random university courses, and "episodic in-service

activities" (Barth, 1986, p. 156). These issues, coupled with the need to further enhance pre-

service learning, has led to school divisions seeking alternative activities and delivery methods

for providing ongoing professional learning and support to school principals (Mitgang, 2012).

Of particular interest are models that incorporate strategic, ongoing, job-embedded training

(Bush, 2009; Cunningham & Hillier, 2013; Eraut, 2011; 2007), focused on student achievement,

and inclusive of opportunities for reflective practice (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002; Peterson, 2002; Barth, 1986; LaPointe & Davis, 2006).

Emerging Issues and Challenges Related to Principal Learning

High-quality principal leadership is necessary to ensure sustainable progress in our nations public schools. The development and implementation of effective principal preparation programs and valuable professional development opportunities are logical strategies for strengthening leadership skills and ensuring more student success in more schools. There is a substantial amount of research indicating the value of workplace learning and urging school districts and universities to partner in providing meaningful, reflective professional development opportunities. While researchers recognize and encourage collaborative working relationships between novice and experienced principals (Rich & Jackson, 2005), these models are providing only minimal support in helping beginning principals hone and improve their skills (Gettys, Martin, & Bigby, 2010).

Rationale and Purpose

Literature in the field of educational leadership demonstrates that the principal is an important factor in determining the success of a school. Knowing that effective leadership "is not something principals achieve by following a checklist of tasks or a step-by-step program" (Quinn, 2002, p. 462) we must develop a better understanding of those factors that are most influential in developing successful leaders' ability to implement strategic leadership practices. A greater understanding of *how* principals learn to implement their craft, within the context of their school community (Klar & Brewer, 2013, 2014) is necessary. Improved training would bring the field one step closer to ensuring high-quality leaders in all schools. The information

could also increase understanding of how we can leverage the current talent to help struggling

principals improve their practice.

The conceptual framework for this study takes into account the assertions made in the

literature regarding principal success and leadership learning. As previously stated, the

effectiveness of the school principal is directly related to student achievement. The literature

indicates that principal leadership is shaped over time by their preparation for the position and

the quality of ongoing professional learning. Framed from the perspective of socially

constructed adult learning, this study examined how successful principals reported their learning

as it relates to the implementation of their craft. The study examined the identified learning

structures through the constructs of adult learning theory, workplace learning, and communities

of practice.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore those factors that have the greatest influence on

the leadership practices of successful principal practitioners and develop an understanding of

how they learned to implement their craft. The findings contribute to the larger body of

knowledge surrounding principal practice, training, and professional learning. This study was be

guided by the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of successful principals, what knowledge, skills and dispositions

    contribute most to their success as practicing school administrators?

2. How and in what ways did they learn those knowledge bases, skills and dispositions that

    they associate most with their success?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the terms *principal, school leader,* and *administrator* are used interchangeably to refer to the governing body of an individual school that is charged with making school-level decisions.

I defined *craft, craft knowledge, and/or principals' craft,* as the knowledge bases, skills, and dispositions principals employ to carry out the tasks of their position.

The terms *participants* and *respondents* are used interchangeably to refer to the principals and executive leadership team members included in the study.

The terms *professional development, in-service, professional learning,* and *continued(ing) education* are used interchangeably and described the traditional process of continuous learning through which principals are expected to hone and perfect their craft.

Contribution to the Field

A closer examination of how successful principals learn their craft and the factors that have the greatest impact on their practice provides reflective insight to practitioners in struggling schools as they strive to improve student outcomes in their own buildings. The study findings also contribute to the literature surrounding higher education principal preparation programs and leadership development. It is important to understand that this study was not intended to create yet another list of what it is principals do that contributes to their success in leading continuous school improvement; rather the study was designed to explore the factors that have the greatest influence their craft and discern how they learned to make the leadership decisions that contribute to their continued success.

Limitations and Delimitations

As with any study there are limitations, factors beyond my control, and delimitations, factors that influenced the study by my own choosing. Limitations for this particular study included the candor and preparedness of respondents, their prior work and learning experiences, quality of their preparation programs, and ability to reflect upon, and learn from, those experiences. Delimitations included my decision to limit the candidate pool to a single school district. The results are not generalizable to a larger audience. An additional delimitation was my decision to assess a relatively small sample size, as I limited the study to three individual principal cases.

Overview of the Study

This report is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter I describe the logical reasoning for the study, a brief overview of the major concerns related to principal learning, the research questions guiding the study, and a synopsis of the contributions the study will make to the field. Chapter Two provides an overview of the extant literature related to socially constructed adult learning, successful principal craft in context, and principal preparation and the ongoing acquisition of knowledge. In Chapter Three, I describe the study design and methods for data collection and analysis in great detail. Within-case analyses for each individual principal followed by a cross-case analysis of all three cases are presented, without discussion, in the study findings in Chapter Four. In the final chapter, a discussion of the major findings and implications for additional research are described.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to present a thorough picture of the phenomenon surrounding principal learning and the successful implementation of their craft. Since this study is exploratory in nature and focused on the essence of participants lived experiences, the literature presented is not intended to guide or direct the study, but rather to establish connections among the topics relevant to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Several bodies of literature are presented and organized into three specific categories. First, adult learning theory and social constructivism literature is used to describe the theoretical foundation upon which this study is built. Second, literature on principal preparation and the ongoing acquisition of professional knowledge is used to describe how principals are prepared and continually developed for their role as the primary school-level leader. Finally, literature on the successful craft of principals within the school context is presented to provide a complete understanding of the role, responsibilities, and expectations of public school principals.

Socially Constructed Adult Learning

Husserl, also known as the "father" of phenomenology, believed that true phenomenological studies were "constructed using a pure logic, free of any empirical – notably psychological – presupposition and without any foundation other than its own internal coherence" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 5). Researchers subscribing to Husserl's philosophy posit the phenomenon can only be truly understood by setting aside all preconceived notions or explanations (Hays & Singh, 2012). Contrary to Husserl's position on the use of theory in phenomenological research, Creswell (2013) states, "no qualitative study begins from pure observation without a prior conceptual structure composed of theory" (p. 66). Creswell (2013)

describes the use of theory in all qualitative research as central to establishing a basic

understanding of behavior, attitudes, or patterns demonstrated by the study's participants. One

must be able to apply various theoretical perspectives in order to fully appreciate and interpret

the behaviors of study participants and make meaning from the collected data. Creswell's

position best describes the application of social constructivism and adult learning theories for

this particular study.

      Theoretical perspectives on learning. Learning, by definition, means to gain

knowledge or skills through the act of studying, practicing, being taught, or through personal

experience ("Learning | Definition of learning by Merriam-Webster," 2017). Beginning with the

early philosophical work of Plato, Aristotle, and Confucius, exactly how people go about the

activity of learning or making sense of information, is a concept researchers have grappled with

for thousands of years (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Over the past 150 years, the field has taken

a more scientific approach to studying the process of learning, defining "behaviorism,

humanism, cognitivism, social cognitivism, and constructivism, as the traditional learning

theories foundational to what we have come to understand about adult learning" (Merriam &

Bierema, 2014, p. 25-26). This study focused on specifically on the learning experiences of

adult principals within the context of their specific work location. The study is framed by the

theoretical constructs of social constructivism and adult learning theory. A critical perspective of

each is presented in the paragraphs that follow.

      Social Constructivism.   The learning theory of constructivism is not born of a single

ideology, but rather the confluence of multiple learning theories. Though relatively new as a

philosophical/psychological concept, constructivism can be traced back to the work of many

prominent scholars such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Dewey.   Constructivists see knowledge as

"constructed by learners as they attempt to make sense of their experiences. Learners, therefore, are not empty vessels waiting to be filled, but rather active organisms seeking meaning" (Driscoll, 2005, p. 387). Central to the idea of constructivism is the way in which people construct knowledge through their experiences. Where some theorists differ is whether that process occurs individually or socially (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Vygotsky, credited with the creation of social constructivism, stressed the significance of social interaction during the process of learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Social constructivists view learning as a social process through which individuals interact with one another to create and extend knowledge. It is this holistic approach to the sense making of information that highlights the contributions of social constructivism to adult learning theory. The internal or intrinsic knowledge and beliefs are coupled with external environments and social structures to create learning. Self-directed and transformational learning, for example require the learner to draw upon their prior knowledge and experiences and to reflect upon their own motivations for learning.

Adult learning theory. This study is framed by how principals learn to implement their craft. Principals are adult professionals, an understanding of the multifarious structures of adult learning theory are essential to a complete understanding of the phenomena. The work of school-level leaders is social in nature. Principals are required to interact with other professionals, typically teachers, executive district leaders, and other principals on a daily basis, thus the theoretical framework of this study is situated at the intersection of social constructivism and adult learning theory. What follows is a review of adult learning theory, a discussion of how adults learn in context, and a summary of how social constructivism and adult learning theory frame this particular study.

Adult learning is different from the learning of children in several ways (Knowles, 1984).

First, adults have more complicated life roles (Knowles, 1984). They are not merely students,

but also parents, spouses, employees, or employers. They also choose to be learners. Second,

adults have many more life experiences that have shaped their knowledge base and approach to

learning (Knowles, 1984). Third, adults, unlike children, are fully developed citizens of a social

world, in which they are focused on learning to fulfill their individual role (Knowles, 1984).

Finally, adult learning needs are different from that of children (Knowles, 1984). Because adults

choose to be learners, they are motivated by different factors and require very individualized

curriculum (Knowles, 1984; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). The following sections will describe

three major approaches to adult learning: andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformational

learning. These descriptions are followed by a brief description of the relationship between

experience and adult learning.

Andragogy. Knowles (1984) demarcated the learning needs of adults from those of

children. He presented six principles of adult learning, that instructors must understand to create

significant learning experiences for adults: 1) the learner's need to know, 2) self-concept of the

learner, 3) prior experiences of the learner, 4) readiness to learn, 5) orientation to learning, and 6)

motivation to learn (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Despite andragogy being criticized

for over-generalizing the underlying principles to all learners from all cultural backgrounds

(Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Sandlin, 2005) and for lacking empirical data (Rachal, 2002), it

continues to garner support because

Andragogy continues to be a major theory/model/approach to understanding and planning

instruction for adult learners, as the assumptions about learners make intuitive sense and

the instructional practices that go along with them acknowledge the experience and needs

of many adult learners (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 58).

The contribution of andragogy to our knowledge of how adults learn is evident across multiple

disciplines, particularly higher education and human resource development, and continues to

serve as a foundation for providing adult learners with significant learning experiences.

    Self-directed learning. Building upon the work of Houle, Tough first discussed the

concept of self-directed learning (SDL), a concept that substantially overlaps Knowles's

andragogy framework (Merriam, 2001). Tough's definition of SDL, or self-teaching, as

"widespread, occurring as a part of adults' everyday life, and systematic yet not dependent upon

an instructor or classroom" (Merriam, 2001, p. 8). SDL has been discussed as both a process and

an attribute of adult learners. Tough and Knowles each describe SDL as a linear process through

which adult learners decide what they want to learn, plan, seek, and the learners take part in

various learning opportunities, and evaluate their learning experience. A slightly contrasting

definition, Spear and Mocker (1984) describe SDL as a cyclical process through which "self-

directed learners, rather than preplanning their learning projects, tend to select a course from

limited alternatives which occur fortuitously within their environment, and which structures their

learning projects" (p. 4).   Building on Spear and Mocker's framework, Brockett and Hiemstra

(1991, 2012) also believed SDL was a process of adult learning affected by the learner's

experience and context. Brockette and Hiemstra (1991) described their Personal Responsibility

Orientation (PRO) model of SDL, which accounted for both the learning process and the

attributes of learners. Brockett and Hiemstra's Person, Process, Context (PPC) model came as a

result of confusion and criticism in the academic community (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). The

PPC model highlights the interconnected aspects of personal characteristics, the learning process, and the context in which the learner exists.

SDL as an attribute has been heavily researched, including aspects of learning style, ability levels, lifestyles, and propensity for learning, yet it remains somewhat mysterious as concrete evidence is lacking (Merriam et al., 2007). The two most notable instruments for measuring personal attributes, the beliefs, and attitudes contributing to learning readiness include the Oddi Continuing Learning Inventory (OCLI) (Oddi, Ellis, & Roberson, 1990) and Guglielimino's Self Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS) (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Despite Stockdale and Brockett's (2011) concerns regarding the use of an unrevised SDLRS and questions related to the validity of the instrument (Merriam & Bierema, 2014), SDLRS remains the most widely used tool for empirically assessing SDL (Merriam et al., 2007).

The widespread occurrence and applicability of SDL contribute substantially to its usefulness in adult learning. While the personal attribute discussion lacks evidence and requires further study, there is strong evidence to support SDL in both personal and professional aspects of life as an adult. Merriam and Bierema (2014) support the continued development of SDL stating, "Given our fast-changing environment, it is no longer possible to learn everything we need to know in formal preparatory education" (p. 78). Therefore, we must continue to build our knowledge of SDL as we attempt to integrate continued learning experiences into the lives of adults.

Transformational learning. Mezirow (1997) articulated the concept of transformational learning in the late 1970's as a central component of cognitive adult learning that understood the significant impact of personal experience on the perceptions, learning, and behaviors of adults. Mezirow (1997) writes,

Adults have acquired a coherent body of experience—associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define their life world. Frames of reference are the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings. They set our "line of action." Once set, we automatically move from one specific activity (mental or behavioral) to another. We have a strong tendency to reject ideas that fail to fit our preconceptions, labeling those ideas as unworthy of consideration—aberrations, nonsense, irrelevant, weird, or mistaken. When circumstances permit, transformative learners move toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience (p. 5).

In his theory, Mezirow provides a 10-step process believed to begin with a 'disorienting dilemma,' a construct he later revised conceding that a disorienting dilemma might be the easiest to identify and realizing that a series of experiences or events could also produce transformative learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Mezirow also clarified his perspective on critical reflection, a significant piece of his transformative learning process, by identifying three stages of reflection: content reflection, process reflection, and premise reflection. These stages attend to the what we know, think, or feel, how we act out those thoughts or feelings, process of digging deeper and questioning our underlying assumptions about why we think, feel, or act the way we do (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

While Mezirow's work is strongly rooted in the cognitive process, others believe transformational learning occurs beyond rational thought in the unconscious, somewhere in the emotional spiritual realm (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Dirkx (2012) centered transformational learning in the human psyche, but made his position clear that "soul work" (p. 127) did not

replace the cognitive process of transformational learning, but rather helped to provide a more holistic approach to understanding how transformational learning occurs. Similarly, Charaniya (2012) describes her cultural-spiritual transformational learning as "an ongoing, cyclical smorgasbord of opportunities to learn from each other" (p. 238). Merriam & Bierema (2014) discuss Charaniya's approach and how the change occurs in an individual's spiritual and cultural identity and subsequently in how he or she sees themselves within the world around them. Another beyond rational approach, but one far different from the spiritual subconscious models previously discussed, is presented by Taylor (2008) and O'Sullivan (2012). Their more worldly environmental approach to transformational learning involves recognizing the interconnectedness between humans and the natural environment as a means of protecting the planet.

One last school of thought with regards to transformational learning lies within the context of creating and sustaining social change (Cranton, 2013). The social-emancipatory perspective (Taylor, 2008) posits the goal of transformational learning is to create a more socially just society by recognizing the inequities in our own lives and working to change or limit, their restraints on a population. Merriam et al. (2007), summarize this perspective succinctly stating, "Here one achieves an in-depth understanding of the forces that shape one's life space, and becomes an active agent in constructing a different, more just reality" (p. 141). Brookfield (2012) examines the natural relationship between critical theory and transformational learning, and he cautions adult educators and scholars against focusing only on the individual and sacrificing the power of transformational learning in achieving democratic socialism. Merriam and Bierema (2014) recognize his concern and conclude, "transformative learning can, and perhaps should be seen as a social change process, it is a lot more difficult to understand and

document this process than transformations at the individual level" (p. 89).

Transformational learning, as represented by the varying perspectives on its goals and objectives, can take place within a variety of contexts. The process can occur individually, in a classroom, the workplace, online, or within a social community. It can be self-directed, formal or informal, experiential, observational, pragmatic, or completely irrational. Though it is outside the scope of this study, research provides a vast list of strategies for engaging adults in transformational learning experiences, tips and rules for setting up the environment to ensure success, and methods for assessing the learning outcomes. It is also the versatility of this approach that has lead to several critiques.

Transformational learning has quickly become the most researched and widely accepted model of adult learning since Knowles introduced andragogy (Merriam & Bierema, 2014), however it is not without criticism. Newman (2012) questioned the validity of transformational learning, arguing the concept was being applied to all types of learning, relegating it nothing more than a fancy label to describe effective learning experiences. He argued that anytime learning takes place, the learner understands they have greater knowledge or skill and thus it is not a type of learning, but rather an increased level of learning. A second major critique shows the model fails to identify what a person's identity, consciousness, or social context transforms and at what level individual, group, or organization is impacted. Other questions include a lack of understanding of transformational learning as a linear process as Mezirow defined it, or as a more cyclical process as presented by Charaniya, as well as the permanence of the learning. Mezirow (1997) believed that once a greater understanding is met one cannot unlearn, thus the transformational learning is permanent. Wilner and Dubouloz disagreed, pointing out the possibility of renouncing a position and returning to preconceived notions. The final critique,

which roots firmly in the field of education, is our ethical standards regarding transformational

learning. Educators must realize how their own beliefs and values influence the students they

encounter and take measures to ensure ethical practice at all times (Ettling, 2012).

Adult learning through experience in context. As we seek an understanding of how

adults learn, the concept of experience surfaces again and again. It is present in the roots of

andragogy, as one of Knowles's six pillars of adult learning clearly identifies the experiences of

adult learners as being a resource for sense-making and as having a substantial impact on the

ways in which they process and learn new material. In SDL experience serves as the means by

which the learning takes place or as a motivating factor for engaging in new learning. In

transformational learning, the sum of one's personal experiences *are* the learning and serve as

key motivators for changing behavior, social structures, or ones frame of reference for evaluating

information. Looking as far back as Aristotle, philosophers believed learning occurred through

doing (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Dewey and Lindeman each weighed in on the value of adult

learning experiences, agreeing they were of the highest value (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). The

significance of personal experience on adult learning seems to be the one aspect upon which

every researcher agrees. Merriam and Bierema (2014) said, "At the heart of adult learning is

engaging in, reflecting upon, and making meaning of our experiences, whether these experiences

are primarily physical, emotional, cognitive, social, or spiritual" (p. 104).   Experience and

learning have an ongoing reciprocal relationship. A person may learn through and experience,

and can also apply their learning during the experience to create new learning. Here, I will

provide a brief overview of four different approaches to the experience-learning relationship—

experiential learning, reflective practice, situated cognition, and communities of practice.

Experiential learning*. Perhaps the most influential model of experiential learning is presented by Kolb (1984) whose model is built on the assumption that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). Kolb presents a model that demonstrates learning as the process of moving through four specific stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In order to move through each stage effectively, learners must have specific abilities that correspond with each stage. Embedded in his model are also four different learning styles: diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating. Despite criticism for lacking validity and reliability (Merriam & Bierema, 2014), these styles help determine how a person will best learn the required skills.

Born from Kolb's model of experiential learning, Jarvis (2006) presented a nine-step process of learning that involves three separate routes followed by three directions within each route. Along the first route, non-learning, a learner may presume to know the material, reject the material altogether, or fail to consider the opportunity to learn at all. The second route, learning, demonstrates non-reflective practice, the memorization of basic facts, or the practicing of basic, mundane skills. The final route, reflective learning, involves learners conceptualizing their learning, reflecting upon their experience and either confirm or improve upon the learning, or make a decision to agree or disagree with the experience.   This model has been criticized for a number of reasons, but mainly for lacking a complete understanding of learning styles and having a clear definition of the learning process. Tennant and Pogson (1995) present a model that is much less process oriented, focusing on the levels in which a persons experience is interpreted. Tennant and Pogson (1995) give examples for how prior experience, current experience, new experience, and learning from experience are applicable to the adult learning

process. Fenwick (2004) presents a final model, that is also less process oriented, which posits that the lens through which the learner constructs knowledge determines how each experience is conceptualized.

  Reflective practice. Learning that occurs as a direct result of introspective contemplation during or following an experience is reflective practice. Reflective practice is most commonly associated with professional practice, but can be applied to all aspects of adult life (Merriam et al., 2007; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Schön (1987) described two key reflective thinking practices: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. The first, reflection-on-action, occurs in retrospect, after an experience has occurred. The second, reflection-in-action, the type of reflective practice most associated with experts in their field, occurs during an experience and results in immediate change to the practice. In an earlier related work Argyris and Schön described the discrepancy between a practitioners espoused theoretical perspectives and their actual practice (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Espoused theories are those that practitioners describe when asked to explain or predict their response to a particular situation. Theories-in-action are what they actually do in those situations. Merriam and Bierema (2014) recognize the importance of reflective practice: "Our learning is rooted in practice/experience, even if the experience is one of formal education; and for learning to occur, we need to reflect on or in the experience" (p. 117).

  The most important aspect of reflective practice is realizing the discrepancy between what we believe and how we behave, and taking steps to rectify the differences. Brookfield (1991) describes a three-step process of reflective practice, which he calls critical reflection. The first step of critical reflection is to examine the underlying assumptions that guide an individuals thoughts and actions. Second, the individual should compare and contrast how those

assumptions align with their practice. Finally, the individual broadens his or her thinking to include and account for the discrepancies identified in step two. The ultimate outcome is changed behavior and improved practice.

Situated cognition. Beyond the concept of reflective practice is Jean Lave's theory of situated cognition. The theory of situated cognition accounts for the learning constructed within a specific context (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). This type of learning is a result of the interaction between individuals and the tools (language, cultural structures, physical structures, etc.) at their disposal. A commonly known practice rooted in situated cognition is the apprenticeship model of instruction, a strategy involving interns, apprentices, and/or novice learners participating in authentic learning experiences as a means of attaining the requisite knowledge to complete the task on their own. In practice, learning might be a result of modeling or role-playing. A novice learner might observe a more experienced practitioner in the process of conducting a task, followed by a reversal of the roles wherein the novice would conduct the task and the expert would observe. The learning is based on the context of the situation and the tools at their disposal.

Communities of practice. A manifestation of the situated cognitive perspective (Merriam & Bierema, 2014), a community of practice is the formal or informal gathering of people around a shared interest (Wenger, 2000; Mierriam & Bierema, 2014).   Examples of these communities of practice might include formal structures such as the workplace or a civic league, but can also be informal structures such as social media platforms. Wenger (2000) writes, "Communities of practice are the basic building blocks of a social learning system because they are the social 'containers' of the competences that make up such a system" (p. 229). It is the social and historical structures of our community that define the competences by which

individuals are measured. Wenger (2000) also posits, "participation in these 'communities of practice' is essential to our learning, and is at the very core of what makes us human beings capable of meaningful knowing" (p. 229). He describes learning as a fluid and reciprocal process between the members of the community, regardless of experience level. Novices, or newcomers to a community, seek to understand the socially and historically determined levels and requirements of belonging and competence. Comparatively, community 'experts' continually seek new knowledge and use it to expand the thinking of others in the community. Wenger defines three levels of interaction among community members: engagement, imagination, and alignment. Wenger (2000) describes engagement, the first level of belonging, as the process of "doing things together, talking, producing artifacts… to help us better understand what we can do and how the world responds to our actions" (p.227). Imagination, the second level, is concerned with how we view our community, our role, and ourselves within a certain community. Alignment, the third level, describes the reflective process through which learners "coordinate perspectives, interpretations, and actions toward the realization of higher goals" (Wenger, 2000, p. 228). Based on Wenger's description, schools are formal communities of practice, in which members of the school community routinely engage with each other to improve the outcomes for students.

Intersection of social constructivism and adult learning theory. This study is predicated on two key theories of learning. The first, social constructivism situates learning as a social phenomenon in which people make sense of their learning through social interaction. The second, adult learning theory, posits adults learn differently from children and the sum of their adult experiences has a substantial impact on their knowledge base, conceptualization of new material, and how to apply individual learning opportunities. The intersection of these theories

of learning as it relates to this study is pictured (Figure 1) below. The literature provides several

theories of learning, including experiential learning, reflective practice, situated cognition, and

communities of practice that represent the experience-learning relationship. The valuable

learning that occurs as a result of these experience-based opportunities, something children do

not yet have, is what separates adult and child learners.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework: Socially Constructed Adult Learning
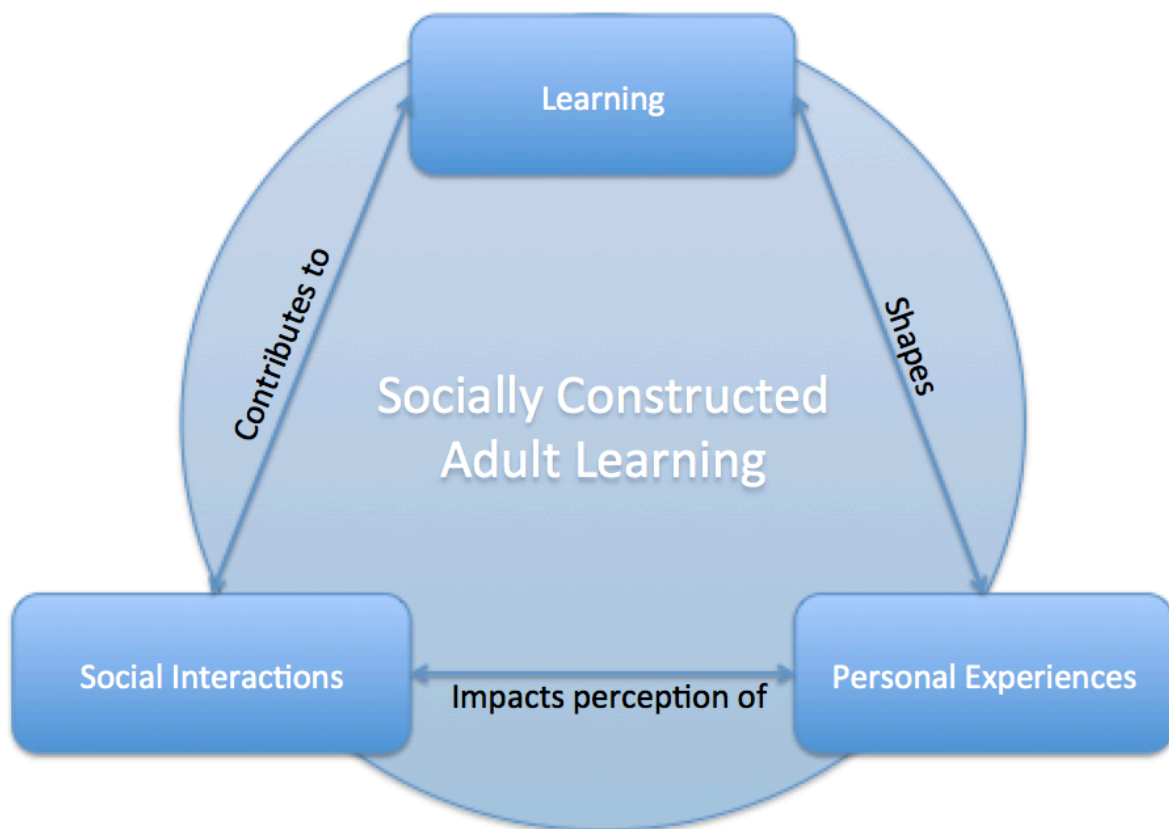
Principal Preparation and the Ongoing Acquisition of Professional Knowledge

The role of the school principal, discussed in depth later in this chapter, is social by nature. On a daily basis they spend a significant, if not all of, their time interacting with students, teachers, parents, school and district leaders, as well as community members (Crow, Day, & Møller, 2016). During each of these interactions, principals are presented with potential learning experiences that can, and should, lead to reflective practice, leading to improved outcomes for the entire community of practice. Given the significant impact principal leadership has on student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2006), recruiting, training, supporting, and retaining effective leaders is important to the sustainability of an effective education system (Davis et al., 2005; Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009; Mitgang, 2012; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2006; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). The multifaceted, complex role of the principal, and the variety of contextual factors that each principal will undoubtedly face, make preparing principals for success in the field an extraordinary feat (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). Learning is the sum of various learning opportunities (Cunningham & Hillier, 2012; Eraut, 2007; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007), both formal and informal, that any individual might experience. Formal learning includes any experience or opportunity through, which principals elect to attend for the express purpose of learning new material. Material presented in formal learning environments is pre-designed, strategic, and intended to produce a specific leadership outcome or result in specific knowledge related to the attendees position, or desired position. These structured learning opportunities are not dependent upon context, as they might occur online or in person. Experiences may be lead by an instructor or self-directed. Examples include principal preparation programs or other coursework delivered by higher education institutions, licensure or continuing education courses,

and professional development training sessions. Informal learning experiences have a direct impact on the development of leadership craft, but do not include predesigned curriculum or delivery models. Informal learning can occur through observations or interactions with solicited or unsolicited sources. While a variety of unstructured, informal learning opportunities exist, only two are relevant to this study. The literature presented is focused on the informal learning that occurs in workplace settings and the learning that occurs as a result of feedback and collegial interactions. Principal learning is a continuous, lifelong process of growth and development that can be attributed to a variety of learning opportunities. In this section, I will focus on the formal and informal learning processes specific to public school principals: principal preparation programs, professional development opportunities, and workplace learning.

Principal preparation programs. In order to become a principal in the United States, a candidate must meet a minimum education requirement, pass any state mandated licensure assessments, and demonstrate that they have the skills and knowledge to lead a successful learning community. Some of the requisite skills are learned through experience, but there is an expectation that much of the knowledge and foundational skills for leadership are learned though the completion of a prescribed leadership preparation program (Møller, 2012; Crum et al., 2009). Unfortunately, not all graduate programs are created equal, some programs are more effective than others at teaching pre-service principals how to lead and most programs lack the on-the-job training that is quintessential to leadership success. This disconnect between theory, what is covered in preparation programs, and practice, the actions of principals on the job, undoubtedly has an impact on an aspiring principals ultimate preparedness to lead a school (Mitgang, 2012; Davis et al., 2005).

The literature describes four components of an effective principal preparation programs.

First, effective principal preparation programs have a curriculum that is aligned with the core

competencies of effective school leaders (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Davis et al., 2005;

Mitgang, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006; Yilmaki & Jacobson, 2012). Second, effective programs

prepare school leaders by providing real-world experiences throughout their coursework and

training that encourage networking and mentorship opportunities (Bush, 2009; Davis et al., 2005;

Davis & Leon, 2011; Hallinger & Lu, 2013; Mitgang, 2012; Yilmaki & Jacobson, 2012). Third,

it is essential that principal preparation programs emphasize culturally responsive practice and

social justice leadership (Bush, 2009; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Lynch, 2012; Yilmaki &

Jacobson, 2012). Last, there is a strong call for more strenuous admission requirements, such

that the best and brightest can be recruited for leading the learning in our nations schools (Davis

& Leon, 2011; Green, 2013; Mitgang, 2012).

