2011

Secondary Principals at the Center of School Reform: Portraits of Leadership

Daniel James Evans

University of South Florida, danandjudy@tampabay.rr.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the American Studies Commons, Educational Administration and Supervision Commons, and the Other Education Commons

Scholar Commons Citation

Evans, Daniel James, "Secondary Principals at the Center of School Reform: Portraits of Leadership" (2011). Graduate Theses and Dissertations.
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/3095

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
Secondary Principals at the Center of School Reform:

Portraits of Leadership

by

Daniel J. Evans

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
College of Education
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Valerie J. Janesick, Ph.D.
Sherman Dorn, Ph.D.
Zorka Karanxha, Ed.D.
William Young, Ed.D.

Date of Approval:
February 23, 2011

Keywords: Distributed Leadership, Site-Based Management, Transformational Leadership, Phenomenological

Copyright © 2011, Daniel J. Evans
Acknowledgements

I would like to take this time to recognize the care, support and guidance provided to me by the members of my doctoral committee and especially the invaluable contributions of my committee chair: Dr. Valerie Janesick. Without her constant prodding and vigilance to the integrity of this document I would never have completed this study in the time and manner in which it was constructed. Her attention to detail and appreciation for good scholarship contributed much to this paper and to my personal growth. For that I am grateful.

I would also like to pay tribute to the four principals who boldly shared their stories and work lives with me. I endeavored to present their cases in fairness to them and in honor of their daily sacrifice. In this way, I want to acknowledge the work of all principals. For all principals in all schools I am grateful.

Finally, I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to my family and friends for their unaltered belief in me and in the uncertain certainty that this dissertation would someday – somehow – be completed. To the fellow members of my doctoral cohort, I say thank you for your courage of convictions and for the odyssey of intellectualism and emotionality that we shared. To my wife Judy and son Connor, I thank you for giving me time and for your unwavering understanding of my purpose. You continually believed in me even when I stopped believing in myself. Everybody’s story needs a hero and you two are the heroes of my life epic.
# Table of Contents

List of Tables iv

List of Figures v

Abstract vi

Chapter One: Introduction 1
  Statement of the Problem 3
  Purpose of the Study 5
  Importance of the Study 5
  Exploratory Questions 6
  Definitions 6
  Literature Review 8
  Research Design 10
  Theoretical Perspective 10
  Boundaries of the Study 13
  Conclusion 13

Chapter Two: Literature Review 15
  Introduction 15
  Research Summary 17
  Decision-Making Theory 26
  The Principal’s Role – A Review of Leadership Theory 27
  Decentralization and Site-Based Management 32
  Research Studies 35
  Teacher Participation / Influence / Empowerment 41
  Parent Participation / Influence / Empowerment 46
  Organizational Conditions for Quality School Reform 49
  The Struggle for Power and Control 54
  Realizations / Ponderings / Provocations 58
  Conclusion 61

Chapter Three: Methodology 63
  Introduction / Rationale 63
  Phenomenology: A Theoretical Framework 64
  Portraiture: A Technique 67
Principal Brightly -- Views on School Reform 143
Principal Brightly -- Views on School Culture / Decision-Making 145
Epilogue – Principal Brightly 149

Chapter Five: Research Findings 151
   Introduction 151
   Key Themes / Findings 153
      I-Focused Leadership 155
      We-Focused Leadership 158
      Servant-Focused Leadership 161
      Learning-Focused Leadership 164
   Implications of the Study 167
   Research Terms / Complexities and Criticisms 168
   Impact on Future Studies 170
   Response to the Current Literature 172
   Implications for Professional Practice 174
   Impact of the Study on the Researcher 175
   Conclusion 176

References 178

Appendices
   Appendix A: Interview Protocol 189
   Appendix B: Letter to Interviewees 190
   Appendix C: Consent Form for Interviewees 192
   Appendix D: Second Reviewer Form 194
   Appendix E: Member Check Form for Interviewees 195
   Appendix F: Sample Reflective Journal 196

About the Author

End Page
List of Tables

Table 1: Five Common Leadership Theories 30
Table 2: The Five Essential Elements of Portraiture 70
Table 3: Dissertation Timeline 84
Table 4: Participant Summary 92
Table 5: Data Findings for Mr. Ruddy 106
Table 6: Data Findings for Mr. Rust 120
Table 7: Data Findings for Mrs. Stone 135
Table 8: Data Findings for Mr. Brightly 150
Table 9: Data Findings / Four Key Tendencies 154
Table 10: Qualities of I-Focused Leaders 156
Table 11: Qualities of We-Focused Leaders 160
Table 12: Qualities of Servant-Focused Leaders 162
Table 13: Qualities of Learning-Focused Leaders 166
List of Figures

Figure 1: Summary of Data Collection and Analysis 89

Figure 2: Overlapping and Paradoxical Aspects of Key Leadership Tendencies 169
ABSTRACT

The number of studies related to school reform and principal leadership styles confirms both the interest in how the two might be related and the enigma that schools and principals present as research topics. The art and science of school reform is hard to figure. While many studies attempt to make sense of an overlapping and competing set of variables that are found in good schools, nearly all studies have confirmed some support for principals as a key ingredient to school improvement.

This study seeks to add to the increasing amount of research related to principal leadership styles in an era of increasing levels of accountability. The focus for this study was on four high school principals who were identified as “successful” by their central office superintendents. Each of the principals was a veteran administrator in three of the six largest school districts in Florida. This study’s initial focus was on site-based management and the amount and degree of control afforded the principal, teachers and parents in secondary schools. The literature review found that site-based management by itself could not be confirmed as a reliable, research-supported school reform protocol. In each case where site-based management or distributed leadership was found to be successful, the principal was the key antecedent to the school improvement.

This study sought to add to the research on principal leadership styles by providing a qualitative view on the lives and efforts of the principals in these four
schools. The study employed a phenomenological approach and used a technique called portraiture to paint the narratives of the four participants. The interviews and site visits provided a great deal of data and produced four key themes or tendencies found in all four principals: They tended to be *I-focused, We-focused, Servant-focused, and Learning-focused*. These four styles of leadership were found to be both overlapping and paradoxical. Though each of the participants had slightly different leanings, all of them shared aspects of the four tendencies. The study adds to the growing research on school reform and principal leadership styles and provides a deeper understanding of each through its use of phenomenological methods.
Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The entire notion of changing a school from bad to good is as daring as it is dire. It is daring in its scope, in its breadth, and in its import. It is dire in that many of have tried and failed, undone by the weight of their task. Those daring few are often left uncertain and uninspired, bereft of their spirit. Improving schools, especially public schools, has been the inspiration of educators, parents and policy-makers for much of the past half-century. It is a fanciful notion that is wrought with spirited debate from the resilient teacher to the resolute administrator.

After thousands of research studies, we still don’t know everything about ensuring a school’s success. In fact, we may know more about what doesn’t work than what does. We know that there is no wise old man who has all the answers. We know there is neither a seminal text to read nor a market on the one best way. There is no program. There is no formula. There is only salad. Many mixtures are tried and some of them even taste good at first. Still the right blend is hard to find and much of what we try in schools quickly becomes familiar and soggy.

There is one idea, though, that is rarely debated and never debunked. There is one ingredient to all good schools: hiring a good principal. In the research conducted during
the past half-century about successful school reform, the principal was always at the center (Lewis & Murphy, 2008; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006; Ouchi, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987). Interestingly, the vision we have of a successful school leader varies widely – from principled autocrat to caring matriarch, from the stern, hallway general to the nurturing mentor.

The research on school reform also supported principals having control to make the changes necessary in their own buildings, and often the best principals chose to share that control with others (such as teachers and parents) (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Lewis & Murphy, 2008, Ouchi, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; Fullan, 1999; Beck & Murphy, 1998). The movement toward greater jurisdiction for schools fell under the heading of school-based management, site-based management or decentralization. For purposes of this study, all three terms were considered initially under the heading of site-based management (or SBM). Still, not all principals in the research used site-based authority in the same manner. Some shared their decision-making with others and some did not. The more modern term distributed leadership came into currency to describe a decision-making style that was collaborative and inclusive.