Curriculum alignment. Principal preparation programs strive to educate future leaders

using the professional standards by which they are judged as a guide for creating their

curriculum and determining the standards of candidate success. As such, program curriculum is

largely based upon, and aligned with, the core competencies of effective school leaders. The

core competencies of effective leadership include: setting directions, developing people,

redesigning organizations, and leading instructional programs (Louis et al., 2010; Davis et al.,

2005), each of which is discussed in further detail later in this chapter. The Interstate School

Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) *Education Leadership Policy Standards* (Council of

Chief State School Officers, sponsoring body, 2008), (Appendix A) provide universities the

framework for building and designing appropriate coursework to meet the needs of practicing

school leaders. The expectation is aspiring leaders will gain a good understanding of leadership for learning through their university coursework.

    Real world experience and networking. In this era of high-stakes accountability, the challenging and multifarious role of the principal requires highly qualified and experienced candidates. It is essential universities provide aspiring principals real world, rigorous learning experiences allowing them an opportunity to practice and apply the theories discussed in their coursework (Bush, 2009; Davis et al., 2005; Davis & Leon, 2011; Hallinger & Lu, 2013; Mitgang, 2012; Yilmaki & Jacobson, 2012). Examples provided in the literature include field-based experiences (Bush, 2009; Hallinger & Lu, 2013; Yilmaki & Jacobson, 2012), internships (Mitgang, 2012; Davis & Leon, 2011; Green, 2013), case studies, and cohort models (Hallinger & Lu, 2013; Jacobson & Cypres, 2012). Regardless of the model used, the goal of these real world, hands-on learning experiences is to provide aspiring principals an opportunity to garner practical knowledge and refine those skills that contribute to their effectiveness as a school-level leader. Green (2013) concluded, "effectiveness must begin with a quality preparation program, one that offers an opportunity for participants to understand theory, as well as experience the practical aspects of leading a school" (p. 13). The second purpose for providing these real world experiences is to ensure principals build a network of peers and mentors through which they can continually refine their practice over time (Bush, 2009; Davis & Leon, 2011; Yilmaki & Jacobson, 2012). Candidates successfully completing these types of programs are better able to hire and support effective teachers, use data to drive decisions for resource allocation, planning professional development, and to establish a mission and vision for success in the school community.

Culturally responsive practice and social justice leadership. Culturally responsive practice is essential to a school leaders success (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Klar & Brewer, 2013; Yilmaki & Jacobson, 2012). Researchers also posit that principal's identities are largely shaped by the political and social contexts in which they operate (Crow et al., 2016) and as such, their personal identities shape their ability to implement their craft within the context of their school community (Møller, 2012). The large concern for diminishing achievement in high-poverty schools and among those students with special education needs (Lynch, 2012) has created the call for more training in this area. Contributing to the specific application of this material in principal preparation programs is the evidence that successful leadership practices can be "transposed from one context to another" (Drysdale, 2011, p. 454).

Strenuous admission requirements. Though universities have set requirements for entrance into graduate programs, there is a strong call for even more strenuous admission criteria. While there are many aspiring administrators certified for the position of principal, researchers argue few administrators are actually qualified to fulfill the obligations and requirements of the position immediately following the completion of their degree (Mitgang, 2012; Davis & Leon, 2011; Davis et al., 2005; Green, 2013). Effective principal preparation programs have a rigorous candidate selection process. The hallmark of their recruitment, what sets it apart from others, is that they seek only candidates with a demonstrated leadership capacity, motivation for success, and who have the endorsement of the school and district leaders, with which they work (Green, 2013; Mitgang, 2012; Davis et al., 2005). In addition to the arduous testing and interview screenings, candidates must also have a proven ability to work collaboratively with others and use data and technology to improve instruction (Green, 2013)

before being admitted to the program. Researchers suggest a more rigorous admission process

will decrease the number of certified, yet unqualified candidates.

       Professional development opportunities. Though pre-service programs provide

administrators a foundation of knowledge, they cannot possibly prepare principals to meet all of

the demands and challenges that come with this ever-changing role. As Mitgang (2012) stated,

"getting pre-service principal training right is essential. But equally important is the training and

support school leaders receive after they're hired" (p. 24) thus ongoing professional development

programs are essential to leadership development and success. Several key ideas are present in

the literature surrounding principal professional development. First, professional development

for school leaders is essential, particularly in the early years of a principal's career (Cook, 2015;

Mitgang, 2012; Peterson, 2002). Second, professional development for school leaders must be

collaborative and ongoing (Cook, 2015; Mitgang, 2012; Davis et al., 2005) and third,

professional development must be purposeful and reflective (Cook, 2015; Fenwick & Pierce,

2002; Peterson, 2002). The research on principal professional development is well aligned with

the best practices touted for ongoing teacher professional development. Garet, Porter, Desimone,

Birman & Yoon (2001) identified effective professional development as that which is sustained,

intensive, hands-on, collaborative, and integrated into the daily practice of teachers and

principals.

       Research shows high-quality leadership pays big dividends to school districts by

increasing teacher satisfaction, decreasing principal turnover rates, and improving student

achievement outcomes (Mitgang, 2012). In order to accomplish this task, Fenwick and Pierce

(2002) suggest, "principals need continuous professional development opportunities to support

their efforts toward school improvement and revitalize their commitment to creating and

sustaining positive learning communities" (p. 2). Continuous professional development is especially critical during the early stages of a principal's career. Mitgang (2012) points out "a novice can quickly feel ground down by the loneliness at the top" (p. 24). Collaborative professional development opportunities are essential to building a network of colleagues to support ongoing principal learning.

A collaborative approach to professional learning is seen throughout the research in the form of peer coaching and mentoring (Larsen & Rieckhoff, 2014; Mitgang, 2012; Møller, 2012). Developing these networks and continuously immersing themselves in professional learning, leads to long-term learning and sustained improvement practices for school leaders. Recently, Association of School and Curriculum Development (ASCD) (2015) reported, "to become true leaders of learning, principals need time to reflect and refine their practice as well as ongoing training and development to enhance their professional growth" (p.8). Successful professional development programs must "support reflective practice and provide opportunities to work, discuss, and solve problems" (Peterson, 2002, p. 214) that are purposeful and relevant to the work of school leaders (Cook, 2015; Larsen & Rieckhoff, 2014; Fenwick & Pierce, 2002).

Workplace learning. According to the National Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) most states require principal's to have a bachelor's degree in education or a related field, at least three years as a successful, full time, classroom teacher, a master's degree from an accredited university, and in some states a passing score on a comprehensive state exam. While their principal preparation program will assist them in obtaining the necessary credentials, administrators must also have ample experience to demonstrate their preparedness for the position. Valuable experience for the position of principal is gained through introductory leadership roles, such as chairing committees or serving as the department chair, allow aspiring

leaders to gain firsthand knowledge of what it means to work through others and helps prepare

them to take on more formal roles in and around the school community. Mid-level leadership

roles, which often come with a significant pay increase and extended contract lengths, might

include serving as a lead-teacher, curriculum coordinator, or another similarly aligned role.

Successful candidates eventually earn a position as an assistant principal, typically the final step

before becoming the principal. It is through these positions that future principals have an

opportunity to gain firsthand experience and on-the-job training, something that principals will

continue to seek even after securing the highest of positions in educational leadership.

There is an increasing interest in harnessing the power of these informal learning

opportunities. Eraut (2011) indicates, "informal workplace activities provided between 70-90

percent of the learning; but informal learning was treated as only an occasional by-product" (p.

12). Cunningham & Hillier (2013) further substantiated his claim, "Participants are likely to be

more engaged in informal learning activities because the content is likely to be more meaningful

and more closely connected to one's career needs" (p. 49). With such a large percentage of

learning being the result of employees engaging in the actual work, it is not a surprise that there

is such a large interest in principal preparation programs taking a more hands-on/internship

approach. I approach the literature using the same questions that guided Eraut's (2004, 2007,

2011) research. What do people learn in the workplace? How does the learning take place? What

factors influence the learning?

The informal learning that takes place in work settings accounts for both the cultural

knowledge of the workplace and the personal knowledge of the individual (Eraut, 2004). It is

often difficult for people to explain their learning in informal settings because it is unstructured

and often implicit (Eraut, 2000, 2007). Eraut (2011) proposes people develop new knowledge,

skills, and dispositions as related to "task performance, awareness and understanding, personal development, academic knowledge and skills, role performance, teamwork, decision making and problem solving, and judgment" (p. 11). He also theorizes that the learning in each of the aforementioned eight areas follows a constant path of progression that leads to an increased ability to handle more complex situations, increase competencies and skills, and acquire more responsibility (Eraut, 2011, p. 10-11). Cunningham & Hillier (2013) cited similar descriptions of workplace learning, describing it as an employee's opportunity to enrich and expand their job skills. For principals, workplace learning is the learning allowing them to take what they have learned in class and apply it to the situation of leading. For example, a principal might have a good understanding of curriculum and instruction, and through their experience in the workplace will gain a better understanding of how to help teachers improve their craft.

The literature points to a variety of tasks through which learning takes place, but the common denominator among them is the value placed on collaborative work (Eraut, 2011; Cunningham & Hillier, 2013). Eraut (2007, 2011) identified eight work processes of which learning was a by-product, eight learning activities that enabled the work to produce learning, and nine learning processes that occurred at or near the workplace. Many of the tasks through which learning occurs involve engaging in collaborative work with other colleagues. Cunningham & Hillier (2013) similarly agreed that learning occurs through relationship building, planning, modeling, and engaging in specific tasks. This collaborative process is readily observable in the daily practice of a school principal. For example, principals might work in professional learning groups or serve on district committees. Principals frequently work alongside other administrators to learn new skills, tackle challenging tasks such as implementing

district initiatives and increasing student achievement, and work with a variety of clients, such as parents, teachers, and students.

Eraut (2004, 2007, 2011) divided the factors that influence learning in the workplace into two categories, those related to learning attributes and those involved in the context of the workplace. Learning factors included an employee's confidence and commitment to the work, the challenge of the work and the value they felt in the organization, and the quality of feedback and level of support for their work (Eraut, 2004, 2007, 2011). Eraut represents the three concepts as being triangular and interrelated. An employee feeling undervalued will lack commitment to the work, just as having inadequate support will make the work feel too challenging to be successful (Eraut, 2004, 2007, 2011). Contextual factors are more related to the demands of the workplace including: the allocation and structuring of the work, the expectations for employee performance, and the strength of collegial relationships (Eraut, 2004, 2007, 2011). Similar to the relationship between learning factors, each of the three contextual factors are equally important and discrepancies in one can lead to failure in others. Though Cunningham & Hillier (2013) did not assess the factors that influence learning, they noted that employee engagement in the processes, which included having the physical, cognitive, and psychological resources to accomplish the task were important to informal learning. In the case of principal's, workplace learning is at its peak when the school culture, norms, values, and needs intersect with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions a principal brings with them to the position. Principal learning occurs when their knowledge, skills, and dispositions are broadened as a result of their social interactions.

Successful Principal Craft Within the School Context

In this section, I will explore principal craft, the culmination of a principal's knowledge, skills, and dispositions, within the school context. Over the past 20 years, interest in studying and bolstering principal success, particularly for low-performing schools, has skyrocketed (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Today, a robust body of literature exists depicting the practices of successful principals and how those principals have changed the outcomes for the children they serve. The vast expanse of literature makes it difficult, if not impossible, to consider each and every article, study, book, or paper. The literature review for this portion instead contains, what I believe to be, a fair sampling of the available research, and is reflective of the evidence presented by some of the most prominent researchers in the field as well as some who are less well-known but whose contributions are specifically related to my research study. The related literature is divided into three categories. First, I will present a definition of success, as measured by current research. Second, I will examine the methods, or essential practices, by which successful principals enact their craft. Finally, a review of the common characteristics of successful principals, identified in the literature is presented. Collectively, these three areas illustrate the complex nature of principal leadership and highlight the knowledge, skills, and dispositions touted in the literature as having the greatest impact on principal success.

Measuring principal success. The increase in standardized testing in the United States and abroad, incited a revolution of accountability practices holding both teachers and principals accountable for student outcomes measured by test scores (Møller, 2012; Crow, 2007). However, as the research on the effects of principal leadership within the context of various schools, predominately low-performing schools with high populations of students living in poverty, continues to grow, measures of principal success have become more broadly defined.

The International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP), a research project covering

multiple nations and including more than 100 qualitative case studies, employs a variety of

alternative measures for selecting principals to participate in their study (Gurr, 2015). ISSPP

selects principals who,

> Meet one or more of the following criteria: 1) evidence of student achievement beyond
>
> expectations on state or national tests, where this evidence exists; 2) principals'
>
> exemplary reputations in the community and/or school system. This could be gained
>
> through consultations with system personnel or other principals, school inspection
>
> reports, and so forth; and 3) other indicators of success that are more context-specific,
>
> such as the overall reputation of the school, awards for exemplary programs, etc (Gurr,
>
> 2015, p. 137).

This definition of principal success encompasses those principals who are successful at

improving both standardized measures, such as test scores and graduation rates, as well as those

who are skilled at improving school-community relations, such as community perceptions and

support.

Practices associated with successful principal leadership. Leithwood and Riehl (2003)

identified three practices key to the success of school leaders: setting expectations, developing

people, and developing the organization. Their categories were eventually expanded and

reframed as: building vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people,

redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning program (Leithwood, Day,

Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006). Moos and Johansson (2009) also added "leading

environments" (p. 770) to the list. Recently, a Wallace Foundation report released yet another

set of core practices, which further refined, and again expanded, the practices essential to

successful principal leadership. Their list includes: "shaping a vision of academic success for all students, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction, and managing data, people, and processes to foster school improvement" (2013, p. 4). Differences in the categories, at least since 2006, seems to be more a matter of semantics as there is a substantial overlap in many of the actions supporting these practices. Garza et al., notes the constructs setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program have been so widely recognized by other researchers that they have become the "common" (2014, p. 799) perception among scholars. Several ISSPP researchers recognize the same four dimensions of leadership practice as key to principal practice (Garza et al, 2014; Gurr, 2014, 2015; Jacobson, 2011; Klar & Brewer, 2013, 2104; Moos & Johansson, 2009). Studies surrounding the context in which principals enact their craft have further solidified these practices as the common structures among successful leadership practice. Gurr (2014) writes, "there is now a substantial body of research across diverse contexts and cultures that indicates core characteristics and practices of successful leaders that transcend context and culture" (p. 75). The variability among principal craft is largely attributed to the ways in which each individual principal chooses to implement these core leadership practices. Each of the four dimensions of successful leadership practice is described in the paragraphs that follow.

Setting directions. The practice of direction setting is concerned with facilitating a shared mission and vision of success, based on high expectations for all stakeholders (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2010). In order to accomplish this task, principals must "communicate the direction and foster the acceptance of group goals" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2010). It is understood that

setting the direction of a school is based on a leaders' knowledge and understanding of the data,

ability to establish relevant short and long term goals, and effectively articulate that vision to

their stakeholders. Crum et al. (2009) identified data-driven leadership and the fostering of

ownership as two of the five best practices of elementary school leaders. Each of these concepts

is well situated within the context of setting directions. Gurr (2014) also noted that successful

principals utilize the core practices to set "high expectations for all and foster collaboration and

collective endeavor" (p. 86). Each of these examples further indicates, and supports the initial

claim that setting directions is an essential core practice of successful principal leadership.

     Developing people. The core practice of developing people includes offering intellectual

stimulation, providing individualized support, and leading by example (Leithwood & Riehl,

2003; Leithwood et al., 2006, Louis et al., 2010). It also includes cultivating leadership in others

(Wallace Foundation, 2013) and providing opportunities for employees to build leadership

capacity by focusing on their strengths and putting them in positions that foster their continued

growth (Crum et al., 2009). Leaders who are successful at developing people, work to ensure

teachers individual professional development needs are met, provide ongoing support for both

new and veteran teachers by being accessible and approachable, support school-wide discipline

efforts (Louis et al., 2010). These leaders are people-centered and strive to model the principles

and values they expect their stakeholders to demonstrate (Gurr, 2014). As Jacobson (2010)

stated, "the practice of developing people is the building of personal and collective capacity

necessary to create and sustain the 'communities of practice' prescribed in the literature" (p. 36).

     Redesigning the organization. The essence of redesigning the organization is the idea of

strengthening and supporting a collaborative school culture (Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al.,

2010).   Successful school leaders are able to transform their school cultures by modifying

organizational structures, such as master schedules to facilitate collaboration (Crum et al., 2009; Leithwood et al., 2006). They also strive to build relationships among colleagues that promote a shared sense of community (Crum et al., 2009; Jacobson, 2011; Moos & Johansson, 2009). Increasing productive connections with the external community (Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2010; Moos & Johansson, 2009) is also essential to their success in strengthening the school culture. Not to be overlooked, managing the day-to-day organizational structures, such as addressing safety concerns and promoting a school environment that is conducive to learning (Jacobson, 2011; Moos & Johansson, 2009; Wallace Foundation, 2013) is embodied in the concept of redesigning the organization, particularly as it relates to improving student achievement in low-performing schools.

Managing the instructional program. Staffing, supporting, and monitoring teaching and learning practice is at the core of managing the instructional program (Crum et al., 2009; Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2010; Moos & Johansson, 2009). Leaders successful in this area ensure teachers in classrooms are well trained and highly skilled. They leverage their resources to provide adequate materials and supplies (Louis et al., 2010) to each classroom and student. Principals monitor the quality of instruction by setting appropriate standards of conduct (Moos & Johansson, 2009) and by being visible and active in classrooms (Louis et al., 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2013). This hands-on approach to leading learning increases their awareness of and involvement in the day-to-day instructional decisions of teachers and allows them to keep a "pulse on the instructional environment" (Crum et al., 2009, p. 58). Assisting teachers in maintaining a focus on high quality instructional practice, also means principals must act as a "buffer" (Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2010, p. 75) and "remove obstacles to success" (Jacobson, 2011, p. 36).

The four core practices described in the previous paragraphs are the most commonly agreed upon dimensions of successful principal practice. The actions associated with setting directions, redesigning the organization, developing people, and managing the instructional program provide a solid general description of the role of the school principal. Researchers also agree that these practices are minimum expectations for success and an inability to master these core practices, almost always guarantees failure (Leithwood & Reihl, 2003; Jacobson, 2011). Scholars contend it is not the practices themselves that enable principal success, but rather the ways in which each leader contextualizes their environment and leverages their decision-making against organizational goals, that encourages their success (Gurr, 2015; Jacobson, 2011; Klar & Brewer, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2010). Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, and Giles, (2005) described the lack of prescription in leaders behavior as "neither linear nor formulaic" (p. 611). Going on to describe each principal's leadership strategy as being influenced by their "constant recalibration of the contextual conditions and constraints" (Jacobson et al., 2005, p. 611) and ability to act accordingly in each given situation. Drysdale (2011) said, leaders "were able to read the situation and act accordingly—knowing when to act and when not to act" (p. 452).

Characteristics associated with principal success. Throughout the literature a wide variety of personal characteristics are described as having a significant impact on principal success. Drysdale (2011) noted, "success is determined mostly by personal factors, such as personal qualities, values, beliefs, attitudes, and skills" (p. 450). A review of the literature focused on the practice of successful school leaders revealed more than two-dozen different personality traits, values, beliefs, attitudes, and skills were identified as "enabling leaders to translate their core practices into school success" (Jacobson et al., 2005, p. 607). Successful

principals were described as being open-minded, morally ethical, caring, confident, persistent and resilient, reflective, adaptive, authentic, transparent, and passionate about ensuring equitable educational experiences and opportunities for all students. Garza, et al. (2014) wrote,

> The principals displayed a range of personal qualities that help them sustain school success. They were resilient people, not prone to giving up or to being burdened by continual challenges and change. They were people-centered, and as described above, focused on the development of all in the school community. They displayed trust in others and engendered trust from others. In part this was because they were ethical people, with a transparent sense of moral purpose and lived commitment to the school community (p. 801).

Research related to specific characteristics or traits that are most associated with successful principal leadership is sparse. There is a resounding call for leadership preparation programs to place a stronger emphasis on the "critical dimensions of human social behavior" (Garza et al., 2014, p. 808) particularly the "development of self-reflection and self-management" (Drysdale, 2011, p. 452) and emotional sensitivity (Crow et al., 2016; Leithwood, 2005; Møller, 2012).

Summary of Literature Review

Socially constructed adult learning is an appropriate theoretical construct upon which to base my research, as it takes into account both the formal and informal learning experiences that contribute to successful principal craft. Andragogy provides a set of characteristics that apply to many adult learners and which frame appropriate strategies for ensuring significant learning experiences for adults. SDL highlights both the process of adult learning and the propensity for adults to select, guide, and successfully master independent studies of material which are both relevant to the context in which they operate and which they are motivated to learn.

Transformative learning recognizes the significant contribution of experiences to adult learning occurring within a variety of contexts, and applicable to this study. Experiential workplace, learning is necessary for on-the-job principal training and provides a valid avenue for integrating theory and practice. Literature supports the bulk of job training as the result of informal learning experiences. However, principal learning in the United States is still very much considered a construct of formal preparation programs.   Research in this area, specifically in ways to replicate this type of learning in principal preparation programs, may be the key to successfully recruiting, training, and supporting aspiring leaders.

Literature indicates principals must have adequate and appropriate knowledge and skills to implement the four core practices of successful school leadership. The core of leadership practice includes setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program, though there is substantial research to indicate that a general understanding of human social behavior and a high level of emotional sensitivity would be equally as important to principal success. There is sufficient evidence that effective communication skills are also critical for aspiring leaders. Articulating the mission and vision of the school, setting expectations, and establishing, building, and maintaining relationships with stakeholders, that encourage trust and facilitate buy-in toward community goals and practices, are impossible without this valuable skill set. In addition to the knowledge and skills required of successful principals, they must also posses a variety of dispositions, that demonstrate their ability to garner trust, build relationships, and relentlessly persist in their pursuit of a socially just education system. Though there are a number of researchers that have alluded to the importance of these characteristics, there remains a lack of consistency in determining which dispositions are of greatest value to successful school leadership. The literature points to the need for a better

understanding of how leaders enact their practice and how principal preparation programs can

harness the power of informal learning opportunities to better prepare aspiring leaders.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN and METHODS

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of how successful principals learn their craft and explore those factors that they perceive as having the greatest influence on their leadership practices. The findings contribute to the larger body of knowledge surrounding principal practice and professional learning. In this chapter I describe the study design and explain the methodology guiding this phenomenological case study. Following a discussion of the methodology, I describe the case selection strategy, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the strategies for ensuring trustworthiness and my role as the researcher.

Design

This study was exploratory in nature and focused on the participants' subjective views of lived experiences regarding the growth, learning, and developmental procedures, which influenced the craft of successful principals. Through this investigative inquiry, I, the primary researcher, sought to understand from the practitioner's perspective how successful principals learned their craft and the factors they perceived as having the greatest influence on their abilities as a school-level leader. A qualitative methodology is most appropriate (Creswell, 2014). I utilized a social constructivist paradigm and expected many conclusions to be drawn from this study (Hays & Singh, 2012). Using the research tradition of phenomenology and a multiple-case study approach (Yin, 2014), I sought to understand the essence of participants' lived experiences related to those factors identified as having a significant influence on their leadership craft and continued success (Creswell, 2014; Hays & Singh, 2012).

Phenomenological Case Study

Hays and Singh (2012) describe the purpose of phenomenology as a research tradition used "to discover and describe the meaning or essence of participants' lived experiences, or knowledge as it appears to consciousness" (p. 50). Phenomenology is appropriate in this particular study, because I sought to understand both principal success and the learning attributed to that success from the perspective of the principal practitioner. Yin (2014) defined case study research as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). Since the role of the principal is influenced by unique contextual factors in each school and the principal's own individual attributes, it was important data collection methods enabled the examination of individual lived experiences relative to the phenomenon of successful leadership within each participant's school (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The multiple-site phenomenological case study approach allowed me to examine in-depth the lived experiences of multiple principals, each within his or her school context.

Case selection. Demographics, socioeconomic status, age, experience of teaching staff, and other characteristics contribute to the unique nature of schools and the wide variety of contextual factors influencing school success. To reduce the number of confounding contextual factors, I chose to limit my case selection to a single school district. The principals in a single school district are all extensions of one organizational culture with shared beliefs and traditions. Ideally, these individuals are held to the same standards, evaluated on the same criteria, possess similar structures and resources within their buildings, and are provided similar support and professional learning opportunities as their counterparts. Yin (2014) states that the most

appropriate case studies are those which provide "sufficient access and that will most likely

illuminate the research questions" (p.28). The selected district, which for the purpose of this

study will be called Forrest City Public School District, is located in a mid-Atlantic coastal state

and serves more than 20,000 students in 32 schools. The size of the district provided a rich

selection of principals from which to choose and is located close enough to the researcher to

allow in-depth, prolonged engagement. The candidates each had more than three years

experience as a public school principal, a proven record of achievement as an instructional

leader, and a history of leading schools to improved student achievement as recognized by their

peers and supervisors.

   Participant selection. A two-pronged method of selection was utilized to identify the

specific principal cases (Yin 2014). First, I sought the recommendations of the highest-ranking

instructional executives in Forrest City Public Schools (FCPS) as well as one outside consultant

with intimate working knowledge of the district (Yin, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). The results of

their recommendations were triangulated for congruence and three principal candidates were

identified. The second prong of the selection criteria was intended to further reduce political bias

that might have influenced the recommendations of the executive team. During this phase of the

selection process, I utilized a snowball sampling method, in which I requested recommendations

from each of the three principals identified in the preliminary selection process (Creswell, 2014).

The final list included 10 principals, seven elementary, one middle school, and two from high

school. One elementary candidate was eliminated due to her not meeting the initial

recommendation criteria of three years of principal experience. From the remaining nine

principals, I selected the top three elementary principals, because the study design called for a

minimum of three participants and the similarity of their school structure and size would likely

minimize the number of confounding variables. Yin (2014) advises selecting "cases that best fit your literal replication design" (p. 95). These cases were similar enough to allow in-depth comparison. The selected participants were all female, two Caucasian and one African American, ranging in age from 35 to 60 years old. Each of the three women agreed to participate in the study and each served as a single case in this multiple-case study (Yin, 2014).

Methods

Data Collection

Data collection in both the phenomenological and case study traditions typically includes prolonged in-depth interviews with participants "who have experiences with the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2014, p.81), and through direct observation (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). In order to gain access to the schools and participants, I first followed the application for research process in the Forrest City Public School District. Upon approval, I followed the case selection procedures described in the previous section and established a mutually agreeable meeting time with each participant. Our initial phone contact was followed by an email, requesting the candidate's participation in writing and including the approval letter from Forrest City Public Schools with the informed consent document. After gaining access to the selected participants, data for this study was collected by conducting multiple interviews and observations of each principal in their individual schools. In the sections that follow I describe the interview and observation protocol utilized during data collection and the process for verifying the accuracy of the collected data prior to data analysis.

Holding true to the purpose of phenomenological research, I adhered to Moustakas's (1994) recommendations by using broad, open-ended questions intended to explore what the participants experienced and how they experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). I used a

semi-structured interview protocol (Yin, 2014) of 12 questions (Appendix B) to establish: the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that principals perceive as having the greatest impact on their success as practicing school administrators, and how and in what ways they learned those knowledge bases, skills, and dispositions they associate most with their success. An observation protocol document (Appendix C) was used to record notes and observation information as appropriate. A semi-structured post-observation interview protocol was used to guide the conversation following a scheduled observation (Appendix D).

When drafting the interview questions, consideration was given to the sensitive nature of the content and any potential risks participants might take when disclosing information, thoughts, and/or feelings regarding their leadership development, practice, training, or ongoing professional learning (Creswell, 2014). Prior to beginning the interview process, participants were asked to sign a document of informed consent (Appendix E), which provided the details of participation, guidelines for confidentiality, and allowed participants an opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014; Hays & Singh, 2012). To further protect anonymity, the school district, each participant, and their work site was given a pseudonym (Creswell, 2014; Yin 2014). Site activities included scheduled interview meetings and observations. There was no incentive for participation, but principals and members of the district executive team have been provided access to the study findings.

The data collection process included an initial interview, followed by two rounds of observations and post-observation interviews, for a total of five visits in each case site (Creswell, 2014). Each interview lasted no less than two and one half hours and each observation lasted no less than three hours. In addition to the time spent during phone and email correspondence, I

spent more than 20 hours actively engaged in the data collection process in each case site. The total time spent collecting physical, written, data exceeds 60 working hours.

Interviews. Interviews in case study research, as described by Yin (2014) often "resemble guided conversations rather than structured queries" (p. 110). As such, the conversation during each of my interviews included a candid, detailed, and in-depth discussion between the principal participant and myself (Yin, 2014). The semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol sought to engage principals in the thoughtful self-reflection of their behaviors, leadership practices, preparation, learning style, and training for their position as principal. Questions covered topics relating to participants' learning, background knowledge, skills, and dispositions as they related to their practice as a school leader. Throughout the interview process, I employed the use of transition, probing, and clarifying questions (Yin, 2014) to encourage participants to provide detailed answers to the questions and allow me to gain insight to the meaning and depth of their perceptions and experiences (Creswell, 2014). To ensure the exactness of my data collection, I documented each interview using a digital hand-held recorder (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). Each recording was subsequently transcribed by a professional transcriptionist (Miles et al., 2014) and checked for accuracy by both the interviewee and myself.

Observations. Site observations included observations of collaborative learning team meetings, hiring procedures, post-observation conferences, student assemblies, morning meetings, and general shadowing opportunities (Yin, 2014). These visits allowed me to observe, first-hand, successful principals engaging a variety of stakeholders: students, parents, teachers, secretaries, bus drivers, customers, and custodians. During each observation, I was able to talk with the principals about their practice and observe their day-to-day working life in their natural surroundings (Yin, 2014). I believe the location of my interviews and observations further

increased participant comfort and encouraged them to engage in more reflective thinking.

Following each observation and interview, I transcribed "descriptive and reflective notes"

(Creswell, 2014, p. 167) to myself regarding my takeaways, initial impressions, and thoughts

from each meeting. Observation data was recorded, transcribed, and verified in the same manner

as interview data.