In reviewing the research, distributed leadership was found to be another common antecedent to most successful school improvement initiatives. Many studies showed that teachers and principals, when operating as collaborative, collegial professionals, could make great strides in improving student achievement (Earley et al., 2002; Fullan & Watson, 2000; Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Louis & Marks, 1998). This was typically made easier in schools that employed site-based management and in schools where
principals had the self-confidence to make daring decisions and to involve others in making those decisions.

Statement of the Problem

In most school districts across the United States, principals still lack control over many of the things that happen in their buildings. In fact, only one-third of all school districts employ some version of site-based management (Kedro, 2004). Moreover, the majority of principals still have no budgetary control, many are not permitted to interview and hire the teachers they want, and some don’t even evaluate the teachers in their own schools (Kedro, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003). The lack of power given to principals (and, in turn, teachers) is in line with the limited training provided to principals on issues related to finances, curriculum and policy (Ouchi, 2003). This comes at a time when principals are at the center of school improvement and accountability demands.

Most principals in most schools are trained and selected to be what the usually are -- middle managers who follow school district policy and who make few decisions that are not handed down by central office superintendents. Even when school districts claimed to implement site-based management, many decisions remained at the regional and central offices (Fullan & Watson, 2000). The slow movement toward full-scale decentralization may be due to political hindrances in light of the power-play between central office leaders and school leaders (Malen, 1994). At the very least, some research on decentralization called into question the motives behind central office superintendents and their willingness to share their power and control with others (Malen, 1994).
School districts that gave control over to their principals have not found it to be an easy fix. Moreover, the notion that site-based management alone will improve student achievement was found to be flawed and not supported by the research (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Fullan 1991, 1999; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Odden & Archibald, 2001; Ouchi, 2003). In reviewing the literature on school districts that employ site-based management, there were mixed results around student achievement. It was clear that some schools found great success in raising student performance while others did not. Most studies showed no clear connection between site-based management as a way of work and improved student metrics (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Fullan, 1991, 1999; Murphy & Beck, 1995). Put another way, site-based management practices didn’t work simply because they existed. Instead, the research showed that the effectiveness of site-based management, teacher growth and school reform was tied to the effectiveness of the school’s leader – as with most interventions (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Kose, 2009).

More recent interpretations of site-based management focused on schools that employed distributed forms of leadership that involved principals, teachers, parents (and even community leaders) joining forces to improve student learning. The principals in those schools often pursued a transformational style of leadership that sought to raise the expectations of the school employees and parents toward a higher cause or vision (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). Further, some principals called on those around them to take on school improvement through a social justice / advocacy lens (Anderson, 2009). In those schools, principals challenged their teachers (and parents) to become more entrepreneurial in helping students overcome their difficulties and to be less cookie-
cutter in their solutions (Anderson, 2009). In light of this movement toward greater empowerment of school principals and their staffs, this study focused on principal leadership styles and empowerment efforts in an effort to extract data that would inform leadership practice and improve schools.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the perspectives of secondary school principals regarding their leadership styles and empowerment efforts in the era of accountability. The study attempted to siphon and pool the critical actions that those principals took in making decisions, fashioning consensus and building community in their schools. The study focused on how principals built collaborative cultures because the research showed that principals and teachers who worked closely together were more likely to make lasting change in student achievement (Earley et al., 2002; Fullan, 1999).

This typically began with a principal who worked to develop a climate of trust and respect (Blase & Blase, 2001; Short & Greer, 2002 and Wall & Rinehart, 1998). Certainly, the research showed that not all principals who had site-based authority shared their power genuinely and equally with teachers and parents (Malen, 1999). This study looked at data sources that spoke to the decision-making and power structures within the schools in light of this research.