I believe the process of conducting interviews and observations over a series of visits

allowed the principals an opportunity to reflect on each visit prior to the next visit, which may

have increased the depth of their responses in subsequent meetings. Following each interview

and observation, a transcript was provided to each principal to review for accuracy (Hayes &

Singh, 2012). In no instances did participants make changes to transcripts. Naturally a failure to

mention changes or make changes to the transcripts does not indicate that the transcripts are

without flaws, as reviewing and editing transcripts is quite time-consuming and they may not

have had an opportunity to conduct such a review at this time.   Additionally, I reviewed each

transcript to ensure I maintained the confidentiality of participants, their work locations, and

contact information. I was in contact with each candidate for approximately 12 weeks,

beginning with the invitation to participate and ending with the participant's final review of

transcripts. My final communication with the participants will include a copy of the report, and

an invitation to discuss or question, my research, analysis, and findings (Hayes & Singh, 2012).

Data Analysis

Data was collected using a series of interviews and observations (Yin, 2014). To

maintain coherence with my research tradition I bracketed my own researcher bias and

assumptions about the study's focus prior to completing the initial coding of the data (Creswell,

2014; Hayes & Singh, 2012). A combined total 334 pages of single-spaced data, memos, and

handwritten field-notes were analyzed and sorted into 3,672 individual text units for analysis.

Each piece of data was reviewed multiple times throughout the coding process. In total, three

levels of coding, multiple codebooks, several diagrams, and case displays were used in the

process of examining the data and highlighting themes (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell, 2014; Yin,

2014; Hayes & Singh, 2012). The data analysis process is best described in four individual

phases, each intended to refine and condense (Miles et al., 2014) the data until the essence of the

experience is revealed (Creswell, 2014). Each of the four phases employed during the data

analysis process is described in the following paragraphs

Phase one: Initial coding. Using my research questions as a guide, I first generated a

list of five a priori codes and 33 keywords (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell, 2014). Using this initial

list of codes, I began reviewing each interview transcript and observation note in the order it was

conducted and applying codes as I read from beginning to end. The a priori list was non-

restrictive, and additional codes generated and applied throughout the reading. These new codes

were also recorded and a complete list of all codes generated during the planning process and

initial reading were compiled into a single list (Miles et al., 2014). The new list was utilized

during a second reading. Codes were again applied to each transcript, field note, and memo.

Once this process was complete, I conducted a frequency count to determine the number of times

each code appeared (Yin, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). The frequency count allowed me to begin

isolating themes within the data. Jottings and margin notes were recorded throughout the

process to capture my thoughts and reactions to the data as I completed the initial reading

(Creswell, 2014). These memos assisted me in bracketing my own bias and reducing the data.

Through the process of horizontalization (Creswell, 2014; Hayes & Singh, 2012), a

phenomenological process in which each individual statement in the transcripts, field notes, and

memos was given equal value as I worked through the data to identify the significant, non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements (Creswell, 2014; Hayes & Singh, 2012), I was able to maintain coherence with my research tradition.

      Phase two: Organizing the themes. At the beginning of phase two, I reduced the data by transcribing each unit of coded data, verbatim, into a self-created Excel spreadsheet (Yin, 2014). Each of the 644 transcribed units was labeled with the case number, event in which the data was collected, and any assigned primary or secondary codes. This primitive codebook, allowed me to organize the data in a manner that could be easily sorted and refined (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2014). After compiling the spreadsheet, the data was arranged by case number and chronological order of receipt and coded a third time (Yin, 2014; Miles et al., 2014), using words from the completed keyword list. Jottings and margin notes were again employed to record and capture my initial interpretations and thoughts regarding the data (Creswell, 2014).

      Phase three: Defining thematic concepts. After completing the third round of coding, I created a Venn diagram for each principal (Yin, 2014). These individual Venn diagrams allowed me to visualize and better understand the essence of each principal's perceived experience. Using a different color of ink to represent each participant, each single-case Venn diagram was transferred to a larger multiple-case Venn. This all-inclusive illustration enabled me to examine the data on a broader level and identify overlapping themes among the three cases (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). The chart further assisted me in clarifying concepts that initially appeared ambiguous as belonging to a specific category as a knowledge, skill, disposition, or learning experience as the comparative nature of the Venn diagram highlighted dubious areas in the data needing ancillary refinement. Each of these questionable units of data were re-examined within the context of the dialogue to determine the intended meaning of the

statement and either re-coded or removed completely from the data set (Creswell, 2014; Hayes &

Singh, 2012). Themes identified during the construction of the multiple-case Venn diagram

were arranged in a case display matrix (Miles et al., 2014) and used to create a second, more

useful codebook (Hayes & Singh, 2012), in which textural and structural definitions for each

code were recorded (Creswell, 2014; Hayes & Singh, 2012).

Phase four: Final analysis of data. Using the new codebook I began the fourth, and

final round of coding. The 507 text units were scrutinized and condensed in order to hone in on

common themes and develop the essence of the principal's experiences (Creswell, 2014; Hayes

& Singh, 2012). During this coding round, I sorted the database according to code and

participant, printed the newly organized database, and used highlighters to again reduce the data.

The final data set included: 72 units of knowledge representing two separate domains, 110 items

characterizing one predominate skill set and three corresponding, inter-related sub-skills, 49

segments illustrating three distinct dispositions, and 138 accounts detailing three categories of

learning experiences. Within each identified sub-level (Miles et al., 2014), several micro-level

codes were identified allowing me to further refine the structural definitions of each code and

effectively describe the essence of each principals' lived experience. These structural definitions

and their corresponding data points are recorded in the final codebook. Two thematic conceptual

matrices (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014) were created to represent the data. The

first matrix depicted the essence of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions principals perceive as

having the greatest impact on their craft. The second visually represented the learning

experiences principals described as having had the greatest impact on their success in the field.

The findings that resulted in the creation of those matrices are presented in chapter four.

Researcher

As a current public school administrator and doctoral candidate in the field of educational leadership, I consider myself well versed in current research and issues of principal leadership. I have in depth knowledge regarding the multifaceted role and responsibilities of school-level leaders, as my professional experience includes seven years as a classroom teacher, four years as a secondary assistant principal, and two years as an elementary school principal. Over the course of my 13 years in the field, I have worked alongside six different principals and 12 assistant principals, each with their own leadership style. I have a diverse background, having served in variety of elementary, middle, and high schools of varying sizes, small, medium, and large, and a mixture of both high and low achieving populations. As a graduate student, I am driven to study principal leadership, as I am passionate about improving leadership practices that I know will ultimately lead to increased success for all students. My purpose in conducting this study is to provide school and division leaders feedback regarding the factors that have the greatest influence on the craft of successful principals, in order to facilitate a better understanding of the support needed to ensure principal and student success. Assessing my own reactions occurred simultaneously throughout the research process. In analyzing the researcher-participant relationship, it is important to understand that my relationship with these individuals, prior to this study, was limited, as I have intimate knowledge of only a select group of administrators in the state and I have never been employed by Forrest City Public Schools.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness and authenticity (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Yin, 2014) were established through the use of member checking, triangulation of data sources, and thick description. Member checking was conducted through "the use of probing questions for

clarification, requesting each participant to review transcripts and confirm authentic

representation, and by distributing the qualitative report to participants for their input prior to

submission" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 206). One member of my dissertation committee

conducted member checks throughout the research process to ensure I maintained attention to

detail, ethics, and alignment with my research paradigm and tradition. Collectively, my

committee members had more than 30 years of experience in the field of education, having

served as classroom teachers, school-level leaders, and most recently as professors of education

at Old Dominion University. The principal's were asked to react to the themes that emerged

from my interviews and provide feedback on my construction and interpretation of the

phenomenon and accuracy describing their lived experiences as successful public school leaders.

Triangulation of data sources was obtained through the use of multiple data sources (i.e. multiple

case site interviews and observations) (Yin, 2014; Hays & Singh, 2012). I further enhanced

trustworthiness by using thick descriptions of my participant interviews, observations, and in my

post-interview field notes. Confirmability was established through the use of member checking,

as well as simultaneous data collection and analysis. Coherence was ascertained through the use

of thick description and a compiled audit trail, or as Yin (2014) calls it, a "chain of evidence" (p.

127) turned into the responsible primary researcher listed on the informed consent document, Dr.

Jay Paredes Scribner, Professor and Chair, Education Foundations and Leadership at Old

Dominion University. Finally, ethical validation was determined through the use of peer

debriefing, as the members of my dissertation committee, each of whom are well versed and

experienced in the field of education, served as devil's advocate (Hays & Singh, 2012) and

ensured the research tradition was followed.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter I present the findings as they relate to the primary research questions. Drawing from the recommendations of Yin (2014), the chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I present a within-case analysis, to include contextual information and relevant findings, of each individual case study. The second section includes a cross-case comparative analysis of the collective study. Thick description and direct quotes from participants are utilized to communicate the findings, so as to illustrate as accurately as possible, the essence of their individual and collective experiences. For the purpose of increased readability and coherence each participant, the school district, and their work location has been assigned a pseudonym. The findings in this chapter are presented without interpretation. Discussion and potential implications of the study findings are reported in Chapter five.

Within-Case Analysis

Using the two-pronged method of selection described in the previous chapter, three research participants were identified, and each agreed to participate in the study. The findings for each individual case are broken down into five specific segments relative to the study's purpose. In the first segment I provide a brief overview of my interaction with the participant during the data collection phase, as I believe it is essential to understanding the interpretations and findings presented in the final cross-case analysis. Next, I provide a concise introduction to the principal participant and their work setting to include an overview of their education and relevant work experience, as well as germane details associated with the candidate's school. The criteria used for identifying participants as successful included a record of increasing student academic achievement and a reputation for improving the outcomes for students and their

community. This measure of success is different from the principal's perspectives of how

success is measured. As such, the criterion by which the individual participant measures or

evaluates her success as a public school principal is presented in the third section. The essential

knowledge bases, skills, and dispositions conveyed by the individual principal are described in

the fourth segment. Finally, I present how, and in what ways, the principal illustrated their

learning as it relates to the aforementioned knowledge bases, skills, and dispositions. This

organization structure was utilized in the presentation of each individual case and cases are

introduced in the order of their participation in the study.

Case One: Amy

I first interviewed Amy the last week of September 2016 in her office at Accolade

Elementary School (AES). Her office was a very neat space, decorated with many purple

accents, photos of her friends and family, her framed degrees and achievements, as well as a

wide variety of quotes reflecting a positive, optimistic attitude. It was clear that she values

human interaction and avoided distraction when working with others, as she has a small round

table set up opposite her desk, for conferencing and collaboration. Her desk was littered with a

variety of educational books, stacks of papers, and files. The messiness of her desk led me to

believe that she rarely works in that space, but rather that it serves as a catchall for her materials.

The small table has purple, cloth placemats indicating where people sit at the table, but also

giving the table a warm inviting appeal. She has a small desk caddy on the table that holds basic

office supplies. We sat down at the table for our first interview, which lasts approximately two

and a half hours. At the end of the interview, we discussed opportunities for me to observe Amy

at work. We agreed that I would come and observe her during a collaborative learning team

(CLT) meeting the following week. The post-observation interview immediately followed the observation.

My first observation of Amy was held in a classroom, that I assumed was assigned to the reading specialist, as there were a number of bookshelves lined with what appeared to be class sets of various texts. There also seemed to be an absence of typical classroom furniture, such as student desks. The room held two teacher work areas, a large rug designating a reading space, and one big table in the middle of the room surrounded by eight chairs, at which the CLT meeting took place. The first grade teachers, reading specialist and math specialist all sat around the table with Amy. They brought a variety of hors devours to share during their meeting, which indicated to me that they felt the meeting was somewhat social. Amy facilitated the meeting, using a protocol to guide the teachers through an examination of their student's work and a discussion of best practice for future lessons on the topic. The observation lasted approximately 90 minutes. Our post-observation interview was held in Amy's office. During the interview Amy reflected on the meeting and answered my questions regarding the knowledge, skills, and dispositions she attributed to her success during the event. The post-observation interview lasted approximately two hours. We scheduled another observation and post-observation interview for the following week.

We decided the second observation would give me a chance to see her interacting with faculty members in a one-on-one setting. The second observation included two post-observation conferences with third grade teachers. Each of the teachers was experienced and Amy indicated that one of them was also seeking an administrative degree. The conferences were held in Amy's office. Each of the post-observation conferences lasted 15 minutes. Following the conferences, a post-observation interview was conducted, which lasted approximately 90

minutes. All interview and observation transcripts were sent to Amy for review and feedback.

The essence of Amy's leadership experience as it relates to this study was extracted from the

transcripts and is presented in the sections that follow.

Education, experience, and school setting. Amy, a native of Forrest City, came to the

field of education as a career switcher. After having received a Bachelor's of Psychology, she

spent six years working in her chosen field, before realizing, as she stated in our first interview "I

did not want to do psychology anymore". After reconnecting with many of her former Forrest

City Public Schools (FCPS) teachers and administrators, she returned to school to pursue her

Master's of Teaching. She knew she wanted to work with children, but also knew her ultimate

goal was to become a school administrator as she had a passion for helping adults succeed. Amy

stated,

> I went in with the full intentions of never teaching very long because I really wanted that
>
> whole getting at staff to help them personally grow. I loved that adult learning aspect
>
> while at the same time I loved the kid aspect and wanting to be around kids, but I loved
>
> that really molding adult learners and really trying to figure out how best to benefit them
>
> to make an impact on an entire community.

During her four years in the classroom, Amy continued to advance her education, earning her

Education Specialist Degree in School Supervision and Leadership. Her hard work paid off

when she was awarded an assistant principal position in FCPS. Amy's assistant principal

experience included two years serving in a gifted center and three years in a Title I school. Six

years ago, Amy was promoted to the position of principal, and has been serving at her current

school, Accolade Elementary, for the past four years. During this time, she continued to pursue

her education and just last year earned her Doctorate of Philosophy in Education Leadership.

Accolade Elementary School (AES) serves approximately 385 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. The school is situated in the heart of a low-income neighborhood in Forrest City, and is currently designated as a Title I school. Under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) the federal government provides financial assistance to schools with high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure those students are able to meet challenging academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). At the time of the study, AES was considered a school in warning, by the state department of education. However, under Amy's direction, the school realized 21% increases in English and 11% increases in Mathematics pass rates, based on state accreditation ratings. She was confident the school would finally meet their goal of becoming fully accredited within the year. In her own words, "I know we will be fully accredited this year and I tell the staff all the time, I can smell it and taste it."

Amy's Definition of Leadership Success. While Amy anxiously awaited the full accreditation of her school, it was not the only criteria by which she bases her success. Amy's ultimate prize, the criteria by which she judges her success, was the degree to which she was able to improve school culture and influence the outcomes for students. Amy takes a team approach to leadership, describing her role in the building, not as the leader, but as a single piece of the whole-school puzzle, which she described as incomplete without all pieces properly aligned and connected together. In her own words, she is a "culture changer" who very much considers her ability to build relationships with her teachers, students, parents, and community members as her greatest asset. She has a passion for improving the outcomes for students, and seeks to build a "community of learners," that includes teachers, students, parents, faculty, and community members, who value instruction and growth. She believes that schools are successful when the

students feel safe emotionally and academically and teachers enjoy coming to work every day.

Through her ability to change school cultures, Amy believes she is able to influence the

achievements of her students. At one point during our second interview, Amy talked about her

perception of effective leaders, describing the leader as a facilitator of change who brings people

willingly along in pursuit of a common goal. So while Amy holds out hope that her school will

realize the joy of full accreditation in the near future, she presented this measure as a by-product

of effectively changing the culture at AES. Amy seeks to model her practice after that of her

mentors, by creating a community of learners who value the educational opportunities created by

effective schools.   Already, in just four short years, Amy is able to see the fruits of her labor at

AES. She indicated that suspensions were down and confidence was rising. While, Amy

recognized there was still much work to be done, she was energized by their progress.

Knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Amy describes herself as a lifelong learner, who is

constantly seeking to improve her skills and expand her knowledge, as well as the knowledge

and skills of her community of learners. During our time together she talked about the

importance of understanding and having instructional knowledge, but placed greater emphasis on

the importance of having empathy for others and really knowing the members of her community.

She talked about being able to build authentic relationships with her teachers, establish trust by

being transparent in her words and actions, modeling reflective practice, and being able to

communicate effectively and provide authentic feedback in a way that helped teachers feel

valued in the school community. The essence of Amy's experience as it relates to the

knowledge, skills, and dispositions she perceives as having the greatest impact on her success, is

graphically represented (Figure 2) and described in sections that follow.

Figure 2

Case One: Amy's Leadership Craft
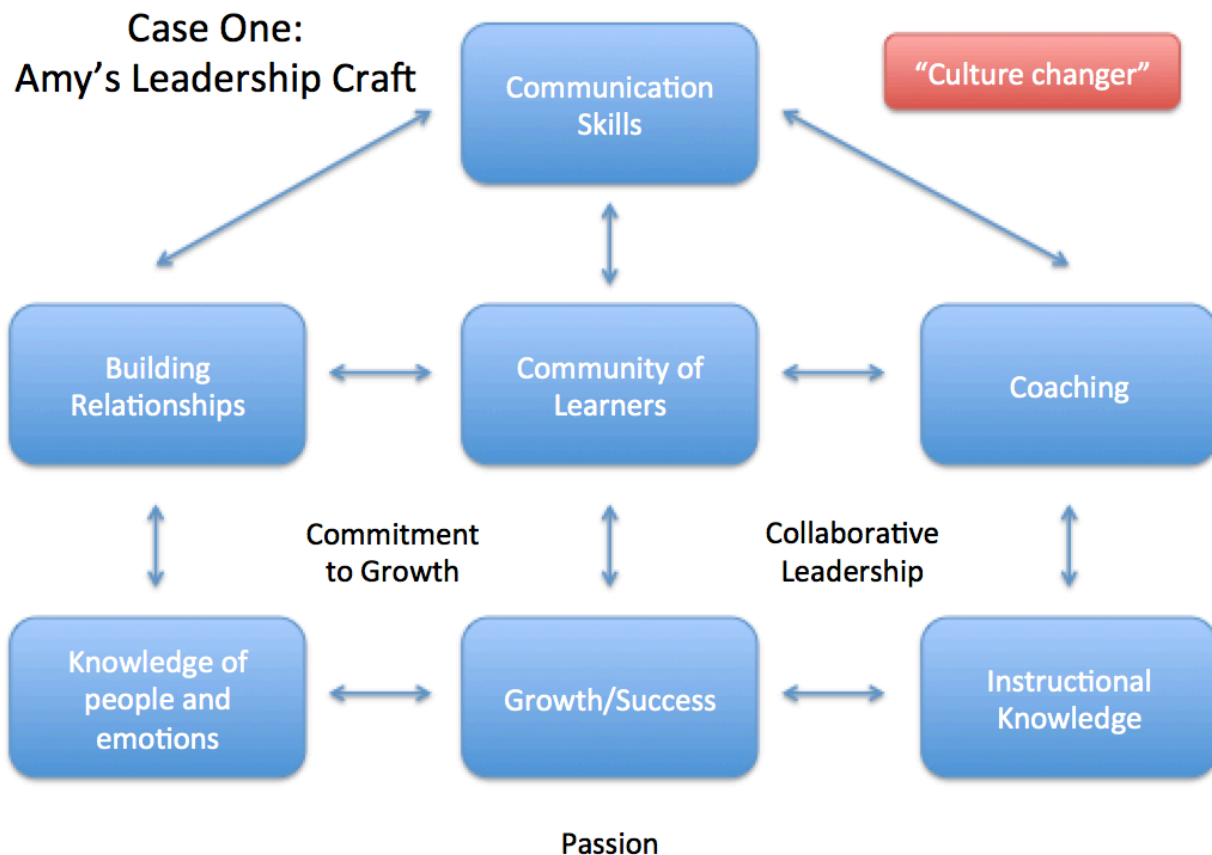
Knowledge. Amy highlighted two areas of knowledge that are most essential for her success. The first is knowledge of instructional leadership. Amy described instructional knowledge as having an understanding of the curriculum, assessments, standards, instructional strategies, and classroom management practices that are appropriate and effective for each grade level in her building. Amy says instructional leadership is, "knowing the curriculum and knowing what effective teaching looks like." The second is knowledge of people and an

understanding of what she calls " the core" that drives their emotion and decision-making. Each of these concepts, as described by Amy, is explored in this section.

Instructional leadership. Amy described her knowledge of instructional leadership, as having an understanding of the curriculum and strategies that she needed teachers to know and understand in order to be successful. She cited this area of knowledge as essential for guiding conversations and providing teachers effective feedback that they can use in their classroom. Over the course of our interaction, there were two specific occurrences, in which I observed her utilizing this knowledge base to improve instruction. The first was during our initial observation, in which Amy facilitated a CLT meeting, with a group of first grade teachers. Prior to the meeting, Amy asked each teacher to provide her three student assessment samples. The samples were to include one student assessment example that was exemplarily, one that demonstrated average student work, and one that demonstrated a struggling learner. The teachers were to turn them in with the labels, high, medium, and low. During the conversation, Amy led the teachers through an examination of their students work to identify the specific areas of weakness, followed by a discussion of strategies that might be more effective in teaching this particular concept. Later, during our post-observation interview Amy described how she had prepared for the meeting. She told me about researching the associated curriculum standard, examining the strategies that students would typically use to solve basic subtraction problems, and the potential pitfalls that students encountered during the learning process. She also worked to gather resources and evidence-based strategies that she could suggest to the teachers that they could immediately implement, to improve their instruction and enhance student learning. She attributed her success in the meeting, to being prepared, but also to her ability to fluidly articulate her knowledge of teaching and learning. She felt this knowledge base equipped her with the

essential knowledge to facilitate and shape an in-depth instructional conversation with the teachers.

Amy utilized her instructional leadership knowledge again, during our second observation. During this meeting, Amy held two post-observation conferences with two teachers on different grade levels. During each of these meetings, she drew upon her knowledge of effective instructional practices as well as effective classroom management techniques to provide the teachers with specific, relevant feedback regarding their practice. The first of these conferences, Amy spoke with Mrs. Smith about her ability to use flexible grouping in the classroom, giving students "right then, right there feedback," utilizing word study strategies, and maintaining high levels of student engagement. She also gave Mrs. Smith valuable feedback about how she might maximize instructional time while working with other students, by ensuring every student knew exactly what they needed to be working on while Mrs. Smith worked with the small group. At the end of the meeting, Amy reiterated the celebrations, the suggestions, and set a time to follow up with Mrs. Smith.

The second post-observation conference, following a similar style, Amy opened with celebrations about the good things she saw going on in Mr. Davenport's classroom. She talked about his use of engaging word study activities, opportunities for students to collaborate, his use of a flip chart to help students take responsibility and build independence, and his use of a graphic organizer to help students improve their writing skills. Amy also gave Mr. Davenport feedback that he could immediately implement to improve his effectiveness. She suggested he consider smaller work groups or ways to spread his groups out in the room, as some groups were loud enough to create a distraction for others. Here again, was an example of how Amy drew upon her instructional leadership knowledge to engage a teacher in thoughtful reflection of their

teaching practice. Amy's ability to facilitate these conversations is directly attributed to her

knowledge and understanding of instructional best practice.

　　　Knowledge of people and emotions. The second knowledge base Amy described as

having a significant impact on the success of her practice, is knowledge of the emotions that

influence the actions and decisions of others. Amy talked at length about the importance of

knowing the core that drives people, and understanding how "to adjust what you need to adjust

to move on." She cited a need to be empathetic toward teachers, students, parents, and

community members and the importance of seeking to understand the circumstances surrounding

an event, so that she might be able to reason with the actions or emotions of the individual. In

her own words she says, "There's a core that drives everybody and when we find that we can

empathize, and change lots of things."

　　　Amy believes that seeking common ground with her community members is the only

way she can actually create a shift in the school culture. Her working knowledge of the impact

human emotions have on individual judgments has allowed her to reach a better understanding of

her community, thus she is able to tailor her own words and actions for each intended audience.

She described a recent incident involving an angry parent, in which she had to empathize with

the parent to determine why they were angry. She described her motivation,

　　　　　I want to get on the same page with you and I want to know where you're coming from,

　　　　　and I want you to know where we're coming from so that when we walk out of here

　　　　　today, we are both working towards the benefit of your child, the benefit of *our* student.

Her purpose was to reach common ground with the parent and send the message that they, the

school and the parents, are a team, all working in concert with one another to help the child

realize success.

Similarly, she uses this knowledge base when working with her teachers. She described a differentiated leadership style, in which she worked to provide each member of her staff individualized support based on the relationship she has built with that particular teacher, not based on the status quo. She says for some it is a shoulder to lean on or help with a parent situation; for others it is honest feedback. She understands that with some teachers she can be light and jovial but with others she has to be more formal and serious. Regardless of the individual or situation, Amy perceives her knowledge of how emotions impact people, coupled with her ability to empathize, as having an enormous impact on her success as a public school principal. The skills Amy utilizes to deploy her knowledge are described in the next section.

Skills. In Amy's own words, the number one skill that is essential to her success is being able to communicate. She says, you have to be able to "communicate with people whether it be that empathy or that knowledge that you are going to share with somebody, or communicating to them that you've heard them or that you know where they are coming from." She was also very clear in describing communication as a two-way street. She spoke in our first interview about the importance of listening to people to gain an understanding of their feelings and the core that drives their emotions, but also about using clear language to express an idea, shape a conversation, or address an issue. From Amy's perspective, effective communication is both verbal, what she says, and nonverbal, what she does. Amy uses her communication skills for two main purposes. The first, is building relationships, the second is coaching. Collectively, when she uses her communication skills to build authentic relationships and coach teachers toward improved practice, she believes she is able to build a culture of trust.

Communicating to build relationships. Building relationships is an indispensable sub skill of communication that Amy believes is key to establishing trust. While discussing the

significance of building relationships, Amy made reference to her success criteria, as discussed

earlier in this chapter. She described her desire to build a community of learners where people

feel valued and respected. During our second interview, she talked about how her ability to build

relationships directly impacts her success in this area. In our second interview, she said,

> I have built relationships with these teachers, so they know I value their input, they know
>
> I listen to what they have to say, therefore they feel safe in verbalizing and taking those
>
> risks while we're at the table and having those conversations.

The CLT meeting was an excellent representation of how Amy uses her verbal and nonverbal

communication skills to build authentic relationships with her teachers. During the meeting,

Amy engaged in small talk, verbal communication, with the teachers about their children, whom

she called by name. She also talked about her own family in a way that communicated to

teachers that she was their equal. Nonverbally, there was a common respect for each person's

input as teachers were courteous of their peers in both demeanor and choice of language. The

atmosphere of the room was relaxed as Amy and the other teachers sat back in their chair and

routinely engaged in jovial conversation. Amy used nonverbal communication skills to model

the behavior she expected of the teachers. Throughout the meeting she refrained from

interrupting when others were speaking and she gave the team her undivided attention resisting

any temptation to engage in other distracting tasks like checking email.   Amy sat quietly,

actively listened, and responded when it was her turn to talk. Her actions were intended to

communicate the message that she did in fact care about the teachers input and was willing to

dedicate her time and attention to each person at the table. The informal feeling of the meeting

further evidenced the relationship Amy has built with her teachers. Each person was address by

first name and participated equally in the discussion, so much so that it was difficult to tell if

there was an actual first grade team leader based on the meeting structure alone.

Building relationships, according to Amy is not just about the teachers and their practice.

She also talked about how important it was to build those same authentic relationships with a

variety of stakeholders, and described how her knowledge of people and emotions guide her

relationship building practice. In our first interview, she said,

> You have to be personable. You have to be willing to reach out to different stakeholders
>
> and be personable with them. It's not just about my staff. I can come in and be
>
> wonderful and great to my staff, but I also have to be wonderful and great to parents. I
>
> have to learn to meet them on their spot.

Amy indicated that building relationships with stakeholders was directly related to her ability to

empathize with their emotions and understand how their perspective will impact her message. It

is then her role, to build trust through clear, compassionate, communication. Amy summed up

her perspective on the value of understanding human emotions and the power of building

authentic relationships when she stated, "I realized the deeper I had a relationship with

somebody, the easier it was to deal with people. The easier it was to know how to handle

people." This statement also alludes to her use of communication as a tool for coaching

improved practice, a concept described in the next section.

Communicating through coaching. Establishing a positive authentic bond, which Amy

believes is impossible without clear and consistent communication, is merely the first step

toward improving teachers practice. Amy described coaching as the second sub-skill of

communication. Once Amy established a relationship with a teacher, she used her knowledge of

that individual to improve their skills through coaching. She draws upon her knowledge of

instructional leadership, and her understanding of people and emotions to communicate

expectations and coach improved practice. She uses clear and effective communication to coach

teachers by giving feedback, leading professional development, and modeling expectations for

teacher performance.

Amy talks about coaching teachers by giving authentic, clear, feedback and having

critical conversations with teachers about their performance in the classroom. She described a

back and forth dialogue, during which she provided teachers suggestions and feedback, but also

gave them an opportunity to reflect on their practice and discuss their own thoughts or feelings

about the suggestions she presented. Amy reiterated the purpose of these conversations when

she stated,

> Our whole purpose is to make teachers better at what they do, or to let them know that
>
> they are not measuring up to the expectation. The only way to do that is to provide them
>
> with authentic feedback. I surely do not want my boss coming in and just cutting and
>
> pasting things on my evaluation.

The value she places on this skill set was further evidenced when she described the process she

employs to develop her assistant principal's leadership capacity. She stated,

> I took that lead with my assistant principal. We had conversations where I would say,
>
> 'Tell me what a teacher would get from this?' If you don't look at anything else, if you
>
> didn't sit in on the observation, tell me what a teacher would get just from the words on
>
> this paper.' We had hard conversations like that."

Amy draws heavily on her instructional leadership knowledge to set expectations, assess

teachers practice, and provide them effective feedback, but she also draws upon her knowledge

of people and human emotions to ensure the message is delivered in a manner that will produce

change. In our first interview, Amy talked about ensuring the teachers understand that her

feedback was not intended to be hurtful, but should be viewed in light of consistent growth and

progress. She said, "This isn't personal. I don't come to you and we talk about ways that I can

see we can improve on things because I'm trying to make you feel bad. It's about growth."

During that interview she discussed how she practices difficult conversations before she meets

with a teacher. She said, "I go home and practice if I need to have a tough conversation with a

teacher. I think about what it's like to be on their side and what they need to hear." She further

reiterated her point in our third interview when she talked about the importance of presenting

critical feedback in a way that is "not condescending and doesn't make teachers feel devalued

but rather feels like we're all here to grow." Amy described her understanding of human emotion

and ability to communicate effectively as being the most important aspect of giving post-

observation feedback.