**Importance of the Study**

This study was conducted to add to the current body of research on principal
leadership styles and shared decision-making. In particular, the significance of this study was as follows: 1.) To inform leadership preparation and practice for current and aspiring school principals; 2.) To provide a clearer road-map for success for new school principals, especially those who are attempting to use a shared decision-making style; 3.) To build on the current research surrounding site-based management and distributed leadership in hopes of adding context and practical steps to existing research that is largely theoretically; 4.) To capture and preserve the voices of the principals who are implementing school reform in the current age of accountability; 5.) To contribute to the conversation.

*Exploratory Questions*

The following exploratory questions were used to guide this study:

1.) What elements constitute the principals’ perspectives about school reform and shared decision-making?

2.) What factors influence the principals’ perspectives about school reform and shared decision-making?

*Definitions*

The following definitions of terms were derived from the review of the literature (see Chapter Two) and are provided as a matter of clarity to the reader.

*Site-based management:* The authority provided to school principals and staff members
to make decisions related to all (or nearly all) financial, curricular and personnel matters at the school.

*Decentralization:* The idea of shifting decision-making authority from a large central location to a smaller, local or regional site. In school systems, it is providing schools with broader powers and greater control and lessening the number decisions that are made by the School Board or central offices.

*Collaborative Culture / Collegial Culture:* These terms are synonymous and describe a school setting in which decisions are made with a great amount of input from the teachers and parents, where teachers are given time to work in professional teams, and where professional growth comes from shared experiences and professional conversations that are part of the school’s structure and way of work.

*Distributed Leadership:* This term describes a leadership style that engages many people in making school-based decisions, including school administrators, teachers, parents and community members. The term is presented in this study to describe collaboration around substantive decisions and not simply process and structural concerns.

*Transformational Leadership:* A theory of leadership that involves shaping and sharing a vision, inspiring those in an organization to perform at the highest levels by appealing to their sense of morality, passion and enthusiasm for a common cause.
Social Justice Leadership: A theory of leadership that focuses a school’s members on transforming the culture, curriculum, atmosphere and school-wide priorities to benefit students who struggle (and those who are often marginalized in a large system) – students of color, low socio-economic levels, etc. Related term: Advocacy Leadership.

Literature Review

This study reviewed more than 100 articles and books on the topics of site-based management, decentralization and shared decision-making. Of the studies reviewed, nearly all of them showed positive benefits to site-based management and shared decision-making (though not always the benefits that the researchers expected to see). There were four key findings from this literature review. 1.) Site-based management, no matter what form is takes, is not directly linked to student achievement (ie. learning gains) (Fullan & Watson, 2000). 2.) Site-based management is a process that supports better collaboration (but it does not work as a solution in and of itself). Though site-based management done well (with an instructional focus) does support many aspects of student learning, site-based management done poorly doesn’t help at all (Ouchi, 2003; Odden & Archibald, 2001; Fullan & Watson, 2000; Fullan, 1991). 3.) Learning gains are typically found in schools that have collaborative cultures in place and where true “professional learning communities” are evident (Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Louis & Marks, 1998). 4.) Even in schools that employ site-based management practices, not all principals empower other stakeholders in making decisions. Schools tend of improve only when the
principal engenders collaboration and a common purpose among the stakeholders (Leithwood & Riehl, 2009; Lewis & Murphy, 2008, Ouchi, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; Beck & Murphy, 1998).

Not all the research studies, though, were easy to quantify, many reported findings that were not statistically significant and most were impossible to generalize. One obvious flaw in the research was a lack of true comparison data as one school (or school district) was much different than the next. It is just too difficult to say that what works in Edmonton, Alberta, will work in Macon, Georgia. Other shortcomings with the current research were with the methodologies that tried to find correlations between site-based management and student learning gains. In most studies, there were too many variables in play to credit site-based management with having any true affect on learning. With so many variables contributing to student success, there was just too much statistical “noise” in most of the studies that were reviewed. The literature review also showed that most studies were limited to one or two schools (or school districts) and that, again, made the data hard to generalize. It is fair to say that most studies showed that site-based management did provide the proper context (a “ripe” environment) for positive change to occur. The research clearly showed a connection between effective principals and student achievement, especially in schools where principals and teachers were collaborative partners in learning, where distributed leadership practices were in place, and where principals, teachers and parents shared a common vision (Leithwood & Riehl, 2009; Lewis & Murphy, 2008, Ouchi, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; Fullan & Watson, 2000; Beck & Murphy, 1998).
Research Design