Amy reported that she frequently leads professional development with her staff to build

their repertoire of skills and instructional strategies. These sessions were led with teachers in

small, grade level or content groups, and also in larger settings like faculty meetings. Amy

draws upon her instructional knowledge to design, lead, and facilitate these professional

development sessions, but also depends heavily upon her communication skills to ensure her

message is received appropriately. During our first interview, she said, "If I'm not a good

communicator then I can't stand up and give you PD because either you're not going to listen to

what I say, or you're going to listen and tuck it away somewhere." This idea of delivering

professional development is the intersection of Amy's knowledge bases of instruction and

emotion coupled with her ability to communicate effectively for the purpose of continuing

organizational growth. Amy also reiterated on several occasions the importance of building trust

and facilitating buy-in with her faculty in order to make professional development offerings more effective.

As an extension of her coaching, Amy frequently communicates expectations for teacher performance by modeling what she expects teachers to do in their classroom. In our first interview she said,

> I can't just talk the talk, I also have to walk the walk. I can't just tell you that you need to change your personal mindset but then I use language and actions that don't represent that. I need to be the one who models for teachers, models for people.

During the interviews, Amy talked about modeling risk-taking and being transparent. She gave the example of a time she planned and led a professional development for her staff, and toward the end of the session, she realized she did not have enough time to get through everything. Instead of rushing the session and awkwardly forcing the material, she told the teachers, she would go back to the drawing board, evaluate the work they had done, and get back with them at another time. Though she set out to complete the session in the given time, she realized the mistake, and used it as an opportunity to model what she expects from them. She said,

> I want them to do the same thing in their classroom. I want them to teach and say, "Gosh. This really goofed.' Or 'Gosh. The kids didn't really get this. Let me retrace my steps and try this again, on another avenue.'"

Amy's true goal in providing clear consistent communication is to build relationships with her staff that enhance her ability to coach them toward improved practice. She draws upon her knowledge of instruction and her understanding of human emotion to build trust and facilitate buy-in among her staff. While, Amy discusses communication as a means of engaging outside stakeholders, the focus of her conversation was on her communication with teachers.

Dispositions. Over the course of our time together, Amy described herself as a team

player and culture changer who is approachable, reflective, driven, and transparent. She is

humble in her approach to leadership and perceives her success as being the result of a shared

effort. She believes in creating a culture of trust that ensures all members of the community feel

their contributions are valued and she takes great pride in her ability to build authentic

relationships with her stakeholders. Amy is reflective of her practice and prior experiences and

uses those experiences to frame and understand the experiences of others. She characterizes

empathy and approachability as essential to ensuring her success.   A commitment to continuous

improvement, collaborative approach to leadership, and unwavering dedication to improving the

outcomes for children are the dispositions, of mind that contribute most to her success.

Commitment to continuous improvement. Amy believes there is always room to improve,

but more than that she believes that all people have the ability to get better. She describes herself

as a motivated leader who seeks to learn as much as she can about improving the outcomes for

students. She says she is always reading new material that she can use to introduce strategies for

teaching and learning, improve school culture or build her leadership skills. She describes

herself as reflective and is able to talk about specific instances in which she was forced outside

of her comfort zone, increasing her leadership capacity. Her ability to reflect and continue

developing, coupled with her desire and perseverance to be successful have had a tremendous

impact on her success as a school leader.   Her drive to improve her own abilities transfers to the

other members of her school community as well, because she described a desire to motivate

others and celebrate their success.

Amy described several times her thought process and approach to improving the

outcomes for students by improving the school culture. She presented her process as a constant

evolution of change, in which a team decision is made about the outcomes that are desired,

aspects that need to change in order to reach those outcomes, and a plan of action for making the

requisite changes. During our first interview she stated, "Sometimes you have to step back into

the previous spot and say, 'Okay. We wanted to change this. We tried it this way. It's not

working. I got to go back and figure out a different way to go about this.'"

     Collaborative approach to leadership. As discussed earlier in this section, Amy

describes herself as a single, equal member of her school community. This is reflected in her

emphasis on being empathetic toward the needs of others and desires to understand the emotions

that define the experiences of her stakeholders. Her positive attitude and willingness to both

recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of others further evidence her desire build team

and community among her colleagues. During our first interview, Amy talked at length about

the importance of each member of her school community. She described the contributions of a

local volunteer group who brought her students coats so they would be warm at the bus stop.

She said, "they gave every kid in my school a coat for winter so that they're not…standing on a

bus stop for 20 minutes freezing cold. Now they're ready." She talked about the impact that bus

drivers have on her student success, as they are the first school employees her students see each

day and went on to describe her efforts at making them feel valued in the community. In that

same interview she said, "I don't view myself as any bigger or more important or more

inspirational or more impactful than any other…I just do a different part." She also talked about

the important role that each person has, adding that she is but one part of the bigger picture. She

recalled her conversation with parents during a recent school event stating,

     I can't do this without you. These teachers can't do this without you. Our cafeteria staff

     can't do it without you. Our nurse can't do it without you. We all have to do this

together and so here's what you can do to help us and we want to know what we can do

to help you.

Amy is truly committed to building a community of learners that values education and is

inclusive of all stakeholders.

Passion. Amy genuinely believes that being a school leader is her purpose in life. When

talking about her position, she uses words such as purpose, love, and joy. Her passion for the job

contributes to her relentless pursuit of improved teaching and learning for her students. Every

decision she makes takes into account her larger goal of creating a "community of learners that

value education." She further described her passion, stating

I got into this job to make the world a better place. I got in this job because I love kids

and I want to make things good. I want to make school a place where you love, where

you learn and you get better and you become something great despite anything else.

Her commitment to FCPS is further evidenced by her history as a long-term resident and

employee of the district and by the fact that she sends her own child to FCPS.

Amy's learning. Amy described her learning as a continuous reflective process

influenced primarily by her mentors and prior experiences and fueled by her motivation to

continually improve her skills and knowledge as a school leader. During each of our interviews,

Amy spoke of the various administrators, both school and district level, which she had worked

under during her career, and the influence they have had on her practice. She indicated that not

every experience was positive, but each one contributed to her learning. She cited her learning

as occurring through her observations of and experiences with other leaders, as a result of critical

feedback and reflective conversations facilitated by her mentors. She also attributed some of her

learning as a result of her prior work experiences.

Observations. Amy made numerous references to her observations of other leaders. She

easily recalled the specific details of a wide range of experiences. She described positive

experiences such as watching her former principals jump in and perform tasks outside of their

job description like mopping floors, wiping runny noses, and serving in the cafeteria line. From

those observations Amy learned quite a bit about being a humble leader and working with all

members of the school community toward a common goal. But she also shared negative

experiences that shaped her learning. She talked about the confusion and lack of support she felt

when a former a principal provided her generic feedback, several days or weeks beyond a

classroom observation. When she compared that experience to her observation of another

principal who facilitated timely post-observation conferences that engaged teachers in dialogue

about their practice, she realized how important it is to follow up with teachers and give

authentic feedback. She described her thoughts,

> Just watching him and kind of sitting on the side lines a bit I guess made me go, "Oh,
>
> when you make teachers feel comfortable, when you make them feel like their voice is
>
> valued, when you make them feel as if they have something to contribute and you're truly
>
> listening. You're truly concerned ultimately about their growth and the kid's growth
>
> then people will do anything you ask of them. People will take tons of risk; people will
>
> really go outside their box for you if they feel that support coming from you. I think just
>
> watching other people…. watching other people who are successful at it.

Having both the positive and negative feelings created by these vastly different styles shaped

Amy's approach to giving feedback. She strives to engage teachers in a conversation as opposed

to taking a top-down approach. She also described the lonely feeling created as a result of a

principal displaying a lack of emotional intelligence. She described the principal as aloof and

uncaring about the emotional wellbeing of her teachers. She said, "I never wanted my teachers

to feel lonely like I did that first year. The teammates didn't like each other, the principal didn't

care that we didn't like each other and it was just lonely." These observations shaped her

perception of her role as a school leader and continue to influence her practice.

    Mentor relationships. In addition to observing other leaders, Amy described with great

enthusiasm the mentors she has been fortunate enough to have during her career. The

relationships she built with those mentors have had a lasting impact on her practice, and continue

to influence her decision-making and strategic planning. She shared an example of a time a

mentor had a really difficult conversation with her that had a lasting impact. The principal

described the community's perception that she was unapproachable and standoffish. Naturally,

these comments created feelings of inadequacy and caused negative feelings for Amy. She

remembers however, that after she got past the initial shock of what he said, she was able to

focus on how to improve her practice and try to understand why he had given her this criticism.

She described the reflection,

> Then I started thinking, "What about this that made him to tell me this?" Then I began to
>
> process it and I thought I'd go into admin meetings like when we have our group admin
>
> meetings and I'm there to learn and I want to take things in so I get right to business.   I
>
> would go in, I'd sit down. Get my laptop ready, listen intently, take notes. Think about
>
> how I was processing things and all the while people are walking around me and they're
>
> hugging each other and "Hey how you're doing? How's your kid doing?" I thought,
>
> Maybe that is what is giving him that impression and he's seeing that transferring to the
>
> people's perceptions of me.

That single experience helped her realize the value in building authentic relationships with her

colleagues and stakeholders. She spent the rest of that school year trying to be more open and

approachable. In the end, she said, "he cared enough to tell me, because he wanted me to grow."

His willingness to help her grow shaped her understanding of the type of leader she wanted to

become. Ultimately, Amy said, "the biggest thing that changed between knowing where I

thought I was going to finding my place really had to do with my mentors."

     Prior work experiences. Before becoming a building principal, Amy worked in the field

of psychology for six years, served as a classroom teacher for four years, and was an assistant

principal for five years in a variety of elementary schools. Each of these experiences shaped

Amy's current practice. Her time in psychology helped her gain a better understanding of human

emotion and the impact that emotions have on individual actions. She stated, "I realized the

deeper I had a relationship with somebody the easier it was to deal with them." It also helped her

understand how her reactions, or failure to react, can impact a situation and how to communicate

empathy and understanding to others, particularly in high-emotion situations.

     Serving as a kindergarten teacher contributed to her knowledge of effective teaching

practice and gave her practical experience that would enable her to relate to the teachers she

serves as an administrator. This experience also taught her a bit about how the education field

worked, contributed to her ability to empathize with the demands and emotions of a classroom

teacher, and allowed her to develop her skills in building relationships with parents and children.

     The time she spent serving in the assistant principal position also contributed to her

current leadership practice, and likely had the greatest influence on her craft prior to becoming a

building leader. As an assistant principal, Amy describes the positive and negative experiences

she had with a variety of principals, the connections she made with other district resources, such

as math and reading coaches and instructional coordinators. This position also provided her

practical experience with specific job related tasks, such as drills, discipline, evaluation practices,

and dealing with community stakeholders. Her experiences allowed her to work in both high and

low performing schools, thus allowing her to establish criteria for how she would manage those

types of buildings in the future.

Modeling and emotion are the two themes present in Amy's learning experiences. Any

experience or observation that has led to any amount of learning had also invoked an emotional

response from Amy. She recognized and remembered how different learning experiences made

her feel, be it a positive or negative memory. For example, when talking about the challenges

that other administrators presented her, she described his words as harsh and her emotions as

raw. When referencing how a district leader behaved in her building, she said, "it was as if we

were all in this together." But she also noticed how her mentors were able to inspire a collective

sense of trust, value, and comfort in others. In our second interview she reflected on one

experience,

> They truly believed that he cared about them and he truly believed that he wanted to hear
>
> what they said. In turn they were willing to do whatever he asked of them, whatever
>
> water he led them to, they were willing to drink it because they knew he believed in
>
> them.

Case one summary. Amy's craft as a principal is guided by both her knowledge of

human emotion and behavior as well as her knowledge of instruction. She is an emotionally

driven leader, with a transformational leadership style. She is focused on building a culture of

trust and improving the school community by engaging the core of emotions that drive their

perceptions and decision-making. She depends on her ability to clearly articulate her knowledge

of effective teaching and learning, while also communicating empathy to her stakeholders. Through building relationships with her faculty and staff, and establishing trust, she is able to use her coaching skills to improve instruction. Amy's approachable demeanor and effective communication skills coupled with her desire to be a role model for her staff, leads to a level of transparency that earns her great respect and empowers her leadership at AES.

Amy's emotional sensitivity played a large role in her learning. She learned primarily from experiences that engaged her passions or that resulted in a strong emotional reaction. She attributed her learning to the connections she made with other leaders and the impact those relationships had on her reflective mental process. She was a motivated learner and constantly sought new ways to improve her practice.

Case Two: Beth.

Beth is very energetic. She is a fast talker, but consistently displayed an enthusiastic and cheerful disposition. She was overjoyed about being recommended as a participant and indicated she was more than happy to participate in the study. Our time together began in the last week of October. We spent approximately seven weeks together, beginning with our first phone call, and ending with the third interview.

My first interview with Beth was held at Bedford Elementary School (BES). The large brick building was well kept, pleasantly decorated with flowering potted plants, and the sidewalks and benches were clear of dirt and debris. There was a small café style sign in front of the main entrance that indicated the school was celebrating red ribbon week. As soon as I entered the building, I was greeted with a friendly smile and "Welcome to Bedford Elementary!" Beth was ready for our meeting and called me back to her office.

Beth's office was long and narrow, characteristic of the age of her building. She had a desk at the very back of her office and conference table near the front. Her office was decorated with a variety of green plants and pictures of her family. There were also numerous poster-sized papers on the wall that appeared to have notes from team meetings or planning sessions. Scattered across her desk were a variety of books, notes, flyers, office supplies, a desk calendar, and her laptop computer, which was open and illuminated, indicating she had been working there recently. The variety and volume of materials on her desk led me to believe that her desk served only as a private workspace. She invited me to join her at the neatly arranged conference table, and for the next two hours we discussed the art of being a principal. At the end of the interview, Beth and I decided it would be a valuable experience for me to come and simply shadow her in action. We scheduled an observation, and post-observation interview, for the following week.

The second week of November, I met Beth at BES at eight o'clock in the morning. For over two hours I followed Beth around the building, making notes and observations about her activities and interactions with others. The observation began with the morning drop-off, where Beth met students at the curb, spoke to their parents, and helped the children out of their parents' vehicles. After morning drop-off, we visited every single classroom, hallway, and meeting space in the building. She spoke to every teacher, followed up on several requests, and greeted each student by name. Following the morning announcements, Beth spoke with the custodian regarding a presentation that was scheduled for later that afternoon, chatted with the secretary about a maintenance work order for a specific classroom, and checked in with the assistant principal to ensure the testing, scheduled for that morning, was on track for success. She also met with the reading specialist about the events for the week, spoke with the art teacher about updating the information bulletin board out front, and followed up with the nurse about a student

injury the day prior. Beth entered several classrooms, spoke to the students about doing their

best on their morning assessments, and made note of the classrooms where teachers were or were

not, meeting her expectations. Our observation ended with Beth taking over a testing duty

outside the fourth grade classrooms.

Our post-observation interview was held in a student computer lab. During the interview

Beth reflected on the morning's events and conversed with me about her motivations and

intentions. She answered my questions regarding the knowledge, skills, and dispositions she

perceived as most essential to her success. The post-observation interview lasted approximately

90 minutes. We scheduled another observation and post-observation interview for the following

week.

My second observation of Beth gave me an opportunity to see her engage with teachers

on a more intimate level. I attended a fifth grade CLT meeting. The meeting included the

reading specialist, assistant principal, and the fifth grade classroom teachers. Beth began the

meeting on a positive note, asking the teachers to share their celebrations. Then for

approximately an hour, the five-member team discussed specific student assessment scores,

strategies for remediation, and made a list of resources required to facilitate their success moving

forward. Following my observation of the meeting, Beth invited me to stay and observe her

leading an impromptu second grade class assembly.

The second grade class assembly was held in the cafetorium. Teachers led students into

the room in silent, straight, single-file rows, and each took a seat on the floor until there were

five neat rows of students sitting cross-legged on the floor. Beth began with a jovial "Good

morning boys and girls!" and they responded in a similar manner. For the next 20 minutes, Beth

led the students through a discussion about playground safety. She reviewed the expectations for

student behavior, asked the teachers to model unsafe playground scenarios, after which the

students told her what the teachers had done wrong and how they could improve their behavior.

During the meeting Beth also directed the teachers to monitor specific behaviors and ensure

visibility on the playground at all times. Following the CLT meeting and assembly, Beth and I

met back in her office for a post-observation interview and debrief. The post-observation

interview lasted approximately two hours. All interview and observation transcripts were sent to

Beth for review. The essence of Beth's experience, as it relates to this study, was extracted from

the transcripts and is presented in the sections that follow.

Education, experience, and school setting. Beth grew up in Forrest City and is a

graduate of FCPS. Having been raised by educators, she always knew she would become a

teacher. In our first interview she said, "I used to always play school as a child. I knew when I

grew up I wanted to either be a teacher or a nurse. I do not like blood. Nursing was out!" After

receiving her Bachelor's of Education, she spent 15 years teaching elementary school in FCPS.

Beth describes her teaching experience as a labor of love, stating, "I loved teaching. I felt like I

was on stage, and it was my job to excite the children to want to learn." While teaching, she

served in schools of all levels including struggling Title I schools and gifted education schools.

She also took on a variety of leadership roles serving as grade level lead and chairing various

committees. After much encouragement from her supervisors, she pursued a Master's of

Education in Educational Leadership and quickly worked her way to assistant principal. Toward

the end of her term as assistant principal, Beth assumed the role of interim principal, and for the

next four years, served that same school in the official capacity of principal. In 2015, she was

appointed as the principal at BES, where she continues to make her mark. In total Beth has

nearly 24 years of experience in the field of education and a lifetime of learning experiences to bring to the table.

Bedford Elementary is situated deep in the heart of a low-income neighborhood in Forrest City. The three-story structure is 92 years old, and despite the pristine exterior, the inside resembled something more along the lines of an old hospital. There are tall pastel colored plaster walls, long hallways, and a variety of yellow, grey, and white vinyl tiles line the floors. Bulletin boards and student work samples line the hallways as teachers work to create an inviting atmosphere for learning. The school currently serves approximately 300 students in kindergarten through fifth grades, and is among the highest achieving schools in FCPS. While, BES follows the state curriculum, and is required by the School Board to meet all local benchmarks, their curriculum is slightly different as they are a school focused on integrating visual and performing arts in their daily activities. It is also differs from other schools in FCPS, as BES is a school of choice. Though there are no prerequisite academic achievement requirements, substantial parent commitment is required since the school does not provide transportation for its students. Despite their location, and traditional associations of similar neighborhood schools, BES continues to thrive. Though, Beth's reputation as a successful leader began with her service at another area school, it is expected that BES will continue to succeed under Beth's leadership.

Beth's perception of successful leadership craft. The current achievement of students at BES is the benchmark by which Beth determines her triumph as a school principal. She readily admits that BES is in a good shape academically and she believes it is her job to help the students, and staff, take their performance to the next level. In our initial interview she said, "I didn't come here to change anything. I came here to tweak it. I came to take the school to the next level and make it better." When making reference to her success as a school principal, Beth

talks about building relationships, helping people grow, and ensuring the community takes pride in the work. For Beth, this type of success is measured in a variety of ways. She described the success she feels when student achievement increases, but she feels equally successful when she walks into a classroom and notices that a teacher has improved following a post-observation conference. She described her success, "when I go back into that teacher's classroom that I talked to today and I see a change, or a tweak." She feels successful when faculty members take pride in a job well done and also when students are excited about the work going on in their classroom. In our first meeting she said,

> Success with the students is success with the staff. I want the staff to feel good about what they do. I want the students at the end of the day to feel good about what they've done in this building.

She also talked about her conversation with a student, during which he told her how much he loved being in math class and how much fun he had during a recent lesson. Hearing that excitement from her students makes her feel successful as a leader. Beth admits that instructional success is the criteria by which she is judged by her superiors, but says nothing compares to the success she feels when she builds a really good relationship with someone that results in a positive outcome. She showed me a birthday card that a parent had sent her recently. She told me,

> I know that birthdays have nothing to do with instruction, but I know that family had a really negative experience at their previous school, and it feels good to know that we have established a positive relationship with them that was significant enough that they felt it important to send me a birthday card.

Beth also talked about how she feels successful at building relationships when she is able to give constructive feedback that is received as an opportunity to grow, rather than a criticism. She admits, this is still a work in progress with some of her teachers, but believes she is a reflective leader, who continually grows, and is motivated to be even more successful in the future.

        Knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Beth describes herself as a seasoned educator. She says she has been blessed with a multitude of experiences, each of which has shaped her practice and contributed to her success as a leader. Beth made many references to the importance of understanding the role and expectations of her teachers, but also stressed the importance of creating a culture of continuous growth. The essence of Beth's experience as it relates to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions she perceives as having the greatest impact on her leadership success, is depicted (Figure 3) and presented in the sections that follow.

        Knowledge. In my first interview with Beth, she told me, "I could walk in to any class, any day, and teach a lesson." Even though she serves in the role of the principal, she is very much a teacher at heart. Beth described her knowledge bases of instruction and strategic leadership practice as having the greatest impact on her success. As discussed in the paragraphs that follow, Beth perceived pedagogical knowledge as the hallmark of an effective school leader and she made frequent references to the importance of having a deep and well developed understanding of curriculum, instruction, and child development. Second only to her knowledge of instruction, Beth emphasized the importance of understanding how and when to lead. Anytime Beth talked about her interactions with teachers, she followed up with the logic for actions and the impact she expected those actions to have. Her ongoing logical reasoning demonstrates her knowledge of strategic leadership practice.

Figure 3

Case Two: Beth's Leadership Craft

Case Two:
Beth's Leadership Craft
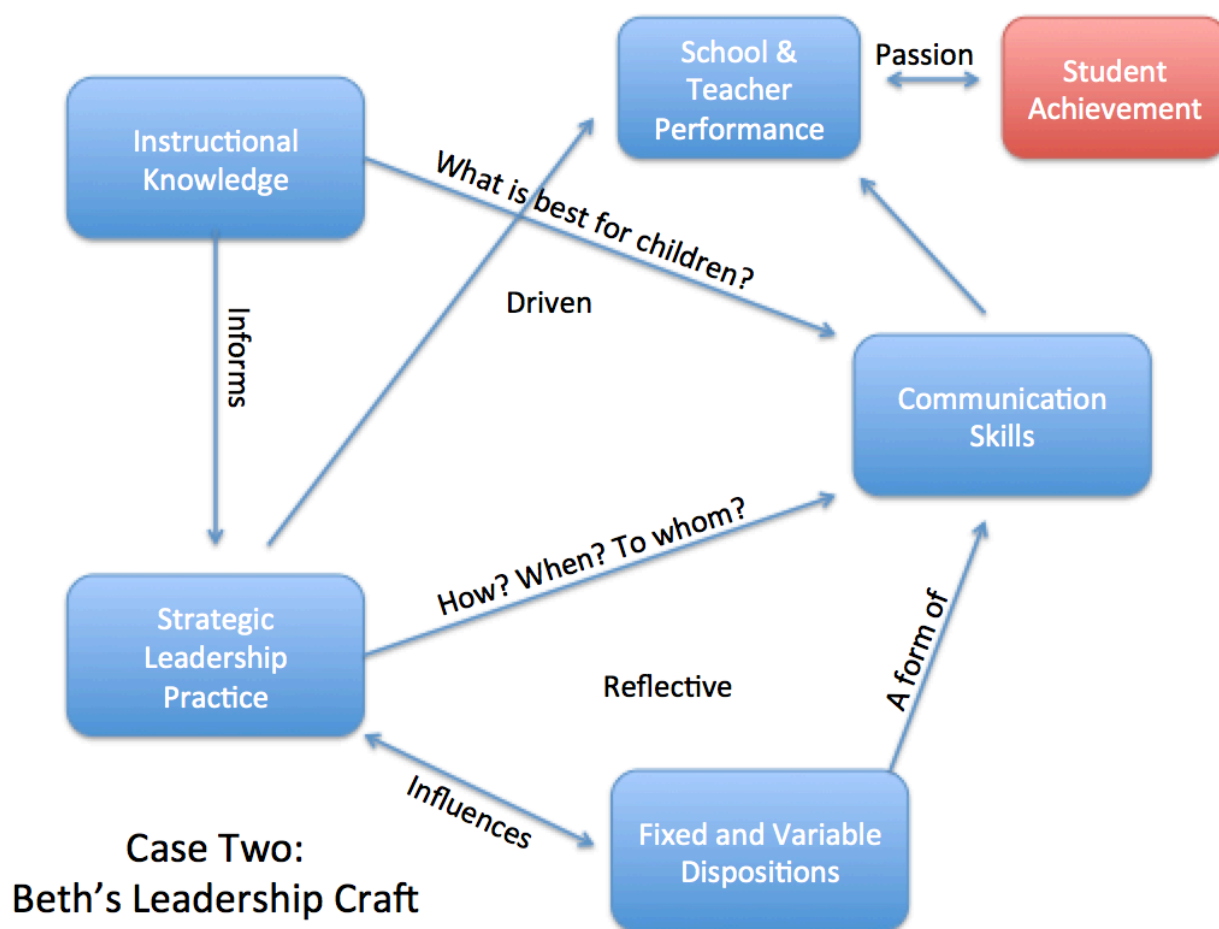
Instructional Knowledge. Pedagogical knowledge reigns supreme with Beth. During

every observation and interview, Beth spoke to the importance of knowing instruction. She said,

"Knowing what good instruction looks like…as a principal your number one job is to be the

instructional leader." When Beth references instructional leadership, she talks about what

children should be learning, how curriculum should be taught, and the factors have the greatest

impact on student achievement. In the first interview, she repeatedly said, "I loved teaching. I

know what good teaching looks like." Her knowledge of teaching and learning was further

evidenced by her actions during that first observation. Beth went into to every single classroom

at BES with a positive message, getting them as she said, "pumped up and ready to rock out that

CSA!" During each visit, she spoke to students about the material they would be tested on that

day, asked them sample questions, looked over their shoulders and gave them feedback on the

work they were doing, and noted a variety of instructional practices going on in different

classrooms. Later in the post-observation interview Beth talked at lengths about how she was

assessing the learning intentions in each classroom, and mentally checking it against the lesson

plans submitted the day prior. She quickly and easily led me through what she expects to see in

a well-written lesson plan, making note of the standards, learning intentions, blooms taxonomy,

student engagement strategies, pacing and transitions, as well as assessment strategies. She said,

> For the most part, your standard is going to be the same, for one week maybe even two or
>
> three….Looking at the Blooms Taxonomy, what do you need? What are your materials?
>
> Kind of giving me that overview. How is each day going to look? The days are broken
>
> down. Technology is infused. The assessment is there at the end, I got it! Or maybe
>
> even an art integration?

During the CLT meeting, Beth demonstrated her understanding of teaching and learning as she

transitioned back and forth between administrator and teacher fluidly throughout the meeting.

She began with a discussion of the essential knowledge and skills that students were expected to

have mastered, evaluated the data the teachers had collected, and worked collaboratively with the

team to design a plan of action for remediation. She spoke to the importance of using running

records to assess students reading skills, brainstormed a list of solutions to the struggles the

teachers were experiencing, and provided a variety of resources for analyzing student data and

planning remediation. She then, moved back to her administrator role, asking the teachers to

provide her a list of resources they would need to make the plan work, so she could support their

efforts. Even in her weekly communication with teachers, Beth references how her knowledge

of instruction shapes her practice. She described a variety of instructional tools and resources

she included, "I used the Frayer Model, which was for vocabulary. The week before that I used

a learning contract and then the week before that, choice."

Though her knowledge of curriculum and instruction is vast, Beth also reiterated on

multiple occasions the importance of understanding the whole child. She said it is extremely

important that she set a positive tone each day. She expects teachers to be at their doors and

greeting students with a warm welcome every morning, and she does the same. She said, "As

the principal, I set the tone for the building." She continued, "If I'm all down in the dumps, 'Oh,

these kids!' 'Oh, these teachers!' What kind of leader does that?" She also talked about how

important it is to know and understand the impact outside variables can have on students stress

levels and the learning environment. In our second interview she said,

> I feel that it is my responsibility to give them a smile, to say, "Have a great day," "How
>
> you doing?" I saw a student in the hallway, he was sick yesterday, he was telling me
>
> about his stomach and his head. I said, "Oh wow, it must be all this Halloween fun." He
>
> said, "I don't know." But then seeing him today and "Are you feeling better?" he said, "I
>
> really am."

During the CLT meeting, Beth further demonstrated her understanding of the factors that

influence student learning. While discussing the progress of a struggling student, Beth asked

questions about his extracurricular activities, the support services he was receiving in the

classroom, distractions from the learning, and even parental support. She said,

Then I'm thinking about the whole child. Is he a part of the clubs after school? Is he in

the Lego club? What else can we do to make him comfortable and adjust? Do we need

the school counselor? What can we do at home to provide math practice at home? He

has an iPad so one intervention could be to send home to the parent, we'd give it to her

that day, some websites that he can use. Then we're hoping that the parent's going to

follow-up. With that conversation came out some student needs, individual student

needs.

Beth perceives her knowledge of teaching and learning, as her greatest asset. Her understanding

of the whole child, and factors that influence students ability to demonstrate achievement,

contribute to her instructional knowledge base.

Strategic leadership practice. While, Beth speaks fluid instruction, she also understands

there is a difference in being an expert in instruction and being an instructional leader. She

makes a conscious effort to consider the audience, her goals, and the actions that will help her

achieve those goals in the most efficient and effective way. Over the course of our time together,

I noticed that Beth meticulously describes the logic and deductive reasoning behind her actions,

dispositions, and language choices. She talked about how she strategically celebrates teachers

and students and how she used certain methods for holding people accountable

Beth talked about celebrating others, and gave several examples of how she celebrated

her staff in the weekly memo, at faculty meetings, and by acknowledging their contributions to

the school in a personal message or group email. She also talked about how celebrating others

was strategic. She utilized positive messages to encourage growth and cultivate a positive school

culture. For example, she was careful to include every member of the staff at some point

throughout the month. She said, "It's not about one or two. I try to find something great in

everybody." Her purpose in recognizing individual contributions was to build a collective camaraderie among the staff members. This line of thinking is directly parallel with her assessment of her own practice. She believes she is successful when people are happy, and recognizing people's efforts, increases self-confidence and happiness. This strategy was also useful in building a positive report with staff members, the foundation for constructive criticism.

Beth utilized her knowledge and understanding of strategic leadership practice to hold teachers accountable for meeting the expectations of professional performance. Beth strategically considered her words and actions to ensure that her message was clear and the expectations were well established. She described a conversation with one teacher the week prior to our meeting,

> I met with a teacher just last week, a follow-up observation, and said, 'Did I miss your
>
> learning intention?' and she very honestly responded, 'Mrs. Beth, I didn't have it up."
>
> And I said, 'But, you're going to have it up when I come back?'"