The design of previous studies produced gaps in the literature that this study begins to address. The research to date on effective principals and their efforts around capacity-building had been mostly quantitative in nature, drawing much information from survey data (including the Leadership Practices Inventory and the Shared Educational Decisions Survey-Revised). The literature rarely provided context and scarcely captured the words and actions of the principals themselves. Additional issues surrounding the previous research are discussed above and in Chapter Two.

It is my hope that the literature will be enriched through this qualitative study that sought to capture the insights from the principals in their real-world environments. The study focused on high schools that were in the middle of ongoing reform efforts and attempted to capture key themes that emerged from those schools.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical framework for this study falls under the research paradigm of phenomenology. This qualitative research arena focuses on the lived experiences of the identified participants – or phenomena (Moustakas, 1994) – in hopes of better understanding the social reality of the participants themselves (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Phenomenology is seen as the “first method of knowledge” because it focuses the research on the participant and requires the researcher to arrive with no preconceived notions about what might be uncovered through the data collection process (Moustakas, 1994). “Phenomenology, step by step, attempts to eliminate everything that represents a
prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of
greeness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the
customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or
by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience.” (p. 41). This theoretical
framework best fit this study because my focus was on individual principals and their
lived experiences with school reform efforts. The data collected came from the principals
and represented their perceptions of what was real, as well as my perceptions of reality
based on what I saw and heard in the moment.

Moustakas (1994) outlines three core processes of what he terms “transcendental
phenomenology.”

- **Epoche** – The idea of approaching the research without judgment, to see what is
  before you without all the biases that typically come with the typical world view.
  Moustakas calls for the phenomenon to be “revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide
  open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego.” (p. 33)

- **Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction** – The idea that each experience is
  considered in its singularity and recorded with great detail. Moustakas calls for
  the researcher to gather a complete description of the phenomenon – with all its
  colors, sights, sounds, etc.

- **Imaginative Variation** – The idea that the researcher must also get at the structural
  essences of the experience. Moustakas calls for the researcher to use the senses,
imaginations, as well as intuition and intellect, to correctly complete the picture.

This Imaginative Variation combines with the more textural aspects of the
Reduction (see above) to synthesize the data.

Phenomenology is an appropriate framework for qualitative methods because it recognizes that no greater reality exists beyond what the participant experiences. The data gathered by the researcher is first-hand and in real-time, adding to its authenticity. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the means people bring to them” (p. 2). As a qualitative researcher, I will attempt to use a number of techniques to capture this reality.

I used empirical methods (recorded interviews, the analysis of school-based documents and reflective journaling) to accurately present the principals and their settings: to paint their realities as they and I saw them. Specifically, I used the qualitative technique of portraiture to capture and authenticate the lived experiences of the principals. Portraiture is a narrative technique that integrates the compelling stories of the participants themselves with the exacting measures of a social scientist (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). I conducted two interviews with the principals and developed protocols that sought to uncover each principal’s insights regarding school reform, teacher and parent empowerment, and culture-building (see Appendix A). I fully embraced the subjective nature of this approach and was true to the task by endeavoring to keep my own biases at arm’s length.
Boundaries of the Study

Identifying principals who had similar experiences with school reform efforts was certainly difficult. Though there were many high schools to choose from, the experience of the principals in each school varied greatly. The proximity of the principals also posed a bit of a problem as, for three of the four participants, I had to travel more than two hours to visit the schools. There were also regional differences in each school and that was an unexpected finding that certainly impacted the participant perceptions and their responses. I chose to conduct the interviews in person and, while that was certainly preferable, it made it difficult to schedule time that was convenient for both me and the participants. I trusted that the principals were forthcoming with their answers and I believe that they were. Still, this was a concern throughout the study.