Beth went on to tell me that she later checked on that teacher and noticed the learning intentions were still not posted. Again, she pointed it out to the teacher. She indicated that if the teacher still is not meeting the expectation when she checks again, she would send her an email and begin documenting her insubordination. Beth also followed up with a message to the entire staff in the Monday memo, celebrating those who were meeting the expectation, another example of using celebrations strategically. During the CLT meeting, one of the teachers questioned the use of running records as a tool for assessing student progress in reading. Beth's powerful response was, "That's what good teachers do, and I know you are good teachers." Her word choice in this case was intentional. She told me about a time when one teacher texted her late on a Sunday night, knowing her lesson plans were due that evening by 8:00pm, to tell Beth that her plans were not complete. The text message confirmed for Beth that the teacher was aware of the

expectation, and in her own words, "I didn't respond. That's how you know, quickly get them done." Beth also utilized her strategic leadership knowledge when addressing the second graders about their playground behavior. The assembly was presented as an opportunity to set expectations for students, but Beth used many phrases, which she pre-planned, and later told me were intended to send the message to teachers that they were not living up to her expectations for supervising students on the playground. She said things like, "Your teachers will walk you around the boundaries of the playground…They will monitor the monkey bars…Your teachers will be spread out across the playground, so you can find them for help." Each of these examples paints a picture of how Beth draws on her knowledge of strategic leadership to hold teachers accountable for their actions through measured actions and words.

While holding teachers accountable is important, Beth also acknowledges that she too has an obligation to her staff. She is responsible for setting the tone of the building by presenting a positive attitude and for establishing trust with her staff by following through on her promises. She describes her strategic leadership knowledge, as knowing when and how to behave in order to accomplish those goals. Beth sets the tone in the building each day by being visible, modeling a positive attitude, and supporting the efforts of her staff. She is a team player and lends a helping hand wherever it is needed most, be it mopping up a spill in the hallway, supervising the cafeteria, or monitoring a testing group. During our walk around the building, Beth made it a point to stop in and speak to a teacher about a dead rodent in the classroom. Her intent was to reassure the teacher that she was listening. She later said, "That teacher needed to know that I was aware of the problem, and that I was working on her behalf for a solution." Beth not only understands the power of words and actions, but also takes a strategic approach to her disposition, presenting herself in the manner most appropriate for each situation.

Skills. Beth described her communication skills as having the greatest impact on her craft. In fact, nearly every coded piece of data associated with Beth's interviews and observations, has some relationship or dependency on her ability to be an effective communicator. She stated,

> You cannot be a leader and not communicate. You can't. You have to be an effective communicator. That's sometimes you know when you've made a mistake. When you don't communicate effectively, and things happen, I step back and ask myself did you communicate that effectively?"

Beth describes communication as essential to all aspects of her job, be it communicating expectations to students and staff, managing community perceptions, improving instructional practice, or reflecting on her own practice to improve her leadership skills. Beth uses verbal and nonverbal communication skills to facilitate the continued achievement of students at BES.

Dispositions. Beth describes herself as a reflective, driven, and enthusiastic go-getter. She believes these dispositions have had the greatest influence on her craft as a school principal. Despite her statement that she is "not the showboat shiny star," Beth is extraordinarily energetic. Her positive attitude, quick wit, and fast pace ensure that she will stand out among the crowd. During my observations of her practice, more than one teacher wished me luck in keeping up with her pace. Regardless of her pace, she describes herself as deeply reflective, an ongoing process by which she internalizes and evaluates her performance and makes calculated changes to improve her skills. Once she decides on the areas of improvement, Beth is driven to be successful; she has a competitive edge, and is steadfast in her loyalty to Forrest City Public Schools.

Reflective. Beth made frequent references to reflective practice. During her first year at BES, she said she conducted what she called a "look, listen, and learn" tour. She took the time to really examine the culture of the school, learn about the driving forces and key players that were shaping the culture, and then determine what and how she was going to make changes. This reflective process is well aligned with her strategic leadership style. Beth also makes it a point to collect data and feedback from various stakeholders. She then measures the collected data against the expectations from the District Leadership Team and the School Board to strike a balance. She said,

> I look at the feedback. I really did. Then I took and I had to look at it and look at me. That mirror. Wow, what is it saying? Six people have said the same thing about me. One was that about me listening to them. I thought, "Golly, if I listen to everybody though, I would not meet my expectations of me, or the expectations of the school board, or the DLT". I thought, "Okay, I'm going to try a little bit better, but I'm going to have to find a happy medium". Once I open up my door, there might be 4 people waiting to see me. Four at one time. I'm talking about like this time of the day. I'm thinking, "Gosh, I thought that I was listening". Because I was on a look, listen, and learn. Like the superintendent last year because I was new.

This ongoing practice helps her to pinpoint specific actions, words, and dispositions that will help propel her school toward increased student achievement.

Driven. Beth describes herself as driven to succeed. In her mind, she chose this job, she chose to work for FCPS, and the day she shows up being anyone less than her best self, should be her last one in this career. She said, "The day that I come to work, and I don't act like this, I need to get my stuff and go home. The day that I feel like I am changing ... It's a done deal." Her

work ethic and competitive nature drive her to pursue the wealth of information and resources

that will ensure she is able to successfully reach her goals. She says, "There is a ton of

information out there, but you have to go get it." Beth's inner drive contributes to her resiliency

as a leader and provides the lens through which she approaches decision-making and challenge.

When talking about planning she said, "First kind of decide, what didn't work, why it didn't

work, and what is the next plan? If plan A doesn't work, you need to go to B. Then I go to C."

She also cautioned against taking any failure too seriously saying "You have to be able to laugh

at your mistakes…to be able to shake it off. Otherwise, this job, it could get to you." She

described her work with a struggling group of teachers, "I'm going to get around the table with

them and identify what did we not do right, or what other resources do you need that I can

provide, or what PD do we need?" She is a problem-solver who is not afraid to get around the

table with others to examine the issues and decide upon a game plan for improving the outcomes

for students.

 Passionate. From the very first conversation with Beth, to our final contact, her energy

and enthusiasm for educating children was unwavering and overwhelmingly positive. She is

very vocal about her passion for children, and readily exclaims, "I'm going to excite you. I'm

going to wow you," and she does. Beth goes out of her way to ensure that positive energy is

transferred to her students and teachers every day. From the very minute they leave their parents

car, and are greeted with a warm "Good morning, Let's have a great day!" to a follow up phone

call when a student goes home sick, Beth conveys a message of love and dedication to her

student's success. Beth's enthusiasm for the success of others transfers to her teachers through

her positive, supportive approach to feedback. During many of our conversations, Beth made

repeated references to her strategy for improving instruction, noting that she has no desire to "go

for the jugular" but rather wants to work with teachers to help them improve their practice.

Beth's learning. Beth's most significant learning comes from engaging in peer-to-peer

learning experiences that allow her converse and share ideas with others. Additionally, she

attributes some of her learning to attending district-led professional development sessions, during

which she learns new strategies and is able to better understand district expectations. Beth

indicated that she both appreciated and learned a great deal from the feedback she has received

from district-level supervisors and teachers over the years. She also attributes much of her

learning to prior work experiences. Each of these learning opportunities is explored in the

sections that follow.

Peer-to-peer learning. Beth describes peer-to-peer learning as the collegial, collaborative

sharing and refining of ideas. For example, Beth talked about working with another colleague to

design the survey that she used to collect feedback from her staff, and also about exchanging

resources with other administrators, like the "Level Up for Student Accountability" sheet that she

gave the fifth grade CLT. Most of all, she referenced the meaningful and authentic

conversations she has with her colleagues about leadership. She described these conversations as

happening in both formal and informal settings.

Formally, she said each principal in FCPS is a member of a CLT, which meets monthly

to engage in collaborative discussions about the work they are doing in their buildings. District

leaders are also a part of these CLT's and often serve as facilitators, guiding the principals

through discussions about their strengths and also about the challenges they face as leaders. Beth

described using real school-based scenarios, book talks, and actual observation feedback as the

foundation for many of their conversations. She said,

> We had our own little CLT's as principals and we had like 10 questions and we had to count off. We talked in groups about our strengths of our buildings, our areas of concern, where we're going to do differently, where are we at this time of the year ... first nine weeks is ending. It was a really good meeting. That was probably one of the best meetings that we've had.

Informally, Beth described being able to call other principals for advice and feedback. She said,

> I have colleagues that have had different experiences, and I will call and ask them for advice or describe what I am doing and have them talk me through it. They never tell me what to do, they just kind of guide me.

Peer-to-peer experiences have a greater impact on Beth's learning than any other experience. The second most impactful learning for Beth occurs during district led professional development.

District professional development. Beth describes district level professional development as the means by which the district sets expectations and provides principals training for implementing the practice. During each interview Beth recounted at least one professional development session that she had recently attended. In our first interview, she described the importance of attending professional development on instructional initiatives. She said, "as an administrator, I need to understand the curriculum, from the teachers perspective," district professional development sessions provide her the same learning experiences that her teachers will receive, allowing her an opportunity to view the material through their eyes. During our second interview, she talked about how district professional development on learning intentions and success criteria were essential in helping her understand what and how to assess teacher performance. She indicated,

> We had PD on learning intentions. We've had PD on success criteria. That helped me to know what I needed to look for because if I'm holding you accountable as a teacher, I need to know what to assess. Also, I had to present it to the staff.

These actionable steps, learn the material, teach it to someone else, and then assess the progress in your building, help solidify the learning for Beth. In our third, and final interview, Beth talked about the district providing professional development on the Response to Intervention initiative. She described the session as informative, and though it was new, she said the presenter gave "clear" information. She said, "The principals loved it, because it was all right there." From Beth's perspective, the most valuable part of any professional development opportunity is the ability to immediately implement the practices she learns. Beth said, "I think the learning experience, just like with a child and the teacher, if you can bring it back and put it into action that's what makes it meaningful."

Feedback. Beth receives feedback that shapes her craft from both her supervisors and her teachers. After attending professional development, Beth says she frequently receives feedback from her supervisors. On two separate occasions, Beth described how her supervisor pulled a post-observation form that she has given a teacher from the database and gave her feedback on how well she described, assessed, and guided the instruction. She said,

> Whoever my supervisors have been, every year during my evaluation as a principal, they'll pull an observation, and they give you feedback on it, and they write it up in your evaluation. You never know which one they're going to pull.

Beth describes the feedback she's received in those sessions as valuable, and as being responsible for her learning to give teachers effective written feedback that informs their practice.

Feedback from her supervisors is not limited to her observation comments. Beth says they also give her feedback on how she can model the practice she desires to see in her staff and they make suggestions for how she can improve her leadership practice. She described the feedback from her administrator during the early part of the year about reducing waste by sending her Monday memo electronically rather than printing and placing it in teacher's mailboxes. Beth said she has not printed the memo all year long. She has found that the practice saves her time and allows her to model the efficient use of technology for her staff.

Beth also collects valuable feedback from her staff. Beth uses a survey to collect feedback each year on the progress of BES and their perceptions of her leadership qualities. She says the feedback can be difficult to take. She said,

> Last year, I gave a survey after being here for one year. I knew that I needed to be ready
> for the responses. I waited a little while. I did. I waited. It was one I actually created with
> another colleague. I looked at what was important to me, though. I wanted to know what
> did they think was most important with me being ... Was I supportive? Principals, we're
> not always supportive when it comes to comes to discipline. That is as a teacher. I've
> been there, too. I understand, but the principal can't come in your class and take your
> class over. I had certain questions and I used that feedback to guide me this year kind of
> sort of.

Though she must balance that feedback against the districts expectations of her performance, the information she receives is used to guide and shape her practice moving forward.

Prior experiences. Beth's craft knowledge has been shaped by her prior work experiences, through her interactions with others, and by observing other leaders. Beth spent 15 years teaching elementary school, and worked in a variety of high and low performing schools in

FCPS along the way. She readily attributes her understanding of instructional practice to her

teaching experience, stating "My experience as a teacher has definitely laid the foundation. I can

talk the talk, and I can walk the walk." Beth continued to refine her knowledge and

understanding of leadership by serving as an assistant principal for several years, and as interim

principal for one year, before being promoted to her current position. After six years as a

building principal, she says she is still learning something new every day. When I asked Beth

about how she learned to ask the right questions, she said, "I didn't. I just keep asking until I get

the information I am looking for." She describes her knowledge of handling tough situations as

"trial by fire," learning by making mistakes along the way. Beth also describes how she has

learned through her interactions with, and observations of, other leaders. When reflecting on her

prior experiences Beth talked about the various principals she worked for as a teacher and

assistant principal, and also about the leaders she has worked under as a building principal. She

says each one is different, and while she did not agree with the practice of every one of them, she

has learned something from each of them. She said, "I learned from each one of them. They

were all very different. There were some things they did of course that I would never do. There

were some things they did, that I wish I could do." As she reflected on those experiences, she

said, "I think I learned from observing other principals and deciding how do I want to be, how

does Beth want to be as a leader?"

    Case two summary. Her knowledge of instruction and understanding of strategic

leadership practice has substantially influenced Beth's leadership craft. Her constant focus on

setting expectations, monitoring accountability, and giving effective feedback coupled with her

ability to communicate effectively, have largely contributed to her success at BES. Beth

attributed her learning to the opportunities she had to observe and interact with other leaders and

the districts commitment to providing professional development opportunities and feedback on her performance. Beth's strategic leadership practice was informed by her instructional knowledge and ability to manipulate her dispositions. Through effective communication skills, she articulated a common vision, set expectations and held teachers accountable for their actions. The sum of her efforts produced improved student achievement.

Case Three: Carol

My initial interview of Carol was during the first week of November 2016 in her office at Creative Elementary School (CES). Her office was fairly small, but quaintly decorated with pictures of her family and the traditional red apples customary of educators. Her L-shaped desk faced the wall in one corner and a large conference table, with high-back office chairs, sat in the center of the room. Behind the door was a bookshelf, holding a large number of books and a variety of educational resources. Her desk was littered with post-it note reminders and stacks of paper. The fact that very little of her actual desk could be seen through the materials, indicated to me that she did most of her work at her desk and used the conference table for meetings. My first observation and all three interviews were conducted at that specific table.

Carol and I decided that my first observation would be of her conducting an interview. This presented a unique situation for my study, as I had not yet been given the opportunity to observe how other principals conducted themselves when making hiring decisions. The interviews were being held to fill a vacant kindergarten aide position and Carol had invited the classroom teacher to participate. Carol also saw this as an opportunity to build the leadership capacity of this particular teacher, who was seeking an advanced degree in school leadership. We decided on this event because it would give me a chance to see her interacting with both a teacher, for the purpose of growing her skills, and with a community member, for the purpose of

hiring. The observation lasted approximately 30 minutes. Immediately following my

observation of this process, a post-observation interview was conducted, which lasted

approximately two hours. Fortunately, the interviews were being held on a teacher workday, and

there were not any students in the building to which Carol needed to attend. At the end of the

interview, we agreed that I would come back the following week to shadow Carol during a

normal workday.

My second observation of Carol was held on the Friday before Thanksgiving break. I

spent approximately two hours shadowing Carol as she went in and out of classrooms and talked

about her role at CES. Our post-observation interview was held back in her office and lasted

approximately 90 minutes. All interview and observation transcripts were sent to Carol for

review and feedback. The essence of Carol's experience, as it relates to this study, is described

in the sections that follow.

Education, experience, and school setting. Carol hails from a family of educators and

was raised in Forrest City and graduated from FCPS. Carol had no desire to become a teacher.

After high school, she pursued a Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages, but quickly realized

the job market would not support her passions. She said, "I fought against it…. My background

is actually liberal arts languages, and when I figured out, I couldn't really do anything with that, I

went back to school and got my (teaching) license." She earned her teaching credential and

spent the next 21 years teaching in various elementary schools across FCPS. Her experiences

included two Title I schools and CES. Early in her teaching career she earned her Master's of

Teaching, and several years later earned her Education Specialist Degree in Educational

Administration. For five years, Carol served in the assistant principal role, and is currently in her

ninth year as an elementary principal. It is her fifth year at Creative Elementary. Carol's 35

years in public education have earned her a stellar reputation, which is evidenced by the fact that

her supervisors have asked her to serve as a mentor to several new principals in the district.

CES is situated at the back of a well-to-do, waterside neighborhood in Forrest City. For

all intents and purposes, CES is a traditional elementary school, serving approximately 400

students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The school is fully accredited, touts a supportive

community and strong PTA, and serves a diverse population of students that are only somewhat

representative of the community, in which the school is situated. Despite the high-income

neighborhood, many of the students that attend CES come from low-income families. Carol

believes the backdrop of a prestigious neighborhood, creates a façade, painting an inaccurate

portrait of the student body. When describing the community, Carol said the multimillion-dollar

homes fool people, because they do not realize that the students who live in those homes attend

private schools. She said, "Traditionally, this is a school that has a perception that everything is

rosy. Everything is wonderful, but we've got a lot of need here... We are a Title I school, but not

a Title I school." While the population of CES is predominately middle-class, she cautions her

teachers, "Don't ever think we don't have poverty. It's just very hidden." Over the past four

years, Carol's leadership has helped CES achieve measurable gains in each area of accreditation.

Student achievement has increased by 10% in English, 8% in math, 25% in science, and 6% in

social studies as measured by state accreditation assessments.

Carol's definition of successful principal craft. As a 35-year veteran of the education

workforce, Carol has an excellent working knowledge of what it takes to be a good principal.

She is aware of the data and measures of accountability required by the state and district, and can

readily synthesize how CES compares to the established expectations. However, Carol defines

her professional success, not by the numerical statistics, but by her ability to build meaningful

relationships with her school community. When asked about her success, Carol was quick to say

that she is not the reason the school is successful, but rather it is because of the hard work and

dedication of her staff members. She said, "Credit has to go in so many directions. It's really

not me. I mean it is, but it isn't." Carol takes great pride in making people feel comfortable

around her, and she goes to great lengths to build authentic relationships with her students, staff,

and community members. During our conversation she indicated many times how passionate

she is about making personal connections. She talked about knowing the name of every student

in the building, knowing their parents, and knowing the community she serves.

As an instructional leader, Carol feels successful when she is able to share something

with someone else that they find useful or helpful. She says,

> When people come up to me and say "I am going to use that idea in my classroom,"
>
> that's why I did it. When I get that feedback of it's made an impact on me, I know I've
>
> hit onto something. I guess approaching it from the teachers perspective.

She also feels successful when she is able to "build consensus" around a learning community

that values teamwork. Carol seems genuinely invested in the success of all students, and

strongly believes her success is a product of her hard work and dedication to improving the lives

of others. She describes herself as a "teacher at heart" and feels a great deal of success when she

is able to help someone else realize his or her goals. One such example, during our second

interview, Carol said, "My last assistant principal just got her own school this year. I feel like

that was a good success story." Carol is a servant leader whose definition of success is

subjective and difficult to measure. The knowledge, skills, and dispositions she has amassed

over the years, have had a tremendous impact on her ability to reach her intrinsic goals, which

are the driving force behind her continued success, and that of CES.

Knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The knowledge, skills, and dispositions Carol most associates with her craft are described in the paragraphs that follow. Specifically, Carol described her understanding of social dynamics and solid foundation in teaching and learning as essential knowledge bases. She credited her verbal and nonverbal communications skills as essential to facilitating buy-in and improving the outcomes for students. Finally, she described her disposition as affable and attributed much of her success to a passionate work ethic. Carol's leadership craft is visually represented (Figure 4) and described in the paragraphs below.

Knowledge. Carol described two specific knowledge bases as having the greatest impact on her day-to-day activities and leadership success. The first, knowledge of social dynamics involves her understanding of the interconnected relationships that exist between stakeholders. The second, her knowledge of teaching and learning comprises her understanding of effective classroom practices and the daily operations of the school. Each of these are described in the sections that follow.

Social dynamics. Carol described her knowledge of social dynamics as most the knowledge base most essential or her success. She repeatedly emphasized the importance of "knowing your clients and know the community." Reiterating the importance of evaluating personal and political connections within the school community, Carol emphasized the importance of measuring her actions, words, and decisions to capitalize on the power of human connections, facilitate buy-in from her stakeholders, and build a strong peer network. She provided several examples of how this knowledge is essential to her job, describing how this information is used to balance workloads, manage perceptions, increase teacher self-efficacy, and make hiring decisions. The intricacy of her social capital knowledge, and how she uses that

knowledge to shape the dynamics of her community and her practice, is presented in the

following section.

Figure 4

Case Three: Carol's Leadership Craft
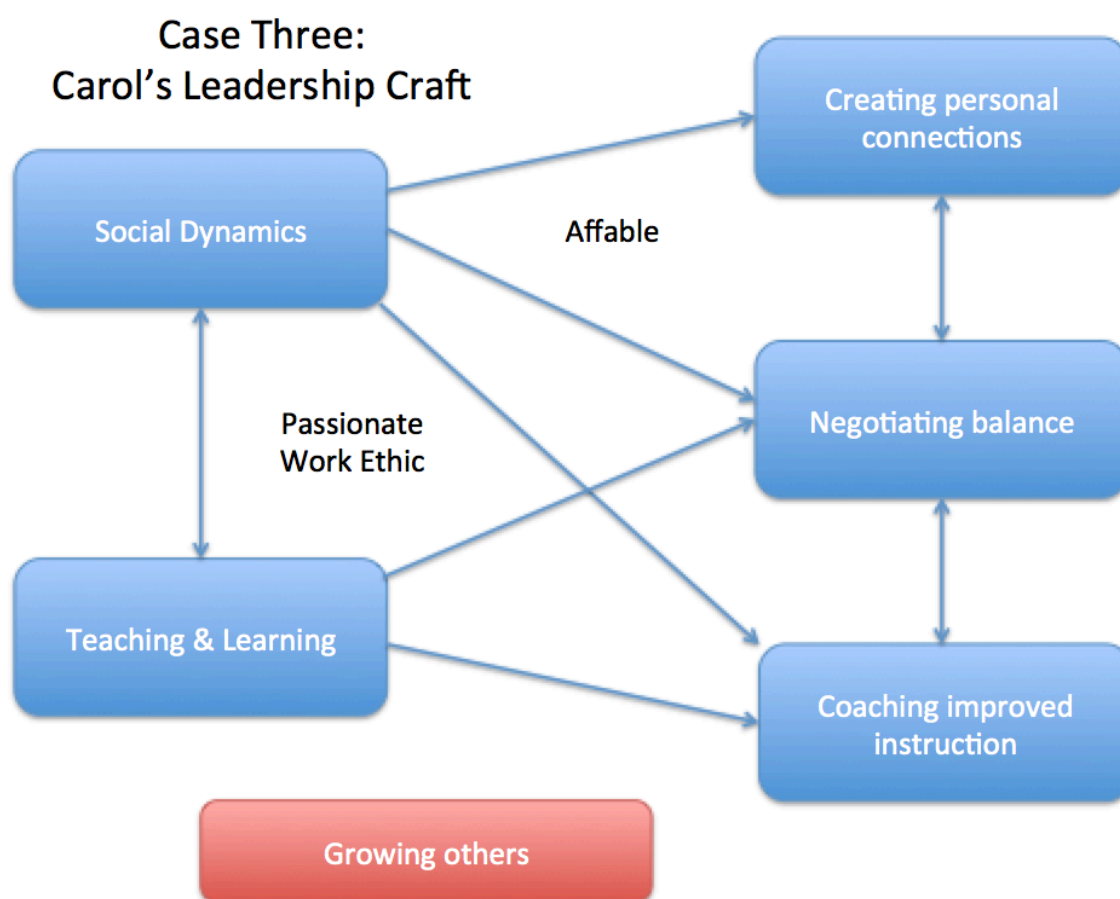
Building and maintaining personal connections with students, teachers, parents, and

colleagues is paramount to Carol's success. She attributes her ability to harness the power of

human connection to her knowledge and understanding of social dynamics. Carol talked at

length about the purposeful and deliberate actions and decisions she makes to nourish and

enhance those relationships. For example, when talking about hiring decisions, she referenced

using interview questions intentionally designed to alleviate anxieties and allow her to assess

candidates' passion and motivation for being in education. She said, "I try to put people at ease,

because I know what it is like to be on that firing line. I think if we can just take a little bit of the

pressure off, it gets them to open up." She continued, "I'm a big believer in I can get anyone on

board, but it's the way you structure questions, it's the way you approach people." She

reinforced the value she placed on personalized human connections saying,

> If we were interviewing for a classroom teacher, someone can sit there and talk data, they
>
> can talk curriculum alignment, but you can't see heart through that. I think that's a piece
>
> that…. I can teach, we can teach, all the curriculum stuff, you're going to have to do it
>
> kind of our way, but I want to see someone who is passionate.

The hiring process has twofold value for Carol as she also treats it as an opportunity to

build organizational and leadership capacity in current staff members. She said, "I've learned

over the years to pull in, instead of my own interviewing of the person, to pull in someone who

has an investment in the role because they will be working directly with them." By creating a

situation where the team teachers are invested in the outcome she lays the foundation for

camaraderie and teamwork. She said, "Building that consensus, and building that team piece is

important." Referring to the teacher that sat on the interview panel during my first observation,

Carol described how she used the interview process to engage and enhance the teachers'

leadership capacity. She said, "She's pursuing her admin licensure… this is a part of the

process…it puts her in a role of seeing some of what admin does, on a very small basis." Giving

teachers opportunities to build their leadership skills helps them prepare for the roles they hope

to fulfill in the future, but also demonstrates her vested interest in growing others. Managing that

perception helps her facilitate buy-in from her staff and hire the right people for the job, which

also means, her students will receive a higher standard of care and a quality education. Lastly,

building capacity with others helps Carol ensure CES's sustainable progress over time. Carol

said it's important to "build that capacity in some other people, because I'm not going to be here

forever…and there needs to be someone who builds and knows that piece."

Carol uses her understanding of social dynamics to influence the perceptions of her

school community. She dedicates time to activities representative of her passion and dedication

to student achievement, putting herself in the public eye and reiterating a positive message of

care and devotion. For example, she greets cars during student drop-off for the first 20 minutes

of every day. In our second interview she said,

> I'm out at the curb every morning, rain, shine, every morning at 7:00 letting kids out of
>
> cars because it's a happy time. When they get out with frowns, I'm going to hug them,
>
> I'm going to stick my head in the window and say, hey, he's been absent a couple of
>
> days, did you send in a note? I pick up so much information, and I'll hear, grandma's
>
> been sick. Is she okay now? Or, wait a minute, you don't usually bring him to school,
>
> but that's the piece that…connection, that has nothing to do with data, but it does have to
>
> do with having heart.

Setting aside that time every day, allows her to establish relationships with families and gather

useful intelligence that may be beneficial when dealing with students later in the day. Being

present in the morning also establishes, and maintains, a standard of care that the school

community, has come to expect from her team. Being visible, actively participating in the day-

to-day school operations, and demonstrating an investment in school and student success, helps

Carol create and maintain a positive community image for CES. To reinforce that perception she

dedicates time to activities that illustrate her shared sense of responsibility. In one interview she

said,

> They see me pushing a broom, they see me pulling weeds, they see me with a paintbrush,
>
> they know that piece, that I don't feel like I'm in here eight hours a day…. I want them to
>
> recognize in me that I'm right there with you in terms of I'm going to do some of the
>
> dirty work, too.

Her actions emphasize the value she places on teamwork, sets her apart from others as a model

of great work ethic, and demonstrate her dedication to the job.

Being able to communicate effectively is certainly a skill that Carol deems important, but

understanding social capital helps her decide how, when, and what information to share, and

with whom. She provided two examples of how this knowledge recently influenced her

decision-making. On one occasion, she had a wild, injured deer on the playground. The game

warden was called and had to euthanize the deer. Understanding social dynamics, she

immediately followed up with students and teachers, and then issued a statement to parents and

community members about the incident. She knew that it was imperative that she manage the

press and reassure parents of the safety of their children at CES. On another occasion, when

faced with communicating the negative impact of district budgetary decisions, she said, I want

"to be sure they are not given things that are just going to inflame them, or make them light up

Facebook… I just want to be sure it's as factual as possible." When tailoring her message, she

tried to avoid "inciting unnecessary drama." Carol believes that knowing when, how, and what

information to share with others is one of the most important parts of her job.

Finally, Carol understands the need to establish and maintain a solid and diverse peer network. She shared with me her feelings of inadequacy in the area of special education, but also described how her relationships with colleagues, who happen to be well versed in special education, have assisted her in overcoming her weakness. In our first interview she said,

> Special education is not my field of expertise, but I sure do have a good core of network that I can go to and say, 'Hey, I need support, I have a question before I contact this person.'…Don't do this alone, pull in your troops and make sure that you have a good chat box.

She said her network also allowed her to extend her practice, as well as the practice of her teachers, by gathering useful tools and resources. She said, "there are a lot of fabulous ideas out there within the division, with a lot of schools…I get a lot more from knowing what others are doing." Carol shared how she builds relationships with the maintenance staff to get work in her building completed in a timely manner, stating,

> I keep popsicles in the freezer in the summer and when the workers come through. 'Hey, I know I didn't turn in a work order for this, but can you look at this?' Knowing how to build those relationships, that's how you can get around some of the expected protocols.

Carol's networking to facilitate success at CES extends beyond the FCPS employees. She also makes it a point to be seen and recognized by key political actors in the community. She uses her knowledge of social capital to create a positive reputation for her school, she said,

> Knowing, when you go to a school board meeting, that just some of the intangible pieces…making sure you make contact and speak to the right people. It's not a brown-nosing thing, not at all, but … I want them to know who I am because we're not a school that creates a lot of waves. My last school wasn't either. We're not one that has a

constant flood of people coming through, scrutinizing everything. I feel like we have to

kind of make our own name, in a good way, by being a part of the community.

Nurturing relationships with colleagues and community stakeholders and having a solid

understanding when and where to show up is paramount to her schools success.

The final aspect of social dynamics, that Carol indicated was important to her leadership

success, was her ability to "Find a balance. Find a balance. Find a balance." Carol indicated on

multiple occasions, how she works to create a sense of equity between the teachers workload and

performance expectations. For example, when the teachers are struggling and "the November

angst sets in, and they start saying, 'I'm done right now.'" Carol works to see where she can

eliminate stress. She monitors the number of meetings teachers are asked to attend, looks for

opportunities to step in and give them a few extra minutes of planning time, and strives to

provide them ample resources and support for doing the difficult work of teaching students.

When talking about eliminating meetings, she said "you have to do things like that when you can

get that feeling or tone and know they're struggling." She continued, telling me about how she

and the assistant principal are currently providing teachers duty-free lunch on Fridays because

she knows they are anxious about all they have to do right now. Even carrying this knowledge

over to the communication and expectations of others, she told me about a conversation she

recently had with the reading specialist about monitoring the length and tone of her emails. Her

concern was that extra long messages take too long to read and created a situation where teachers

are disengaged thus missing the purpose of the message. She said she cautioned her to "put it in

a somewhat conversational tone" and monitor the length to avoid teachers, "getting half-way

through, it's like, 'I'm not reading any more of this.'" She wants her staff to view her as a

member of their team, supporting their efforts, and being respectful of their time. She said, "I

make every effort to be conscious of the fact that they've had a busy day….I am uniquely aware

of their time." Her understanding of social dynamics allows her to help strike a balance that

encourages teacher self-efficacy and commitment to the schools success.

Teaching and learning. Carol describes her knowledge of teaching and learning as having

the second greatest impact on her craft. She defines this large body of knowledge as having an

understanding of the curriculum, instructional best practice, and how people, both children and

adults, learn. As it applies to children, Carol has a well-developed understanding of the

curriculum her students must learn and master, and she indicated as much when talking about

various classrooms. For example, she referenced the curriculum being taught to an intellectually

disabled student, in a self-contained classroom, saying, "he needs to learn (sounds) ba-ba-ba, but

he's in 5th grade age-wise." By comparing the level of instruction being provided by his teacher

to the curriculum being taught to his same-aged peers, Carol demonstrated her knowledge of

curriculum. She also demonstrated her knowledge of teaching and learning by using vocabulary

that indicated her understanding of the skills fifth graders need to be effective readers,

referencing their ability to summarize text, and when she went into classrooms she asked

students specific questions about their learning. In addition to her understanding of curriculum,

Carol made many statements that demonstrated her knowledge of instructional best practice.

When she talked about evaluating individual teacher performance, she talked about the types of

questions she asks herself during an observation. She described one recent observation,

> Did the teacher give 6 directions? Put your books away, label your paper, da-da-da…did
>
> they give wait time? What were the questions that they asked? Did they start with what,
>
> how, why? So many questions that when you kind of break it down in a format that you

can see. Questions, 'What's the setting of the book? Who's the character?, instead of,

'How do you know?'

Her ability to reference and reflect on questioning levels, wait time, strategies for organizing

material, differentiation, small flexible reading groups, and classroom management procedures,

exhibit her understanding of effective instructional practice. When talking about working with

5th grade students she said, "I go in and talk with them about setting goals. I put their CSA

scores in front of them, and then we kind of set the goals for the second 9-weeks." Carol does

more than talk about good instructional practice, she models what it should look like for her

teachers.

Carol also demonstrates her understanding of teaching and learning, by expressing her

knowledge related to the learning process for children. She said,

I think you have to understand the developmental markers for children, have an

understanding of how it is not just about pounding academics at them. That's a piece of

it, but putting that along with that rigor, the relationship of the family, and the

relationship of the school.

Her concern for educating the "whole child as opposed to just looking at the data," demonstrates

her understanding of effective instructional leadership. She said, "I can say they're struggling

with summarizing, until the cows come home. I can say that, but I can also make a case for

knowing the holistic piece of the child." Using her knowledge of social capital and

understanding of teaching and learning, she strives to build relationships with students that lead

to improved practice. She said, "I make a point of knowing the name of every child in the

building and knowing something about them." She reiterated the importance of understanding

curriculum, instruction, and developmental markers of children, when she said, "in this day and

age when we are so hot and heavy data driven…let's see what's making that little fella tick, so we can see what we need to fix."

When it comes to adult learning, Carol has a good understanding of how to deliver professional development to her teachers in a manner that is engaging and applicable to their daily practice. Carol drew upon her knowledge of teaching and learning, specifically adult learning theory, when she discussed the importance of knowing the supports that individual teachers need, and having the ability to deliver it in a meaningful way. She said, "I always frame things in terms of the PE teachers sitting there going, 'What the heck does this have to do with me?'" She went on to say, this knowledge goes beyond the actual skills you want them to learn, and includes an understanding of when it is appropriate to include each group of teachers and how to implement the training. She said,

> Even though the whole staff has an investment in it, I'm going to start with the grade
>
> level teams and CLT's, and then we bring aboard the support of the other folks, because
>
> there is nothing worse than holding that meeting where you're sitting there and you're
>
> breaking down, 'All right, here's where we need to go.' and you've got the PE teacher
>
> sitting there knowing that he's mentally making a grocery list. You have to find the right
>
> time and place. There's going to be a place where he's going to support, but it's not
>
> sitting there at that time.

 She also discussed using professional development opportunities to "touch on the needs of each teacher," but also to help them take ownership of their own learning. She described the teachers role in a recent professional development, "They have 12 minutes to do an activity based on their choice. They are leading it, and boy does it take them out of their comfort zone. It's good. They are doing a great job." Carol's understanding of teaching and learning, coupled with her

knowledge of social capital, allows her to effectively design appropriate learning experiences for

her staff, constantly improve instruction in her building, and establish a positive image for CES

with tremendous community support.

> *Skills.* The essence of Carol's experience indicates that she truly believes in her ability to

relate to her school community and make measured decisions based on their specific needs. She

attributes her success to having effective communication skills. Carol said, "I think you have to

have strong communication skills…good written and oral communication skills." But, she also

emphasized the importance of listening and acting in a way that facilitates the effective receipt of

your message. Drawing upon her knowledge of social capital and her understanding of teaching

and learning, Carol uses her communication skills to create personal connections with her

stakeholders that allow her to set and monitor the mission and vision of the school and also

coach teachers toward improved practice. In the paragraphs that follow, I explore the evidence

of her verbal and nonverbal communication in practice.

> *Verbal communication skills.* In addition to speaking clearly, Carol emphasizes the

importance of selecting her words carefully. When talking about the interview process she said,

> I've learned to be very cautions in what I say, because I hear her saying, when you do
>
> this, when you do that. I'm sitting there thinking, okay. No. No. No., if you were
>
> selected for this, if you were the person in the role.

Similarly, she said, "I'm very cautious with what I say regarding special education." Carol

understands that there can be legal and emotional ramifications to communicating false

information. Effective oral communication is essential to relaying accurate information and

expectations to various stakeholders. Another example of her use of effective verbal

communication skills was portrayed in her selection of words, when working with teachers to improve their practice.

Carol describes coaching as her ability to facilitate healthy struggles, which lead to an improvement in teacher's instructional practice, through effective oral communication. She talked about how she frames conversations in a way that helps teachers determine on their own, where and how they can improve. She said, "There is a way to ask the question to get at what you need." Instead of telling them what they did or did not do correctly, she will ask them to "help me understand. Show me where I missed this particular strategy." She says teachers are their own worst critics and with some guidance she can help them improve their practice without making them feel alienated or defeated. She calls her work with teachers "discovery learning" and says, "I get more accomplished by approaching them with, 'Let's take a look at this, what do you see?' As opposed to 'Here's your scores, develop a plan.'" She told me,

> I want them to have the light bulb go on instead of me saying, 'Okay, today I saw you doing a math lesson, and you were saying 4 goes into 16. Tell me why you didn't use the vocabulary.' I can have them come to understand it on their own, have them articulate it. That whole scenario of, I know the answer to the question, but it's the way I'm going to ask you the question."

Her leadership in this particular practice is a perfect example of how Carol uses her knowledge of social capital and teaching and learning and effective communication skills, to lead her building toward success.

Finally, Carol emphasized the value of having good communication skills to frame conversations, work through difficult situations, and set expectations. She says having conversation skills are important when addressing parent concerns,

I told the staff, when you get that smoking gun, pick up the phone. I'm not hashing this

out on the keyboard, I'm going to talk to you. That is the only way, I may have to hold the

phone out to hear, but I'm not going that route. Particularly at the curb, if there's someone

who's sent me a hot smoking gun, I'll just say, hey, I got your email, I'll contact you for a

time that we can maybe talk, to bring it down a little bit. I'm a firm believer in that you've

got to either face-to-face, or at a minimum get them on the phone, email has no tone.

Addressing conflict face-to-face, or reaching out to a parent via phone conference, helps to ease

the burden of the situation, as she recognizes the value in human connection. By choosing her

words carefully and using a personalized form of communication, she is able to get at the root of

a situation and work toward a solution. When talking about parent complaints she said, it is

important to frame the conversation with an expectation that the parent has contacted the teacher

first. She said,

I always ask the question like this, like when a parent's come to me and complain about a

teacher, or, "I don't like the way they do the homework." I'm like, "Well, what did the

teacher say when you had a conversation?"… I know the answer, but it's designed to get

a little more conversation going.

But she says she does the same thing with teachers. For example, when they bring her a student

for discipline related issues, she'll ask them "What did the parent say when you contacted

them?" She says she knows, 'they'll say, 'Well, I've written notes in the agenda.' or 'I put a

sticky note on his papers.'" She says, she often rephrases the question to reiterate the importance

of conversing with parents about their student's progress or behavior, asking "What did the

parents say when you voice-to-voice talked to them?" she said, "they know I'm not a fan of pen

pals." Carol uses these types of structured questions to set expectations for teachers and make personal connections between the school and the community.

One last example Carol gave of the importance of practicing good verbal communication was when talking about how she deals with hostile or difficult situations. During tense situations, she says her conversation skills are most effective in diffusing the conflict. She said, "I always start off with the parents, "The weather. My goodness, it's so nice today. You got a lot of yard work going on?" something to ease them in" to the conversation. She cautioned "there's a way to bring them on board to where by the end of a conference, the parent's ready to string the child up because they've come to understand that the child really was doing something in class" but she says having strong verbal communication skills are essential to helping everyone come around the table and agree on an appropriate course of action.

Nonverbal communication skills. In addition to strong verbal skills, Carol gave several examples of how nonverbal communication is important for successful leadership. She gave examples of how she uses written language to share information with various stakeholders. She described writing notes to teachers and students as a means of communicating progress and care. She also described several instances where deliberate actions were used to clarify or enhance a message. Some of those deliberate actions included positioning, face-to-face contact, and listening.

Regarding written communication, Carol distributes a weekly newsletter to her teachers that keeps them in the loop about everything going on at CES. She said, "That was me wanting to put things in a format where if someone said, "What? What's going on? What are you supposed to do?" Go back and check." Second, she described writing reports and creating various presentations to reflect upon and explain student achievement data to the district

leadership team. She said she created a PowerPoint presentation to analyzing their strengths and weaknesses and addressing "some of the root causes and our concerns, regarding where we need to go with improving scores." Finally, she talked about using written communication to facilitate positive communication between the school and families saying, "the assistant principal and I review all of the report cards. I ask teachers, when you make your comments…start with the positive…. make it that compliment sandwich." She continued, "we hand-wrote comments on every report card and signed it with our name" to ensure a positive message is communicated to the parents. She said she uses a similar concept with teachers. She writes a positive message to them when they need a little encouragement, reminding them that their work is valued and important. The impact of her written word would be lost if she lacked the skills necessary to communicate effectively. She reminded me, that there is a way to approach any situation, and bring people together, but you should always begin with a positive and be sure your communication is worded the right way.

Carol routinely emphasized that excellent communication involves not only speaking and writing communicating clearly, but also listening to others, and following through with appropriate action. She said, "After a couple of times of hearing from a parent, "You're not even listening to me, you've already decided," she knew she needed to work on her listening skills, "I'll get to that point of saying the no, but I don't want them to think that my mind is just completely made up already." To that same point, she recognizes the importance of positioning people in ways that are agreeable, not combative, is essential to the proper receipt of her message.

There have been conferences I've had to hold with parents who are ready to light my socks on fire over a perception with the teacher. The teacher's just freaking out afraid,

and I will say to them, because I know the kids and I know the standpoint where the

teacher is coming from…I'm going to have you sit across from me so that you're not

confrontational across from the parent. If you feel my foot touch your foot, that's a signal

to ..."

Tailoring conversations with staff, students, and parents in a way that makes them feel valued

and connected to the school environment, listening and appropriately framing conversations to

facilitate growth and resolution, demonstrate how Carol's communication skills contribute to her

leadership success.

   Dispositions. Carol describes herself as an easy-going individual with a positive

attitude. When referencing why she was sent to CES she said, "they needed a band-aid. They

needed someone positive…someone who was going to lift the school." She talked about how

having an open door policy and a sense of humor help people see her as approachable and

available. She described herself as motivated and driven to succeed. She attributes her

leadership success to having an affable disposition and a passionate work ethic.

   Affable personality. Being approachable and available are the hallmarks of Carol's

affable personality. She stressed, "You make yourself available…I just want to tell you, you've

got to act like you like the people…you have to be approachable." Carol described how she

makes herself available, by keeping an open door policy and using humor. She told me, "open

door to me, means I'm going to do everything I can to hear your concerns as quick as I can."

With that in mind, she expressed the importance of having a sense of humor. She said, "I think a

sense of humor helps, because I started out the year with Diet Coke is my beverage of choice. If

you need to have a tough conversation, bring me a Diet Coke, or Diet Dr. Pepper." While on the

topic of humor, Carol said, "if I'm not willing to have a conversation with you about something,

we can talk about sports, we can talk about the weather, we can talk about Duck Dynasty."   She

says, "I think being available when needed is big." She describes how she tries to be available

by lending a helping hand, "I don't want to burden the staff…I try to shoulder what I can."

Carol's affable personality, sense of humor, and approachable demeanor contribute to her

success by making her an approachable leader.

Passionate work ethic. In addition to her affable personality, Carol describes herself as

dedicated to the success of her school. She says, "I invest myself in every part of the school."

As an "overachiever" she does not mind working hard. Regardless of the effort required, and

even if it means having tough conversations with others, Carol believes she is responsible for

ensuring the job is done properly. She is willing to do whatever it takes to meet the expectations.

She said, "I'm going to do whatever it takes, because that's me… I'll have a conversation with

someone about something that needs to get done, but I'm going to see to it, if I have to do it

myself." She is dedicated to being the best educator she can be, and will work endlessly to make

sure her students get the best she has to offer.

Carol's learning. Carol describes much of her understanding of her craft as coming

from the vast experience she has in the field. Similarly, she credits much of her workplace

learning to the relationships she has built with various mentors and mentees over the years. In

addition to her learning through experience and from mentors, Carol indicated that she is

constantly growing and learning from her peers and various professional development

opportunities. Her learning in each area is described in the sections that follow.

Experience. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Carol has been in education for 35

years, 15 of which she has been a building-level administrator. She attributes her knowledge of

effective teaching and learning as having been developed by her 21 years of classroom teaching

experience. She said she was dedicated to teaching, and to being the absolute best teacher she

could be, "I'm just a classroom teacher at heart…I thought I would teach forever. I mean I was

the most reluctant person going into admin because I saw myself, as I'm going to be the best

teacher I can be." It is through this experiential learning, that Carol believes she learned how to

lead instruction. When speaking of her knowledge of teaching and learning she said,

> I think you have to have a good instructional background, which is why I worry
>
> sometimes with the folks who are coming, after 2 years of teaching, into an admin
>
> role….You don't need to be a grizzled veteran, but you do need something you can draw
>
> upon.

After coming into administration, she learned through trial and error how to manage her time,

evaluate her relationships with teachers, and develop her talent for improving the instructional

capacity of her staff. She has also learned how to better deal with parents, navigate the political

arena, and communicate her mission and vision for school success. She describes her learning as

having occurred as a result of failure, like asking the wrong questions until she learned to ask the

right ones, or when the second parent told her she failed to listen to their concerns and give them

the attention they deserved, she changed her communication practices. Through those types of

real-world situations, Carol has learned and shaped her craft.

   Mentor relationships. Carol described her learning and the development of her craft as a

result of mentor relationships. What sets Carols learning apart from others is the multidirectional

learning that she believes happens as result of a mentor relationship. Over the past 10 years,

Carol has been asked to serve as a mentor to several new principals. She describes her learning

as having been influenced by those to whom she was a mentee, and also by those to whom she

has been a mentor. Carol gave an example of her learning as a mentee, describing how prior

leaders have influenced her approach to difficult conversations,

> Having an understanding from them of the tough conversations, plus being around some
>
> people who made some, maybe not the choice I would have made in conversations, and
>
> seeing how I think I'd have done that differently.

She also described how her mentors taught her the value of building and establishing

relationships with the school community,

> When I became an AP, he said, are you on that track where you want. I said, I'm
>
> comfortable where I am as an AP, but one day, maybe. He said, well you might want to
>
> consider some work teams. Okay, I joined the nutrition wellness team, and he laughed,
>
> and laughed, and laughed, and he said, you will never face any of the people on that team
>
> at an interview panel. You've got to be strategic. But I like the team. Okay, but you've got
>
> to be strategic. You've got to choose wisely a work team that is headed by someone on
>
> the district leadership team who might be interviewing you.

Over the years, her mentors provided her a wealth of strategic knowledge that influenced her

craft and equipped her to overcome the challenges of the position. She also described how she

has learned from serving as a mentor to others,

> I've been a mentor to several administrators, and one of them that I mentored last year,
>
> she contacted me all the time, and if I didn't know the answer I said, 'I'm gong to call in
>
> the troops, and I will get back to you.'

She says her mentor and mentee relationships have given her a better understanding of how to

grow the leadership capacity of her assistant principals, increased her knowledge of both

technology and instructional strategies, and have grown her network of colleagues to which she

often defers for advice.

     Networking and peer interaction. Learning from a mentor or mentee, implies a strong

relationship in which there is a more intimate level of trust and a greater understanding of the

strengths and weakness of the two individuals. While Carol acknowledged that mentor/mentee

relationships have had the greatest impact on her craft, those, with whom she has a less intimate

relationship, also frequently influence her learning. For example, as previously mentioned she

has developed a network of peers who are well versed in specific areas, upon which she will call

when she needs to know how to frame a specific conversation. She also talked about learning

from other principals during their monthly meetings and gathering resources, like data collection

tools that she could use in her building. She indicated that this was a valuable enough experience

that she wished it happened much more frequently.

     Continuing education. Carol defined continuing education as any formal learning

experience, such as graduate coursework or professional development conference. Surprisingly,

it was not the specific content of those courses that Carol deemed to have the greatest impact on

her learning, but rather the caliber of the individuals leading the classes and the specific strategy

they used to deliver the content. Carol described her learning in these continuing education

courses as having been scenario based, and as having been led by "instructors who were

administrators, and people who would be classified as District Leadership Team members, in

every school district in the region." In fact, she said the impact on her learning was the greatest

when the instructors allowed the students to understand "their perspective" through their

individual experiences. She later described an instance in which she attended a professional

development session that was "the most miserable PD I'd ever sat through," which she attributed

to their terrible presentation skills. Despite the awful and boring nature of the workshop, she

said their experience and reputation in the field helped her to walk away from the training with at

least a few new strategies to implement in her building.

        Case three summary. Carol is a servant leader whose primary focus is to ensure her

teachers are valued, have a sense of balance, and feel that their contributions to students are

appreciated and recognized. The figure below is a visual representation of Carol's leadership.

Her knowledge of social dynamics is largely attributed to the mentor and peer relationships she

has built over the past 35 years. Her experience as a teacher has influenced her knowledge of

teaching and learning and contributes to her ability to empathize with the workload and

emotional impact of being a teacher. Her leadership style is shaped by her affable personality

and strong work ethic. The sum of her interactions with stakeholders, including teachers,

parents, students, other leaders have truly shaped her practice and had the greatest influence on

her ability to support continuous improvement at CES.

Cross-Case Analysis

        After conducting the within-case analysis, I utilized the data analysis procedures

described in chapter three to conduct a cross-case analysis of the three individual case studies.

The purpose of the cross-case analysis was to compare and contrast salient themes and

discrepancies among the three individual cases. The results of my cross-case analysis, as they

relate to this study, are presented without interpretation in the following section. For the purpose

of consistency and congruence, I presented the findings of the cross-case analysis using a

structure similar to that employed in the presentation of each individual case analysis. The

section is divided into four parts. In the first section I compare and contrast the principals

background information, including their prior work experience and education, as well as the

relevant details of their school setting. Next, I present a comparative review of the principals'

perspectives on successful craft in practice. Third, I discuss the similarities and differences in

the knowledge, skills, and dispositions each principal identified as having the greatest influence

on their leadership practice. A synthesis of their learning experiences is discussed in the final

section. An examination of the significant findings of the cross-case analysis, implications for

practice, and suggestions for further study are presented in chapter five.

Compare and Contrast Principal Education, Experience, and School Setting.

Each of the principals who participated in this study, are significantly similar, and yet

vastly different. There are obvious similarities and differences in their upbringing and education.

Their prior work experience and number of years in the field are different, but the essential roles

in which they served, are parallel. Similarly, their school settings have both analogous and

diverse characteristics that have a significant impact on their success as a school leader. Their

similarities, though more aligned with circumstance than intention, must be assessed as they

have undoubtedly had an impact on the development and success of each of these leaders.

Background, education, and experience. The principal participants are all female

ranging in age from their mid-30's to late 50's. They represent both different cultural

backgrounds, both African American and Caucasian. Each participant was born, raised, and

currently resides in Forrest City. They each graduated from FCPS and attended local, in-state

universities of equal caliber for both their undergraduate and graduate studies. Both Beth and

Carol report having been raised in a family of educators. Beth embraced this as her calling and

said she always knew it would be her career. Carol on the other hand reports that she resisted the

idea, implying a sense of obligation to the field, for as long as she could. Amy's parents, unlike

Beth or Carol's, worked in other fields. Only after many years in the field of psychology, did

Amy decide to become an educator.

Though their chosen field of study is similar, each of the three ladies has obtained a

different level of education. Ultimately, each principal's graduate degree is in the field of

educational administration. Amy has a doctoral degree, Beth has a master's degree, and Carol

has an education specialist degree. While, each principal brought a different background to their

position, they each stated that they had only ever worked as an educator for FCPS. Despite the

difference in the number of years they have worked in public education, ranging from 10-35

years, the various positions they have held are similar. Each principal reported having worked as

an elementary school teacher and assistant principal, at both Title I and gifted schools, prior to

becoming a principal. Amy has the fewest years of classroom experience, having only worked

as a teacher for four years. Beth and Carol each worked in the classroom for 15 or more years.

Amy served, as an assistant principal for four years and has been a principal for six. Beth also

served as an assistant principal for four years, and is currently in her sixth year as a principal.

Carol has the most experience, having served as an assistant principal for four years, and is in her

twelfth year as building principal.

School settings. Each of the schools in which, Amy, Beth, and Carol currently work

serves approximately 400 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The schools are all held

to the same state and district accrediting standards and must implement the same state and

district mandates and initiatives. Additionally, each is evaluated by the same district leader and

held to the same standards of conduct. All of the schools are situated deep within local

neighborhoods, a good distance away from heavily traffic laden public highways, in Forrest City.

The schools all have similar safety concerns regarding outside pedestrians and neighborhood influences.

Accolade Elementary is a Title I school, serving a large population of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The school provides students intervention services in reading, math, and gifted education and employs a positive behavior intervention system. The majority of the students at AES receive free or reduced-price lunch and ride the bus to school every day. The school has yet to earn full accreditation status, but has shown tremendous growth in both reading and math over the past three years. Accreditation is expected in the coming year.

Bedford Elementary is a school of choice that focuses on integrating the visual and performing arts into the daily education of its students. Parents submit an application on behalf of their child and each is responsible for making their own arrangements to transport their child to and from school. Students are admitted on a first-come-first-serve basis. There are no prerequisite or admission criteria. Similar to AES, Bedford provides students reading, math, and gifted intervention services and employs a positive behavior intervention system to manage school discipline. In 2014, BES was recognized nationally for their exceptional performance increasing student achievement and remains among the highest performing schools in FCPS.

Creative Elementary, similar to AES, is a traditional elementary school, though the population demographics are more in line with that of BES. Creative Elementary serves nearly 400 students, most of which come from middle class families. The school also provides reading, math, and gifted intervention services and employs a positive behavior intervention system for managing school discipline. The school does not qualify for Title I funding, and student transportation is split equally between parent drop-off and public school bussing. The school is

fully accredited and has maintained state accreditation and progressive achievement levels for

many years.

While each of these schools is different, they serve an equal number of students from

Forrest City. Their structures and program options are similarly aligned, and representative of

the various types of public schools, which most districts are familiar. AES represents a

struggling, Title I school, BES is representative of a public charter school, and CES represents a

traditional school setting. Each of the aging brick buildings is in mediocre condition, neither

looking new, nor dilapidated. Faculty members in each school, work hard to ensure the walls are

bright and cheery and display a variety of student works. All of the schools have an active

Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and prides itself on promoting school-community interaction.

Comparing Leaders Perspectives of Success

Despite the criteria by which their schools are evaluated, the principals defined their

leadership success by their ability influence the perceptions, feelings, and investment of others.

They each spoke to, and seemed to understand the importance of meeting state accreditation

standards, but whether or not their schools actually met that mark was not a factor in how they

perceived their own progress.

Amy's perception of her success is defined by the impact her leadership has on the

community's perception of her school. Her purpose is to shape the culture of the school

community in a way that leads to a stronger investment in the instruction students receive. Amy

wants the parents, students, and staff to value the work that is done at AES and to feel that the

school has a real impact on the outcomes for students.

Similarly, Beth defines her success by her ability to build relationships with parents and

students that lead to a happy and rewarding experience at BES. She also seeks to build

relationships with her teachers that are strong enough to facilitate the acceptance of critical

feedback. Beth also defines her success by her ability to lead, direct, and implement district

initiatives and mandates that result in increased student achievement and a more enriching or

rewarding experience for students.

Carol defines her success, not necessarily on the happiness of students, but on the

efficacy of her teachers. Her goal is to provide teachers a pleasant working environment that

respects their time and appreciates their hard work and dedication to student success. She

believes her success as a building leader is measured by her ability to facilitate continued

professional growth and maintain a shared sense of responsibility for student learning while also

ensuring teachers job satisfaction.

The three leaders are very similar in their approach to leadership success. They each

spoke positively, none providing excuses for the reasons why they might not be successful. Each

principal is diligent about promoting a positive image of the district as well as state and local

mandates imposed upon their school communities. They each took responsibility for their

schools performance and exuded confidence in their ability to build meaningful relationships that

would inevitably result in their success.

Analyzing Principal Craft

Findings support that leadership success is a result of strategic and thoughtful practice

and not something that occurs by mere happenstance. Their leadership is best described as the

application of intentional, deliberate, and mindful practices that harness their knowledge, skills,

and dispositions in a manner that improves school culture and instructional practice, thus

ultimately improving the outcomes for students. It is the identification and acquisition of those

knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are of most interest to this study.

The knowledge these principals amassed, either through schooling or experience, is the information that is required for their success, and can be characterized as the 'what' of their thinking. Their knowledge of teaching and learning represent what they know about the education industry and the intricacies of day-to-day school operations. Their knowledge of emotional intelligence comprises their emotional sensitivity, psychosocial awareness, and understanding of factors that motivate success. The skills, or methods through which their knowledge is applied, enable them to strategically lead their schools and continue improving the outcomes for students. Communication skills are the primary tool of their craft, through which they implement their knowledge. The dispositions describe their mindset or the personal characteristics that shape their decisions. These dispositions can be thought of as the lens through which they examine intellectual input and the values that derive their process of reasoning. Their dispositions help us understand why they make the choices they make. The knowledge bases, skill sets, and dispositions, collectively create the craft of these successful principals (Figure 5). The results of the cross-case analysis resulted in several key similarities and distinctions among the participants as it relates to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they perceived as having the greatest impact on their leadership craft. Figure five depicts the collective essence of successful principal craft. In this section, I will present a comparative review of each.

Knowledge. Knowledge, as described by Amy, Beth, and Carol is the foundational knowledge, of which mastery is required, to be successful as a school principal. The essence of the principals lived experience reveals two domains of knowledge that have the greatest impact on the successful implementation of their craft: teaching and learning and emotional intelligence. The concept of teaching and learning is best described as the technical knowledge of schooling.

This concept includes knowledge of curriculum and instruction, assessment policies and practices, child development and adult learning, as well as an understanding of the general management, operations, safety, and support structures necessary to support teaching and learning. The concept of managing social capital is the more practical knowledge of human emotion and behavior and an awareness of how one might impact the other. In this segment of chapter four, I will present the essence of the participants lived experience as it relates to their knowledge bases of teaching and learning and emotional intelligence.

Figure 5

Cross-Case Analysis: Leadership Craft
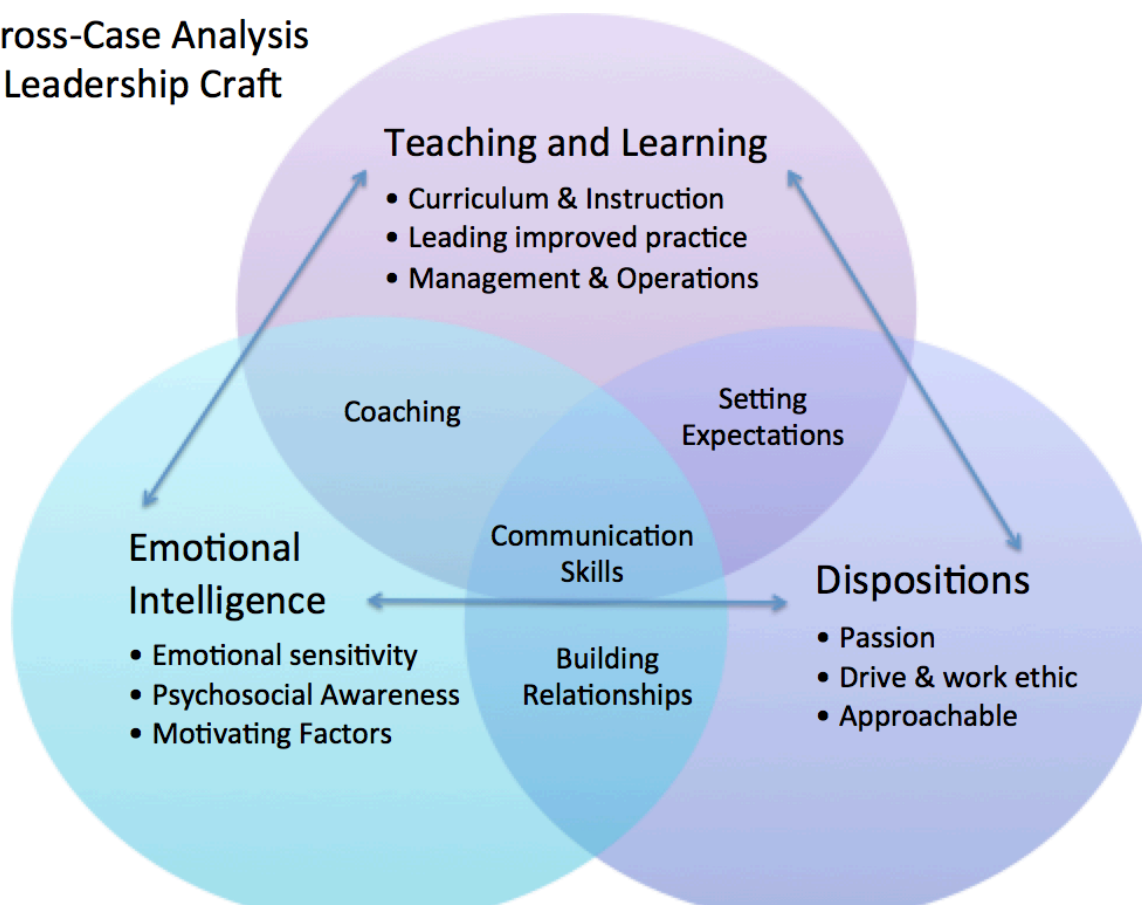
Teaching and learning. Teaching and learning, as discussed and perceived by the principal participants, is an all-inclusive technical knowledge of the trade. The principals discussed their knowledge of instruction in three specific areas, which are described in detail later in this section. The first is curriculum and instruction, which includes an awareness of instructional best practice, knowledge of curricular standards and assessment strategies, and understanding of child development markers and the interventions that support student growth, as well as polices related to standardized tests and accreditation standards. The second domain of teaching and learning knowledge is that of leading improved practice. Knowledge in this area encompasses the notion of understanding andragogy and the strategies that lead to more successful teaching practices, specifically, through the implementation of meaningful professional learning and evaluation structures. The final domain of teaching and learning knowledge is management, operations, and support. This area is described as having an acute understanding of the support structures, discipline and safety procedures, and basic operational requirements that facilitate an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. Each of these specific micro-domains of knowledge is interrelated and their success in one category is dependent upon, and related to, their knowledge and success in another. Principals draw upon this valuable knowledge base to provide teachers feedback on their practice, suggest strategies that lead to improved academic achievement, and ensure a safe, effective, and efficient school environment, conducive to learning.

Curriculum and instruction. Teaching and learning knowledge related to curriculum and instruction, is defined as an understanding of the core information that must be taught in each grade and subject, teaching and assessment strategies that lead to increased student achievement, and child development markers indicative of student growth. The principal's knowledge in this

area is evidenced by the vocabulary they used in our conversations and the situations they described as being connected to their knowledge. For example, when discussing the CLT meeting with Amy she described her understanding of the curricular framework, the connection to state assessments, and strategies for improving teachers practice. Carol described the content being taught in a special education classroom, and discussed the specific areas of the curriculum the teacher was struggling to teach. As related to child development, each principal described the importance of educating the whole child and considering the various stages of progression, addressing appropriate age level content and behavior, and structures to support their learning.

Leading improved practice. Teaching and learning knowledge related to leading improved practice is defined by a principals understanding of the strategies and resources that lead to improved instructional practice, thus increasing the outcomes for students. The principals described their knowledge as being related to leading professional development, understanding adult learning, and implementing evaluation structures with fidelity. Their knowledge was evidenced through my observations of their practice and in their descriptions of conversations held with various stakeholders about improving practice. When discussing the CLT meeting, Amy stated, "I need to know what type of assessment they've provided and what standard they were looking at." She said, "I know curriculum so when I have conversations with teachers, I know it well enough that we can talk about it. I can talk about what effective teaching looks like, and what you need in order to be effective in your classroom." Beth also spoke about her knowledge of leading instruction as her first priority. "We know, as a principal, your number one job is to be the instructional leader." She also said,

> I know what good teaching looks like. I think from an administrative position now, it
>
> certainly has helped me, because if you're not doing it (teaching) quite the way it needs

to be done, I'm going to approach you with: How can I help you? How can I support

you? Let me tell you what I saw today, and let me offer some suggestions.

As an instructional leader, Beth believes she needs to know "what good instruction looks like,

and then help teachers take it to another level." Similarly, Carol referenced her knowledge of

adult learning theory, by addressing the need present professional learning in a manner that

reflects her respect for teachers time and by selecting material that is pertinent to every member

of the staff and balancing the length and frequency of professional learning opportunities with

the expected workload of teachers. She says, "I always frame things in terms of the PE teacher

sitting there going, 'What the heck does this have to do with me?'"

When evaluating teacher performance each principal discussed their approach, but all

agreed it is essential to understand the methods of evaluation, but also to conduct frequent

classroom observations. Amy referenced the importance of doing frequent short interviews,

"When you're doing the ten page evaluation during the year, you only see a chunk of time, but

going into these little snippets of time, sometimes I don't see what I had been seeing." Carol

cautioned against only conducting formal observations, "If I'm coming in and it's announced,

they've got it all going on. It's all graphic organizers, it's everything going on, but just kind of

stopping in like this is when I pick up on pieces." Beth discussed the importance of asking

questions and encouraging reflection about instructional practices,

What are the facts, what do I see, what can I support? If you're doing guided reading,

then I need to come around the table with you and say tell me about that level reader that

you were using. Talk to me about that group. I did, I saw the book. I saw the level, but

tell me about those students. Tell me about the other group at the back table, and when

did you meet with them? Those are the kinds of conversations that I have.

Carol, took it all a step further, she talked about going into a room and talking to students about

the lesson to gauge their learning,

> I generally come in, and I'll sit down in a quiet corner and just capture a little bit. I know
>
> I have to do this piece, and then I get up and walk around because I'm just like them. I
>
> get bored. I've go t see what they're doing. I can see it from a distance, but I need to see
>
> it over their shoulders.

Though Carol described the significance of observing through the lens of the student, she also

talked about the importance of providing specific feedback. She gave an example of specific

feedback given during a post-observation conference, "You asked 4 questions in a row."

Frequent observations and specific, measurable feedback allows these principals to help teachers

understand in a non-threatening way, how they can improve their practice.

Management and operations. Management and operations, as related to teaching and

learning knowledge, is defined as the principals understanding of the support structures, safety

procedures, and facility operations that must be in place to create an environment conducive to

teaching and learning. This knowledge includes understanding the physical structures of the

building, such as heating, air conditioning, lights, and water systems, and what to do or who to

call when those systems fail or need repair. It also encompasses an awareness of the potential

threats to student safety, including discipline procedures, and working knowledge of the

protocols in place for addressing a concern. Each of the principals touched on these areas in our

conversations and I observed a lockdown protocol in place at AES. As a result of Amy's

knowledge in this area, and having pre-existing procedures in place, instruction continued almost

completely uninterrupted during the lockdown at AES. Beth reiterated the importance of this

knowledge base, "if your building is not safe and the students and the staff and the parents don't

feel that their children are safe, then you're not going to be effective." Carol also stressed the

importance of being prepared for anything, "Do you expect that the police are going to say,

'Lock down. I have to shoot a deer!'…. Then my phone starts ringing. I have to send a letter out.

You have to be prepared" Having the knowledge to effectively overcome and address obstacles

that interfere with teaching and learning is essential.

   Emotional Intelligence*.* Emotional intelligence, as described by the principals, is an

awareness of the impact a situation or emotions might have on an individuals decision-making

process and the ability to intentionally engage that knowledge in an effort to guide and direct the

thinking of others. Emotional intelligence, as described by the principals, can be divided into

three specific domains: emotional sensitivity, psychosocial awareness of self and others, and

factors that motivate success.

   Emotional sensitivity. The principals each described emotional sensitivity as an

awareness of, and ability to relate to the emotions of another. This knowledge is particularly

important in situations that require empathy, compassion, or exceptional understanding. In these

situations, the principals describe themselves as trying to understand and relate to the emotions

their stakeholders. This is especially important in situations dealing with grief, anger, frustration,

and disappointment. The principals discussed a need to demonstrate a body posture that

indicated they were listening to the speaker, display an appropriate facial expression, sit or stand

in close proximity to the speaker, and use words that indicated they understood and

acknowledged the other persons perspective, regardless of how they actually felt about the

situation. Amy described her ability to empathize with others as simply "knowing how to deal

with people." She talked about meeting with parents who were upset or hostile and being

empathetic to understanding where they were coming from, or what was "driving their core of

emotions." Rather than putting up her defenses and reacting to their behavior, she talked about

sitting quietly beside them, listening, and genuinely trying to understand the driving forces

behind their emotion. She also talked about being a parent herself and getting defensive over her

own child, and how her experiences were able to help her be more empathetic to the parents that

walked through her door. But she also talked about not taking it personally. From Amy's

perspective, it is essential to understand that the emotions are not directed at her. She believes

her ability to comprehend their feelings and separate herself personally from the situation makes

her better able to listen for understanding, rather listening to respond.

Beth also talked about having compassion for others and understanding how their

emotions might impact their ability to be effective in their position. She described a time when

one of her faculty members was grieving the loss of a parent. She relayed a message of

condolence and let the teacher know that she did not expect lesson plans to be done on time. Her

intention was to convey the message that she knew grief was a natural, and necessary, process

and that the teacher had other personal issues to address during that time. Carol described how

she tries to be sensitive to, and understand with the workload of teachers and adjust her practice

accordingly. In response, she eliminated meetings, adjusted due dates, and provided additional

support whenever she was able.

Psychosocial awareness of self and others. Psychosocial awareness encompasses the

body of knowledge that allowed these principals to first understand how their words, demeanor,

and actions impact the emotions, perceptions, and behaviors of others, and second use that

knowledge base to manipulate the outcomes. More specifically, these principals have a

heightened awareness of their own emotions as well as the emotions of others, and able to

quickly assess the context of a situation and respond appropriately. Further dissection of the

concept of psychosocial awareness presents two specific actions principals take that demonstrate their understanding of emotional intelligence: evaluating the audience and acting with intentionality.

When principals evaluate the audience, they consider the interrelatedness of all social factors (i.e. age, role, developmental ability, etc.) of the intended recipient of any communicated or implied message. In response, the principals consider the impact their demeanor, words, or actions might have on the involved parties and act accordingly. Evaluating the audience is a focus on how the message will be received, whereas acting with intentionality is a focus on how the message is sent. For example, when Beth met with the second grade students about their behavior on the playground, she considered the students' age and the environment, and then used language and visuals that second graders could understand. Carol changed her tone, adjusted her voice, and even crouched down to alter her height, when addressing a kindergarten student who had been sent to the hallway for disrupting class. Later, during the same observation, she took a different approach with a fifth grader she believed was pretending to be sick so she could visit the nurse and skip class.

Psychosocial awareness extends beyond the principals actions and demeanor with students. The principals also gave examples that related to parents, teachers, and even the political environment. Principals describe themselves as almost manipulative in this way. All three principals talked about doing morning car duty in order to head off many conflicts and confrontations with parents. Amy talked about how her communication and demeanor with an upset parent would change to demonstrate empathy and compassion for the situation at hand. Beth draws upon her knowledge of psychosocial factors to communicate her expectations and hold teachers accountable for their actions. She makes it a point to stop at every single

classroom every morning. This intentional behavior serves multiple purposes in that it holds

teachers accountable for being on time, increases her visibility around the building, and helps her

facilitate better relationships with her stakeholders. Beth also utilizes body language in an

intentional manner. When talking with her parents she intentionally turned around and looked at

the clock to signal to the parent that she did not have any more time for the parent to babble.

During the playground meeting, she changed her tone to suit the second-grade audience, but

there were many intentional messages, directed at teachers, embedded in her presentation. She

intentionally told the students that the teachers would be located in certain spaces on the

playground and that they would be available for helping them in difficult situations, because she

recognized that the teachers were not properly supervising the students during recess. Carol also

pointed out the need for principals to understand their audiences in terms of who is watching.

She talked about being present at school board meetings, attending the regional PTA meeting,

and ensuring she participated in work groups with those who would later interview her for

specific positions. Her choice to attend these events or participate on those particular

committees was based on an awareness of who would be watching and understanding who was

connected to whom politically.

    Motivating factors. The final subset of emotional intelligence, motivating factors, can be

described as the intersection of emotional sensitivity and psychosocial awareness. When

considering how to motivate teachers toward success, the principals first assessed their practice

from the perspective of the teacher, and then acted in a way that encouraged them to press

forward. Motivating factors were described as the principal's actions or words that helped to

meet a specific need, resolve a conflict, or celebrate an achievement. Evidence of motivating

factors was visible in the principal's daily practice, as they seemed to be constantly evaluating

the circumstances and assessing their actions to ensure continued progress. For example, Amy

noticed that her bus drivers seemed indignant toward the students. After investigating the issue,

she discovered that the bus drivers had been previously banned from the building, thus they were

unable to use the restroom or get water between runs. In an effort to bring them on-board with

building positive relationships with students, she found a place in the building that provided

them access to a restroom, a water fountain, air conditioning, and a comfortable place to rest.

Beth talked about using the weekly memo to celebrate teacher's successes in the classroom,

provide them resources for improving instruction, and to recognize the good things they were

doing around the building that contributed positively to the school culture. Carol talked about

how she makes time every Monday and every Friday to cover the lunch duty of some of her

teachers. Her purpose is to help them see that she understands their stress and wants to do

anything she can to help alleviate burdens whenever possible. Understanding motivating factors

is essential to building community, facilitating trust, and nurturing a positive climate.

Skills. For the purposes of this study, skills are defined as the methods through which

knowledge is applied to principal craft. More specifically, the skills are the tools through which

principals activate their knowledge and manage their dispositions to increase their opportunity

for success. During the data collection and analysis phases, the principals made it very clear that

effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills are the tools of their trade. Principals

describe communication as the skill they employ to convey information in a clear and purposeful

manner that others can understand. This skill set included their regular written or verbal message

with any stakeholder as well as the actions and behaviors they displayed in their daily practice.

Communication skills are essential for delegating job tasks and responsibilities, establishing

expectations, and managing community perceptions.

The skill these principals describe goes far beyond the concept of effective written and oral language. Principals must utilize their knowledge of emotional intelligence and teaching and learning to tailor their communication for the receiving audience. They utilize a variety of methods to communicate with stakeholders including: newsletters, blog posts, bulletin boards, phone calls, letters, notes, emails, video broadcasts, face-to-face meetings, and brief encounters. Sometimes the messages are nonverbal and might include a specific behavior, attitude, disposition, facial expression, or even silence. While each of the principals reported sending some sort of weekly communication to the teachers, only Beth described the ways she communicates to both teachers and the community. Her weekly newsletter to the faculty includes a list of the week's events, some sort of instructional resource (i.e. classroom strategy, app, or resource that can be used in the classroom), and a list of celebratory statements that highlight the great things she saw teachers doing the week prior. She might also remind teachers about upcoming due dates, information about various initiatives, or professional development opportunities. She sends a similar communication to her parents and students each week, but not through email. Every Sunday, Beth's students receive a one minute, pre-recorded phone call highlighting the week ahead and celebrating the accomplishments of the week prior. Her message also includes any information parents will need to ensure they can adequately prepare their students for success at school. Both messages, though transmitted in very different ways, send the message that the administration is aware of the happenings in the building, that they care about progress, and that they have a positive attitude toward students and teachers. The message to the teachers however, establishes an expectation for acceptable teachers practices by highlighting positive instructional strategies, holds teachers accountable for being aware of daily events by putting them in writing, and helps communicate the importance of effective instruction

by providing weekly resources and strategies for improving practice. Beth's knowledge in the area of emotional intelligence coupled with her communication skills allows her to use these messages to manage the perceptions of her school community. She conveys a personal touch by choosing a specific method, tone, and demeanor suited to her audience and tailored to communicate her intended message. Amy and Carol also send out a weekly communication to their staff, but were less forthcoming with details.

Principals drew upon their knowledge bases of teaching and learning and emotional intelligence and engaged their verbal, nonverbal, written, and visual communication skills to convey or exchange information for the purposes of setting expectations, building relationships, and coaching improved practice. Setting expectations includes, establishing the professional responsibilities of staff members, ensuring accountability, and managing stakeholder perceptions. Building relationships includes gathering information about colleagues, establishing trust, and facilitating support for various school and district initiatives. Coaching improved practice involves the careful deliberate communication of feedback that results in improved practice and preserves established relationships without compromising the expectations.

Communicating expectations. The most important reason principals cite for needing effective communication skills is setting expectations. In fact, the majority of the statements coded as communication in the final data set, were also coded as setting expectations. Principals describe setting expectations as any form of communication in which they share or model the criteria against which actions are judged. This category includes everything from establishing guidelines for the cleanliness of the building to how and when teachers communicate with community members and stakeholders about student progress. Successful principals understand

that their decisions, and how they choose to communicate said decisions, ultimately has an

impact on the culture and climate of their building.

During my interviews and observations with Amy, she described a number of ways she

communicated expectations in her building. She talked about the significance of communicating

her core values, of being consistent, and also modeling those expectations, or as she put it

"talking the talk and walking the walk". One example dealt with student discipline. She talked

about how prior administrators allowed students to collect in the main office, almost like a

holding tank for misbehaving students. Unfortunately, that practice led to more students getting

in trouble so as to avoid being in class, and wasting precious instructional time in the main

office. When she came to AES she wanted to send the message that school was important and

that being in class was important. She began establishing this expectation first, by talking to

teachers about the issue and communicating with them her intent. Later, when students were

sent to the office to for misbehaving in class, rather than sending them home or allowing them to

sit in the office, she issued consequences and actually sent the students back to class. Over time,

she conveyed the message that misbehaving in class would no longer result in a student vacation.

She said the most important things to remember about establishing expectations are to be

consistent, model what you expect, and to always follow through on your word.

Beth also talked about the need to set expectations by first communicating what and how

you want things done, and then by following up on those statements, and if necessary

documenting those who still do not comply. An example she gave dealt with lesson planning. It

is Beth's expectation that all teachers submit their lesson plans via Google Docs every Sunday,

no later than 8:00pm. If a teacher fails to turn those plans in on time, she will follow it up with a

conversation, and then an email reminder, and if necessary a notation in their evaluation.

Communicating to build relationships. Building relationships with their stakeholders enables principals to establish trust and facilitate buy-in for the shared mission and vision of the school. Each of the principals talked about the importance of understanding the core that drives and motivates their teachers, but also about being approachable and vulnerable. Amy knew many personal aspects of her teacher's lives, calling their husbands and children by name and also talking about her own personal life. Beth described the importance of building relationships to ensure teachers felt safe and understood her feedback as professional, not as a personal attack. Carol told me about the aspirations of one of her teachers, and described a variety of opportunities she was providing that teacher to identify and build her leadership capacity. She also talked about how she uses humor to diffuse difficult conversations, and small talk to begin conferences with angry parents. Each of the principals talked about the importance of knowing every child's name, their parent's names, and something about them, as they believe that one small piece of information is key to beginning a meaningful relationship with their students. They also agreed, that building relationships with their staff members is the first step to improving their practice through coaching.

Communicating to coach improved practice. While coaching is often considered an action or a job role, the principals describe it as the skill of giving effective feedback and facilitating growth. The principals describe this as the trifecta of their instructional leadership, emotional intelligence, and effective communication skills. Ninety percent of coaching, at least according to Beth and Carol, is asking questions. The remaining 10% is helping teachers reflect on their practice. Building authentic relationships with their staff enables them to give their teachers meaningful, effective feedback, without offending or criticizing. During my observations of Amy she demonstrated the value of this skill. She started the meetings with a

little small talk, described what she saw in the classroom, and then gave the teacher some

feedback on how they might improve the lesson moving forward. She even followed up with a

date and time that she would come back to observe the teacher implementing the

recommendations. During the CLT meeting, Beth asked the teachers questions that helped them

work through the data and determine what specific strategies they could use to improve the

achievement outcomes for their students. Carol described a similar process, of asking teachers to

describe a lesson and then following up with specific questions that promoted reflection and

thoughtful dialogue. Coaching improved practice is the principal's primary means of improving

student achievement outcomes.

Communication was noted by all three principals as the single most important skill set.

Amy noted communication as essential to building relationships and coaching improved practice.

She believes effective communication allows her to build trust among the faculty in a way that

also facilitates buy-in for initiatives and improves classroom practice. Beth uses communication

as a method of setting expectations and holding teachers accountable for the work that need to be

done in order to further enhance the instructional practice at BES. In that she includes giving

authentic feedback as a measure of her communication effectiveness. Finally, Carol agrees that

communication is her greatest skill and uses nonverbal and verbal communication as a method

for ensuring the teachers are able to work within the confines of the system. She communicates

a sense of shared compassion and responsibility for success through her actions, body language,

and humor. The interconnectedness of these concepts makes it difficult to completely separate

one from the other. For example, a principal who is inept at communicating expectations is

unlikely to succeed at building genuine relationships with their stakeholders. Similarly, an

inability to build authentic relationships would undoubtedly hinder their ability to coach teachers

toward improved practice, resulting in a challenge to their leadership capabilities. However, that

is not to say that being able to communicate effectively, as an individual skill, ensures principal

success in coaching or building relationships, nor does the ability to build relationships or serve

as a coach improve overall communication. Rather, the principals described each of these areas

as being both singularly and mutually important.

       Dispositions. For the purposes of this study dispositions were defined as those

characteristics of mind in which principals interpret their knowledge and apply their skills.   It is

helpful to think of dispositions as the theoretical interpretive lens through which the principal

views their world. Their dispositions serve as their frame of reference for making decisions,

interpreting data, and applying their knowledge. Utilizing the data analysis procedures, three

themes emerged as having the greatest impact on principal success: passion for student success,

drive and commitment to continuous improvement, and having an approachable personality.

       Passion for student success. Successful principals are dedicated to their work. They are

passionate about helping children succeed and invested in the overall success of FCPS. Amy

described her desire to work with children and to help the community see their opportunities for

success. She also talked about her relentless resolve to find strategies that would result in

improved practice and increased student achievement. Beth talked about putting the "students

first" in every conversation or decision she made, but she also reiterated the importance of

celebrating FCPS as a whole institution. Carol agreed talking about how she deflected negative

comments about other district schools and worked to ensure people heard only positive remarks

about the school system she so dearly loved.

       Drive and commitment to continuous improvement. Successful principals are driven and

highly motivated to be successful. Each of the principals spoke of, and demonstrated, their work

ethic. Amy described herself as a humble team player that was always looking for ways to improve. She does not mind mopping floors, wiping noses, or working hard on any level to ensure her building is successful. Beth described her self as reflective and talked about the importance of receiving feedback from her superiors and doing everything she could to ensure they met and exceeded their district benchmarks. Carol described a tremendous work ethic and also discussed her determination to be a good leader. Though she admitted to struggling with the significant age gap between herself and other leaders she expressed her faith in her own abilities to continue growing and developing.

Approachable personality. Finally, successful principals are approachable. All three principals talked about being positive, enthusiastic, and available. Amy discussed the importance of being collaborative and easy to talk to. Beth reiterated Amy's thoughts, "you just have to know how to deal with people." Carol agreed, and stressed the importance of being both available and approachable. Though each principal had a very different personality, they all agreed on the importance of being sociable and accessible.

All three of the principals agreed that a strong work ethic, a commitment to children, and an amenable personality were the dispositions that had the greatest impact on their craft as successful leaders. They believe that having empathy and compassion is key to their ability to relate to their stakeholders through shared experiences and emotional understanding. They also agree that their passion and investment in the success of children, particularly children in Forrest City, are the motivating factors behind their tenacious spirit of success.

Principal Learning

The principals defined their learning by the opportunities, interactions, and experiences that shaped their knowledge, skills, or dispositions. The code experience was used as a generic

term to identify any statement or action that described what was learned, how the learning took

place, or specific strategies that resulted in meaningful learning. The principals described the

majority of their learning as occurring through collegial interactions and prior experience. In the

sections that follow I will describe the essence of principals learning, by first describing the

content of their craft knowledge and then discussing the methods through which that knowledge

was acquired.

       Craft knowledge. Principals describe their learning as a continual and gradual process,

in which all aspects of their craft are continually improved. Principals described specific areas of

focus in each domain of knowledge, teaching and learning and emotional intelligence, for each

purpose of communication, and for improving their skills as they relate to strategic application of

their dispositions. While the principals internalized their passion, work ethic, and approachable

personalities as innate characteristics aligned with their backgrounds and personal experiences,

they sought to improve their methods and strategies for inspiring others to achieve that same

level of passion and dedication to success and also sought feedback for improving their own

approachability. The relationship between the method and content of learning experiences are

depicted (Table 1) on the next page. Specific topics of interest related to teaching and learning

included: instructional content delivery and assessment strategies to include professional

development ideas for staff members, alternative and improved methods of communication to

include opportunities and strategies for setting expectations, managing accountability, improving

feedback and coaching skills, building relationships, and facilitating buy-in. Topics related to

emotional intelligence included: developing their own understanding of emotional sensitivity,

psychosocial awareness, and factors and strategies for motivating stakeholders to improve their

practice.

Table 1

Relationship Between Learning Methods and Content

How learning occurs ⬇	Specific learning strategies ⬇	Teaching & learning Knowledge			Emotional Intelligence Knowledge			Communication Skills			Dispositions		
What is learned →		Curriculum & Instruction	Leading Improved Practice	Management & Operations	Empathy	Psychosocial Awareness	Motivating Factors	Building Relationships	Setting Expectations	Coaching	Passion	Drive/Work Ethic	Approachability
Professional Experiences	**Teaching Experience**	X		X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
	Prior Leadership Roles	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Collegial Interactions	**Collaboration & Networking**	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
	Feedback	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X
	Observing Others	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Outliers & Inconsistencies	**District-led Professional Development**	X						X	X				
	Higher Education Coursework	X	X						X				
	Non-Educational Work Experience				X	X	X	X			X	X	X

Acquisition of craft knowledge. Data indicated that principal learning takes place in the workplace and occurs predominately as a result of their interactions with others. The learning was described as occurring in both formal and informal settings. Additionally, the principals reported that learning was most significant when the information is immediately applicable to their practice, and when reflection on their current practice and beliefs was embedded in the learning experience. The collegial interactions and prior work experiences that resulted in principal learning are described, followed by a discussion of the outliers and inconsistencies in their learning experiences. An overview of the specific learning strategies and anticipated learning outcomes are represented (Table 2) on the next page.

Collegial interactions. When describing collegial interactions that have shaped their practice, the principals identify three categories that have the greatest impact on their practice: collaboration and networking, feedback from peers and superiors, and observation of other school leaders. The principals describe opportunities to collaborate with their peers as the first, and most significant, of their collegial interactions. Each of the principals made reference to the network of various colleagues they have amassed over the years and how frequently they call upon those individuals to guide and influence their practice. Amy talked about calling the math coordinator to discuss strategies for improving math practice. Beth talked about calling other principals to generate ideas for solving particular instructional issues or to gather additional strategies and resources for improving teacher's instructional practice. Carol talked about calling upon those in her "network of special educators" to review terminology and conversational dynamics prior to an Individual Education Plan meeting.

Table 2

Anticipated Learning Outcomes for Specific Learning Experiences

	Activity/ Experience	Anticipated Learning Outcomes
Professional Experiences	**Teaching Experience**	• Understand & apply pedagogical knowledge • Awareness of school functions/teachers role • Refined understanding of child development markers • Cultivate collaboration skills • Increase ability to empathize with others • Develop understanding of factors that motivate students/collegial success
	Prior Formal & Informal Leadership Roles	• Develop & refine leadership skills • Understand management & operation procedures • Acquire knowledge of adult learning practices • Expand knowledge political structures/social dynamics • Reflect upon & improve practice • Introduce instructional leadership & adult coaching
Collegial Interactions	**Collaboration & Networking**	• Enhance knowledge of effective curriculum & instructional practices • Strategize to solve problems of practice & brainstorm ideas to improve school functionality, facilitate growth, & enhance school-community relations • Assess and reflect upon individual practice • Use of scenarios/role play activities to improve coaching skills • Deepen understanding of social dynamics & impact of purposeful actions.
	Feedback	• Build/establish mentor relationships • Facilitate conflict resolution/reflection • Provide valid/appropriate/useful performance evaluations • Gather & utilize stakeholder input • Establish appropriate expectations for employee performance • Improve/increase verbal & nonverbal communication skills • Refine leadership practice and skill
	Observing Others	• Increase ability to facilitate dialogue & critical conversations • Improve approachability & psychosocial awareness • Understand both what to do & what not to do in practice • Encourage self-reflection through structured & unstructured peer observations
Outliers & Inconsistencies	**District-led Professional Development**	• Develop knowledge/skills related to leading teaching & learning • Facilitate dialogue and reflection around problems of practice • Establish/maintain performance expectations • Increase collaboration and build collegial relationships

	Higher Education Coursework	• Establish collegial networks
		• Develop foundational knowledge and understanding of:
		  • School law
		  • Finance
		  • Human Resource Management
		  • Organizational & Instructional Leadership
		  • Leadership Theory
		  • Social Justice Practice
		  • Program Planning, Development, & Assessment

Non-educational work experience is not included on this chart because school districts are unable to provide/facilitate this experience as a strategy for increasing principal learning.

In addition to those informal conversations, Beth talked about the principal CLT meetings, as having a significant impact on her practice. She described how the principals spent time together each month discussing their practice, their strengths and weaknesses, and reflecting on how they could improve as leaders. She described these events as opportunities to hear what others are doing and how they are overcoming their individual challenges. In those meetings, she says scenarios play a big role in their learning. The district leadership team facilitates the meetings and will often provide the principals fake scenarios based on the real-world practice of being a building leader, and give the principals an opportunity to dissect the events and discuss how they would go about addressing the issues or promoting the positives. She says these are extremely helpful and adds that this practice is among her favorite ways to learn and improve. The principals all mentioned these collaborative conversations, and agreed that it is time well spent, as it adds to their expertise as educational leaders and provides them genuine opportunities to learn from the experience of others.

The second collegial interaction that principals identified as significant to their learning is the feedback they receive from mentors and district leaders. Amy spoke frequently of her mentor, describing the number of times he gave her feedback that forced her to reflect on her actions and adjust her practice. She recounted an instance in which her mentor told her she was unapproachable. She described the intense emotional response that his feedback invoked, but acknowledged that his feedback resulted in her reflecting on her ability to relate to others taking actions to build more authentic relationships with her peers. Beth discussed the benefits she derived from having leaders that regularly assess her practice and give her authentic feedback upon which she can act. For example, one of her supervisors advised her to model efficiency by sending out her weekly communication via email as opposed to continuing to print the document

and distribute via teachers mailboxes. She also talked about district leaders assessing the

feedback she provided teachers on their evaluations and giving her specific advice on how to

improve the content of those evaluations. She said this practice has resulted in her giving better

feedback to her teachers, and ultimately helped her improve instruction at BES.

Observing other leaders is the third and final collegial interaction that principals

identified as having a significant impact on their practice. This practice is slightly different from

the concepts of calling upon a network of colleagues or receiving supervisory feedback, in that

observations are not always intentionally designed, the way one might imagine a shadowing

opportunity or instructional observation, rather they generally occur fluidly throughout the work

day. They are also different from networking and feedback opportunities because they do not

always result in a positive understanding or opinion of a colleague. In fact, every principal could

recall having observed a peer and deriving a positive benefit, just as easily as they could recall an

observation that resulted in a negative benefit. Amy described her observations of her

colleagues, and being able to ascertain from their peer interactions, how she could adjust her

behavior to ensure a more positive reception of her personality. Beth described both positive and

negative scenarios stating,

> When I began my administrative track, I reflected on each of my principals differently.
>
> How they interacted, how they were about instruction. They might not have always gone
>
> in for the kill, but they were professional in their dress and in their demeanor. I think that
>
> they were all great role models. I learned from each one of them. There were some
>
> things they did of course that I would never do, but there are also some things they did,
>
> that I wish I could do.

When deciding how to frame a critical conversation, Carol described her observation of another

principal, and decided how she would frame her conversation differently. So while she felt the principal's approach was ineffective, the observation allowed her to tailor a better approach to a similar conversation. What makes these observations so powerful as collegial interactions is not the sharing of opinions, or even the learning of a particular strategy, but rather the internal reflective dialogue that occurs as result.

   Prior professional experiences. In addition to their learning through collegial interactions, principals attribute their learning and preparation for the position as the culmination of both their teaching and leadership experiences. They describe much of their knowledge as not what they learned in the classes designed to prepare them for professional practice as educators, but as a result of their successes and failures along the way and the feelings created as a result of previous encounters. Each of the principals felt very strongly that their knowledge of teaching and learning was largely attributed to their experience as a classroom teacher. Beth made many references to tools and strategies she believed to be effective in the classroom because she had used them and experienced a great deal of success. Carol made similar statements about how her teaching practice laid the foundation for both her instructional leadership knowledge and emotional intelligence.

   In education, failure is often the catapult for new learning, even referred to as a first attempt in learning. Teachers go through painstaking efforts to ensure students understand their mistakes and are equipped with the skills to adjust their practice and overcome their challenges. Amy described the same process as a means for improving her leadership as well as the performance of her school. She talked about evaluating the steps she and her team take toward improvement, measuring their progress, making decisions about what is or is not going well, and adjusting her practice to meet the need. Beth and Carol similarly described their learning to

communicate effectively as a "trial by fire" process, during which they made an abundance of

mistakes and were forced to learn from them. This responsive learning process is essential to

their ongoing growth and the development of their leadership skills.

Outliers and inconsistencies. Though the previously mentioned learning experiences

represent the largest majority of principal learning experiences, a few inconsistencies among the

participants remained. First, there are mixed feelings on district led professional development.

Amy made almost no mention of district professional development, and painted herself as a self-

motivated learner who sought new material on her own. Carol mentioned district professional

development but never articulated how the professional development actually impacted her

practice. Beth on the other hand, raved about district professional development opportunities

and could easily articulate the impact those experiences had on her daily practice.

A second inconsistency is the development of leadership practice. Each principal

articulated their learning as being related to the specific instances mentioned earlier in this

section, but Amy also attributed her learning to a prior professional experience outside the field

of education. Amy spent several years working in the field of psychology. She attributed her

knowledge and understanding of emotional intelligence and heightened emotional sensitivity to

that specific experience and continues to draw from that knowledge to build authentic

relationships with her stakeholders.

Interestingly, enough the idea of learning through post-secondary coursework was

mentioned by all three principals, but not a single person credited the content of their courses as

having had an impact on their ability to practice their craft. Rather, they attributed the network of

colleagues that developed during their graduate work and the practical field experience of their

professors as having the greatest impact on their learning and preparation for the position of

principal. Amy discussed all four of her degrees, but credited her learning as the result of the

relationships with her mentors. Beth said, "I think we talked about that in my masters program"

but immediately after described the learning in that class as the result of scenario based

discussions. Carol specifically indicated that the value she found in her coursework was the

result of the experience her practitioner professors shared in class. The coursework, while

important, seemed to be the means that allowed them to meet the pre-established conditions of

holding an administrative position.

Summary of Findings

As detailed in the within and cross case analysis, perquisite knowledge for success for

these principals includes having a high level of knowledge related to teaching and learning,

specifically in the areas of curriculum and instruction, leading improved practice, and school

operations. They also indicate that their success is contingent on their above average emotional

intelligence with a particular emphasis on emotional sensitivity, psychosocial awareness, and

factors that motivate success. The principals indicated that effective verbal and nonverbal

communication skills, particularly as it relates to setting expectations, building relationships, and

coaching improved practice are essential to their success. Dispositions related to successful

principal practice include a passion for student success, a strong work ethic and drive for

continuous growth, and an approachable personality. The exacting of successful principal craft

is the strategic integration of the above-mentioned knowledge, skills, and dispositions in a

manner that leads to improved achievement outcomes for students.

Principals described their learning as a continuous process of observation and reflection

that is influenced by their collegial interactions and ongoing work experience fueled by a

constant desire to excel. The strategies and situations that lead to long-term meaningful learning

and had the greatest impact on principal practice included opportunities to collaborate with peers, specifically in ways that encouraged reflection, invoked an emotional response, resulted in the receipt of specific and actionable feedback, and included well-developed prior experiences. In chapter five I discuss the contributions and implications of this knowledge and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions most associated with the successful craft of public school principals and to identify how those principals came to learn their craft. In Chapter Four, I presented two knowledge bases, one key skill set, and three dispositions that emerged as having the most significant impact on the successful implementation of principal craft. My findings also indicated that principal learning is an ongoing reflective process, through which successful principals are constantly creating, dissecting, and reconstructing knowledge founded on their social interactions and prior work experiences. In this chapter, I discuss my interpretation of the findings regarding the craft of successful principals and their learning for the position, followed by a brief conclusion of the study results. The chapter ends with an examination of the implications of these findings relative to principal learning and practice, as well as recommendations for additional research. Throughout each section I address the theoretical concepts and their alignment with my study.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this exploratory study have been interpreted through the lens of social constructivism and predicated on the theoretical concepts of adult learning theory. The study began with an examination of the literature related to principal learning and successful principal craft within the context of the public school environment. Three study participants, from a single school district, were selected using the criteria presented in the literature from ISSPP (Gurr, 2015). Principal craft was framed by the four core practices of setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program (Garza et al., 2014; Gurr, 2014, 2015; Jacobson, 2011; Klar & Brewer, 2013, 2014; Louis et al., 2010). The

literature further indicated that while the responsibility for principal learning is largely relegated

to higher education institutions (Møller, 2012; Crum et al., 2009), there is substantial evidence to

indicate that much of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that professionals consider relevant

to their practice is actually learned in the workplace (Eraut, 2011). Findings from this study are

congruent with the knowledge, skills and dispositions outlined in the literature. The results align

with the current literature surrounding principal learning, indicating a need to reassess our

current approach to pre and post-service principal leadership training.

Successful principal craft. The results of this study supported the key findings in the

literature illustrating successful principal craft includes an understanding of teaching and

learning (Crum et al., 2009; Leithwood et al., 2006; Louis et al., 2010; Møller, 2012; Moos &

Johansson, 2009) and knowledge of human social behavior (Crow et al., 2016; Drysdale, 2011;

Garza et al., 2014; Leithwood, 2005; Møller, 2012). Effective communication skills (Crum et

al., 2009; Jacobson et al., 2005; Louis et al., 2010; Moos & Johansson, 2009) were similarly

identified, in the findings of this study and the literature, as an essential tool of principal craft.

The literature indicates there is more to be learned regarding the dispositions that have the

greatest impact on principal success (Crow et al., 2016; Drysdale, 2011; Garza et al., 2014;

Leithwood, 2005; Møller, 2012) the findings indicate congruence with this finding and agree that

at bare minimum principals must demonstrate a strong work ethic and passion for improving

education for all students.

As it relates to the four core practices of successful principals, the findings suggested that

these principals knowledge of teaching and learning has provided them the 'who' and 'what' of

their craft. They were able to discern the appropriate direction, goals, and expectations for

performance, based on their understanding of effective teaching and learning. They also

depended on that knowledge to help them understand and make decisions about professional

development topics and practices relevant to their schools success. Knowledge of teaching and

learning provided principals an understanding of the organizational structures, such as resources,

schedules, and community influences (i.e. parental support), which were essential to school

improvement and could be manipulated to improve organizational efficacy. Finally their

knowledge of teaching and learning provides them the foundation required to interpret student

achievement results, assess instructional practice, and provide support for district initiatives.

  The findings of this study demonstrated how an understanding of social behaviors and

emotions provided principals the 'when' and 'how' of their craft. Each of the four core practices

of successful school leaders required an understanding of the emotions that drive individual

behavior and the motivating factors that encouraged and facilitated group agreement.

Knowledge in this area was essential to building collective trust, inspiring dedication to

organizational goals, effectively coaching improved practice, harnessing community resources

and support, and interpreting and navigating the political landscape. Knowledge of emotional

intelligence enabled the principals to empathize with others, understand and interpret behaviors,

be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and conceptualize the driving ideologies within

the political context of the school environment. To a large degree, these findings suggest that

managing and creating a positive learning community requires knowledge of both teaching and

learning, and an understanding of emotional intelligence.

  The role of the school principal is naturally social. On a daily basis, school principals are

required to engage with a variety of stakeholders. The results of this study indicated agreement

with current literature, that effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills are a vital tool

for the success of school leaders (Moos & Johansson, 2009). The findings suggested that

principals should be able to communicate a common vision for the school, but they must also

have the ability to manage their tone and disposition to appropriately match the situation

(Jacobson et al., 2005; Klar & Brewer, 2013; Møller, 2012; Moos & Johansson, 2009).

Communication skills, as described by the study findings, indicated that being able to speak and

write effectively are important, but equally so was an ability to behave in a manner that ensureed

written and oral communication aligned with the intended message (Moos & Johansson, 2009).

Finally, the study findings indicated that knowing when, what, how, and to whom

communications should be directed is fundamental to a leaders success.

Despite the claims that school leader success is in large part attributed to personal factors

(Drysdale, 2011; Jacobson et al., 2005) the literature provided scant evidence regarding what

specific dispositions are most essential for principal success. The findings of this study indicated

a variety of dispositions that contributed to principal success, but also pointed to three specific

areas, passion, work ethic, and approachability, which might serve as a starting point for

additional research. First, the data indicated that all three principals recognized their passion for

educating all students as a disposition key to their success. Second, having a strong work ethic

geared toward continuous improvement was also common among the three principals. Third, the

principals all agreed that it was necessary to present an approachable disposition that facilitated

comfortable conversations. Other dispositions, being reflective and affable, presented overlap

between principal participants, but only passion, work ethic, and approachability were present

consistently. Additional research in this area is required.

Learning for success. The majority of learning experiences presented in this study were

informal opportunities, which occurred as a result of peer interaction in the workplace. The

examples principals provided included opportunities to observe peers and mentors leading

difficult conversations, the receipt of collegial feedback related to their individual practice, and

opportunities to discuss their approach to leading the organization with other school leaders.

Informal learning opportunities shaped principals understanding and practices such as, framing

conversations, strategic leadership behaviors, building relationships, and engaging stakeholders.

Though minimally recognized, district-led professional development was identified as a formal

learning experience that influenced principal craft. The primary content of formal learning

experiences included specific instructional strategies, evaluating instructional practice, and

implementing district initiatives. Formal and informal learning experiences are discussed in the

sections that follow.

Findings from this study aligned with the work of Eruat (2011), indicating that the large

majority of professional learning occurs informally in the workplace. The results of the data

analysis demonstrated that the majority of what principals deemed a learning experience

occurred as a result of informal learning opportunities and on-the-job training. For example,

principal's knowledge of curriculum and instruction was predominately the result of their prior

work experiences as classroom teachers. Their understanding of how to give effective feedback

and evaluate instructional practice was shaped by their experience as a teacher, by observing

other leaders and mentors, and through discussion and feedback from peers and supervisors.

Though there was little emphasis placed on their knowledge of school operations, they indicated

that it was most important that they be able to recognize operational deficiencies and contact the

correct person to rectify the situation. This networking, learning from peers, also surfaced as

their primary strategy for addressing topics, for which they felt inadequately prepared to address,

or finding resolution to questions they could not answer. Their understanding of who to call was

largely the result of having made substantial connections throughout their experience in the

district. Knowledge of social behavior and emotional sensitivity was also described as a result of

their informal learning. Principals were able to articulate the emotions and experiences that had

shaped their practice as a result of the feedback they have been given by mentors and peers.

Their ability to communicate was honed over time through trial and error, and as a result of

watching and assessing other leaders success in the same area. The dispositions they associated

with their success were largely attributed to their upbringing and the fact that they had a personal

investment in the system as lifelong residents of Forrest City and employees of FCPS.

District led professional development and graduate coursework were identified as formal

learning experiences that influenced their craft. The principals noted that the most effective

learning in the formal learning environments occurred when the information was logically

presented and explicitly laid out, included practitioner based scenarios, and was immediately

useful. This was reported as occurring more frequently in district led professional development

than in graduate coursework. It was also noted that formal learning environments that failed to

engage principals in learning that was instantly applicable to practice were frustrating, but

reflecting on those experiences, despite their faults, helped them understand how to better lead

effective professional development for their staff. One final, significant finding regarding formal

learning opportunities, was that principals felt their coursework was most valuable when taught

by practitioner professors, who could share their experiences and make connections between the

material and the real-world work of school leaders. This point again echoes the value placed on

socially constructed adult learning.

The findings of this study related to principal learning are well situated within the

theoretical constructs of socially constructed adult learning. The formal and informal learning

experiences touted by principals as responsible for the majority of their meaningful learning

represented the social nature through which knowledge was unceasingly fabricated as a result of

the ongoing reciprocal experience-learning relationship (Fenwick, 2003; Jarvis, 2006; Merriam

et al., 2007; Tennant & Pogoson, 1995; Wenger, 2000). Additionally, meaningful learning was

reported when the experiences included information that was both relevant and instantly useful

to their daily practice, which is directly correlated with the principles of adult learning theory

(Knowles et al., 1998; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Merriam et al., 2007).

Conclusions

Principal's working knowledge of teaching and learning and understanding of human

social behavior and emotions were the two knowledge bases most associated with principal

success. Communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal, were the essential tools for carrying

out their practice. A passion for helping children succeed, a strong work ethic, and an

approachable personality were the dispositions that had the greatest impact on their success. For

these practitioners, learning their craft was primarily the result of socially constructed, job-

embedded training. Meaningful learning occurred when an interaction or experience initiated or

set the stage for reflective practice by invoking an emotional response from the practitioner.

Each of these statements aligns with current literature and indicates the significant contribution

experiential and workplace learning can make to improve principal leadership practice through

training.

Implications for Principal Learning and Practice

Though qualitative research is not generalizable to larger audiences (Yin, 2013), and the

findings of this multiple-case study represent only a small number of principal perspectives in a

single school district, there are several inferences that can be drawn from the study results. In

this section, the implications related to principal learning and the successful implementation of

principal craft are discussed. I first discuss the implications of this study as it relates to the

experience-learning relationship depicted by socially constructed adult learning. Second, I

discuss the implications of this study related to principal preparation for the successful

implementation of principal craft. A discussion of the significant impact of peer-networking on

principal learning is presented last.

       Socially constructed adult learning. The study's findings emphasized the relationship

between principal learning and adult learning theory and highlighted the value of examining

principal training models through the lens of socially constructed adult learning. First, the

findings highlight the significance of the experience-learning relationship as it relates to

experiential learning, reflective practice, situated cognition, and communities of practice.

Second, the study lends voice to the value of workplace learning and challenges leaders of

principal training programs to reexamine the methods and processes through which principals are

trained to capitalize on the valuable learning that takes place in the field.

       Experience-learning relationship. The principals described their learning through

experience in a manner that aligns with Tennant and Pogson's (1995) theory of experiential

learning, whereby prior, current, and new experiences are all analyzed in the process of learning.

Lending voice to Fenwick (2003) who indicated that experiential learning is largely influenced

by how individuals conceptualize their experiences, the principals each described a variety of

experiences that shaped their learning (i.e., classroom teaching, prior leadership roles, etc.) and

each provided a different perspective on the value of those experiences, articulating in different

ways, the learning that took place as a result of each position they held. The study also provides

additional support to the significance of adult learning through reflective practice (Merriam et

al., 2007; Merriam & Bierema, 2014), which stresses the pensive internalizing of various

experiences leading to changed behavior. The sheer volume of principal's references to learning

from mentor-leaders, underscores the magnitude of situated cognition (Merriam & Bierema,

2014) and its relationship to experiential adult learning. Furthermore, the learning experiences

related to peer networking are perfect examples of Wenger's (2000) communities of practice.

By default, the school functions as a 'community of practice,' facilitating the fluid exchange of

information and continuous learning around a central concept, (i.e., student achievement), in

which engagement, alignment, and imagination (Wenger, 2000) are all tidal forces incessantly

shaping the thoughts and perceptions of its stakeholders.

Workplace learning. The study findings draw attention to the impact of workplace

learning on the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Eraut (2011)

posits that 70-90 percent of all professional learning happens during on-the-job training. The

evidence presented in each of these case studies, particularly the lack of reference to learning

through formalized coursework and the weight given to hands-on leadership training, further

substantiate Eraut's (2011) claims. Given the magnitude of this information, it would be prudent

of those responsible for principal training to plan their formal learning opportunities with an

adult-learning centered approach. To ensure the meritorious implementation of professional

development programs in schools, districts and higher education institutions might also benefit

from providing school-level leaders hands-on training related to adult learning theory.

Peer-networking. The study highlighted the significance of peer-to-peer networking on

the shaping of successful principal craft. The findings of this study aligned with the literature,

which establishes mentor relationships and increased opportunities for peer networking and the

exchange of ideas, could benefit students through improved leadership practice (Bush, 2009;

Davis et al., 2005; Davis & Leon, 2011; Hallinger & Lu, 2013; Mitgange, 2012; Yilmaki &

Jacobson, 2012). Taking these findings into consideration, school districts might consider

increasing opportunities to connect aspiring and novice leaders with veteran leaders, particularly

in the early stages of career development (Mitgang, 2012). Districts might also benefit from

providing ample opportunities to connect principals at all levels and career stages, both within

and outside their district, to increase dialogue and facilitate the extension of peer-networks

(Fenwick & Pierce, 2002; Larsen & Rieckhoff, 2014; Mitgang, 2012; Møller, 2012). Finally,

the principals in the study described how they used the practice of others as a foundation for

reflecting on their own practice. Similarly, current practitioners could use the information

contained in this study as a basis for reflecting on their leadership craft, regardless of their level

of agreement with the study findings.

  Principal preparation. While facets of teaching and learning were brought up repeatedly

by each principal, the concept of managing social dynamics, that is knowing the people you

serve and how their emotions, thoughts, and actions impact their practice, came up more

frequently. The public school principals in this study benefited equally from their knowledge of

teaching and learning and their understanding of managing of social capital. The outcomes of

this study overwhelmingly support the call for principal preparation programs to emphasize the

value of human emotions throughout the coursework, specifically focusing on social behaviors

(Garza et al., 2014), self-reflection and management (Drysdale, 2011), and emotional sensitivity

(Crow et al., 2016; Leithwood, 2005; Møller, 2012).

Implications for Research

  Several considerations for future research emerged as a result of this study. First, despite

the wide variety of dispositions among individuals, the results of this study indicate that more

research is necessary to discover which dispositions are most essential to successful principal

craft. This discovery would provide principal preparation programs a starting point for

developing at least a minimal set of values, beliefs, and traits that benefit school leaders and their

respective school communities.

Second, I noted that absent from the discussions was any significant mention of finance,

school law, or human resource practices. Despite semester-long courses being dedicated to each

of these disciplines in preparation programs, principals seemed only interested in having a basic

technical knowledge in these areas.   When considered in conjunction with the emphasis on

hands-on training and practical experience, additional research regarding the required

coursework and its respective content, and approaches to principal training, could be beneficial.

Additional research may indicate that universities should consider condensing courses such as

finance, human resources, and school law into a single management course, and expanding

offerings on psychology, sociology, human development, and adult learning. Research may

indicate that coursework should also involve longer, more targeted internship experiences.

Furthermore, the evidence surrounding the value of peer networking and mentor relationships

indicates that universities would benefit from encouraging more successful practitioners to take

on the role of scholarship and leading principal training programs. Research in this area could

help identify any overlaps in the masters and post-masters coursework to reduce redundancy and

enhance scholars ability to communicate their thoughts during the processes of learning and

leading.

Finally, more research is required to determine how principal preparation programs can

move toward the inclusion of training modules emphasizing the management of social capital as

a construct of organizational leadership. The principal's knowledge of the organizational

structure comprises their understanding of the political networks, community relationships, and

methodical practices that lead to professional success. This study highlighted the significance of

emotional intelligence, but lacked the data to provide clarity on the points of intersection

between that knowledge base and the application of strategic leadership within the school

context. Further research in this area may highlight and give voice to an incremental approach

and focus on the process of leading organizational change.

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APPENDIX A

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP POLICY STANDARDS: ISLLC 2008
as adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA)

Standard 1: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders*

Functions:
A. Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission.
B. Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning
C. Create and implement plans to achieve goals
D. Promote continuous and sustainable improvement
E. Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans

Standard 2: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.*

Functions:
A. Nurture and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations
B. Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program
C. Create a personalized and motivating learning environment for students
D. Supervise instruction
E. Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress.
F. Develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff
G. Maximize time spent on quality instruction
H. Promote the use of the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning
I. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the instructional program

Standard 3: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.*

Functions
A. Monitor and evaluate the management and operational systems
B. Obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources
C. Promote and protect the welfare and safety of students and staff
D. Develop the capacity for distributed leadership
E. Ensure teacher and organizational time is focused to support quality instruction and student learning

Standard 4: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.*

Functions
 A. Collect and analyze data and information pertinent to the educational environment
 B. Promote understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources
 C. Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers
 D. Build and sustain productive relationships with community partners

Standard 5: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.*

Functions
 A. Ensure a system of accountability for every student's academic and social success
 B. Model principles of self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior
 C. Safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity
 D. Consider and evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision-making
 E. Promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling

Standard 6: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.*

Functions
 A. Advocate for children, families, and caregivers
 B. Act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning
 C. Assess, analyze, and anticipate emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study on the factors that most influence principal craft. The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how successful principals learn their craft and explore those factors that have the greatest influence on their leadership practices. The findings will contribute to the larger body of knowledge surrounding principal practice and professional learning. I believe information from this study will also help foster a better understanding of what it is principals do, on the ground level that contributes to the success of their students. This study is intended to be exploratory in nature. There are no right or wrong answers.

Please keep in mind that your participation is entirely voluntary. If for any reason, or at any time, you wish to discontinue, discussions will be stopped immediately and all information pertaining to your interview will be destroyed and withheld from the report findings. Following the completion of todays interview, you will be provided with a written transcript. I ask that you review this transcript to ensure it accurately reflects your perceptions. After the study has been completed you will be provided with a copy of my final report. Additionally, your identity will be kept completely confidential, known only to me. If after viewing the transcript or report you wish to revoke your participation, you may do so at any time.

Do you have any questions before we proceed?

This interview will focus on your experience as a successful public school principal, how you came to learn your craft and the factors that have had the greatest influence on your leadership practice. At the end of the interview I will allow you an opportunity to ask questions or share any additional information you believe to be relevant to this study.

About Participant:

1. Tell me a bit about yourself, your educational background, accomplishments, teaching and leadership experiences.

2. How do you define or determine your success as a school leader? *(Possible follow-up: What do you do when you are not successful? How do you approach failure?)*

Leadership Style:

3. Talk to me about how you approach leadership in it's various aspects? Like dealing with teachers, instruction, parents, students, community members, etc.

4. Given how you approach leadership, what factors, people, or experiences have had the greatest influence on your development of these approaches?

5. When you think about yourself as a school leader, which characteristics or dispositions do you believe contribute most to your success? *(Possible follow-ups: How do you think that influences your leadership or how your staff perceives you? Why do you think (characteristic) is significant to your success? Was that an inherent disposition or do you believe you learned it along the way? What people, factors, or experiences contributed to your learning/developing that characteristic?)*

Craft:

6. As you reflect on your success as a principal, what specific areas of knowledge do you deem essential to your success? *(Follow-up: Why do you believe it's necessary for school leaders to be knowledgeable about _____?)*

7. How did you learn (specific knowledge base)? (*Possible follow- up: Can you tell me more about that experience? What was that learning like? Can you describe the way this knowledge was "taught" to you?)*

8. What about skills? Are there any specific skills you perceive as being essential to your success?

9. How did you come to learn those skills? *(Possible follow-up: Can you describe the learning process? Tell me more about that experience? Why do you think you were able to master that/those skill(s)? What do you think contributed to your overall success in the learning process?)*

Learning:

10. If you had to choose one or two contributing factors, who or what would you say has had the greatest influence on your craft as a school leader? *(Possible follow-up: Why do think (insert contributing factor) has been so influential? What about your experience has really made the biggest difference for you? What do you believe sets you apart from other principals who may or may not be as successful?)*

11. When you think about yourself as a learner, what types of experiences are most beneficial for your continued growth? *(Possible follow-up: Can you describe that experience for me? What is it about that type of experience that makes it better than others?)*

12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you so much for taking time to speak with me. Over the next few days I will transcribe this interview. I will email you the full transcript as soon as I have finished. Please review it for accuracy, and do not hesitate to let me know if there are any discrepancies or concerns.

Thank you again for your time and input!

APPENDIX C

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Participant (pseudonym):   Date/Time: Observation location:

Activity to be observed:

Purpose of activity:

Reason for selection:

Observation Notes:

Scheduled Post-Observation Interview

Date: Time: Location:

APPENDIX D

POST-OBSERVATION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Please take a moment to reflect on the (event) observed on (date). Are there any significant aspects of this event that come to mind?

2. Probing questions might include:
   a. Describe the knowledge bases required for success during (event).
   b. How did you come to learn those knowledge bases?
   c. Are there any specific skills that were essential to your success during (event)?
   d. How did you come to learn those skills?
   e. Describe your disposition/attitude/mindset during (event).
   f. What impact, if any, do you perceive your (disposition/attitude/mindset) had on the success of (event)?
   g. How do you think you learned that (behavior)?

Discussion Notes:

Thank you so much for taking time to speak with me. Over the next few days I will transcribe our conversation. I will email you the full transcript as soon as I have finished. Please review it for accuracy, and do not hesitate to let me know if there are any discrepancies or concerns. Thank you again for your time and input!

Additional observation requested: __Yes __No

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: Practitioner's perspectives: Factors that have the greatest influence on the craft of successful public school principals.

INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this form is to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research. The form will also be used to record the consent of those who say YES. The title of this study is Practitioner's perspectives: Factors that have the greatest influence on the craft of successful public school principals. The research study will be conducted at Old Dominion University.

RESEARCHERS
Responsible Principal Investigator:
Jay P. Scribner, Ph.D.
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Department of Educational Foundations & Leadership
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DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY
The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how successful principals learn and implement their craft and explore those factors that have the greatest influence on their leadership practices. The findings will contribute to the larger body of knowledge surrounding principal practice, evaluation and professional learning. Information from this study will also help foster a better understanding of what it is principals do, on the ground level that contributes to the success of their students.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research of your experiences within the education setting. The research questions will focus specifically on your perceptions of principal behaviors and the factors that have impacted your practice, including your professional training, evaluation, and professional development experiences. You will be asked to evaluate, and describe, your experiences as a school principal and elaborate upon your actions and how you believe your actions influence student achievement. This research study will be

conducted through individual interviews of principals currently in practice. If you say YES, then your participation will last for approximately 60 minutes in a location mutually agreed upon by you and the researcher.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA
To be included in this study, you must currently hold a position as a principal in a public school system within Virginia, and be in good standing with your current division. Additionally, all participants must have served at least 3 consecutive years in their current role in the same division and school and be employed at a school that is designated "fully accredited" by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE).

RISKS AND BENEFITS
RISKS: If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of feelings of discomfort related to disclosing personal information. The researchers have tried to reduce these risks through the use of volunteer participants. Additionally, participants are provided an option to withdraw from the study at anytime. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS: The main benefit to you for participating in this study is for self-growth and reflection that can come from disclosing and processing your thoughts and feelings regarding leadership behaviors. Others may benefit from the continued research on principal leadership as it relates to student achievement and leadership development. Participants will be provided a copy and summary of the final manuscript.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS
The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study. There is no cost for participating in the study.

NEW INFORMATION
If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably affect your decision to participate, they will provide it to you immediately. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The researchers (Principal Investigator and co-investigator) will take all reasonable measures to keep private information, such as recordings and interview transcripts, confidential. Only the researchers listed above will have access to your data. The researchers will remove any identifiers of the data, destroy all tapes and store information in a locked filing cabinet prior to its processing. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researchers will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE
It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might

otherwise be entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY
If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. Jay P. Scribner, the responsible principal investigator, at 757-683-5163, Dr. George Maihafer the current IRB chair at 757-683-4520 at Old Dominion University, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT
By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them or you can contact Dr. Jay P. Scribner directly at 757-683-5163.

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. George Maihafer, the current IRB chair, at 757-683-4520, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature	**Date**
Researcher's Printed Name & Signature	**Date**

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT
I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

VITA

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Marsha Caudill Cale is public school principal in southeastern Virginia, and Doctoral candidate at Old Dominion University. Her research interests include: leading school improvement, principal preparation and training, social justice practices, and principal practitioners as change agents in educational communities of practice.

Education

Doctor of Philosophy, Education Leadership, May 2017
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia
Dissertation Focus: Principal learning and craft implementation

Education Specialist, Education Leadership, December 2014
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia
Phi Kappa Phi Honor Graduate
Certification: Division Superintendent Licensure

Master of Education, Supervision and Leadership, August 2010
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia
Administrative Certification: K-12 Administration

Bachelor of Science, Liberal Studies, December 2001
Longwood University, Farmville, Virginia
Teacher Certification: Grades PreK-8, Middle Grades Math, Science, and Social Studies

Publications

Cale, M., Delpino, C. & Myran, S. (2015). Instructional Leadership for Special Education

in Small to Mid-Size Urban School Districts. *Educational Administration*, 22, 155–172.