Of course, I am also a limitation of this study. As a researcher, I recognize my own faults and biases that could provide stumbling blocks to my data collection and interpretation. I hope to build of level of trust with the reader of this study as well. I can do this through the practice of transparency (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) in discussing my study, my methodology, and my experiences. All researchers accomplish a level of credibility by keeping careful records and by being conscientious and sensitive to the task (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I will use meticulous practices to ensure that my data is accurate and authentically presented.

Conclusion

Chapter One introduced the purpose of this study and provided a brief review of
the research design. The next chapter will present and synthesize the relevant literature related to principal leadership styles, site-based management and shared decision-making in schools. The literature was considered in light of my research interest in studying principals and their perceptions of school leadership and site-based reform. The literature review furthered my understandings of the current research on school leadership and informed my methodology so that the design of the study and the findings could add to the current body of research and contribute to the professional conversation.
Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Usually, an entrepreneurial principal in a bureaucratic district is viewed by the central office as a renegade, an outlaw, and a troublemaker.” William C. Ouchi (2003)

Introduction

To know the story of Edmonton, Alberta, is to know the story of modern school reform. The fables of struggle and success in that Canadian province are similar to those told in Chicago and Los Angeles and Seattle and Houston. They are tales of educational reform and renewal, of reinvented theories and recycled philosophies, all intended to create schools that are shining models of success.

Finding the formula for turning bad schools into good ones has consumed practitioners and theoreticians for as long as schools have existed. The pressure has been even greater – and the failures more frustrating – since the modern school reform began in 1983 with the release of A Nation at Risk. In that document, the National Commission on Excellence in Education outlined the sad state of American schools and touched off a tide of reform measures that continues today with the wave of federal mandates from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation.

While school reform has intensified during the past 30 years, it is certainly not
new. Educational theorists and researchers have been searching out better ways of work that are both reliable and replicable for more than a century. Still, one could argue that our schools are no better now then they ever have been. While there are many great schools in operation, there are just as many that struggle each day to educate their students adequately and safely. Those realities breed new reform measures and those beget new hopes and new criticisms.

Teachers, parents, politicians, academicians and theoreticians have all offered better ways of teaching our kids and running our schools. Researchers have done their parts as well. School reform has been the impetus for thousands of studies that are intended to coordinate and pinpoint the variables found in good schools. Smaller class sizes. Merit pay for teachers. Same-sex classrooms. Top-down accountability measures. Parent involvement schemes. Schools within schools. Cooperative learning initiatives. School choice. Neighborhood schools and more. These are just some of the measures that have been attempted, sampled, tweaked and tried again. Most of the research has been inconsistent at best. What works in some schools just doesn’t work in others. What seems like an obvious solution to some doesn’t always pan out for others because it costs too much or it is too hard to replicate. Still, there is one research-supported measure that seems to be the critical antecedent to all successful reform initiatives -- the school principal.

The principal is the key ingredient in every school reform measure that ever been tried and successfully wrought (Lewis & Murphy, 2008; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006; Ouchi, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987). Whatever people think of principals,
they have the most impact in all successful reform projects. Of course, school
improvement is also about the teachers. No one would ever suggest that a principal can
raise student achievement without skilled and caring teachers, and nothing can be
accomplished without a focus on learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Ouchi, 2003; Beck
& Murphy, 1998).

The body of research on school reform is clear on this point: Schools are best
served when they have strong leaders (starting with the principal), a collaborative work
culture, and a focus on student learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Ouchi, 2003; Beck &
Murphy, 1998). Beck and Murphy (1998) put it this way: They say schools must have
several key “imperatives” to be successful: 1.) A learning imperative 2.) A community
imperative 3.) A capacity-building imperative and 4.) A leadership imperative.
Leithwood and Riehl (2003) add that, for lasting and profound change to occur,
leadership ought to be distributed to others in the school and in the community.

**Research Summary**

The integrative literature review presented in this chapter presents the key
research related to school leadership and school culture (which typically go hand-in-
hand). It takes a critical look at the methodologies and key research findings around
principal leadership styles and decision-making theory in an attempt to find common
variables for success that can be replicated in all schools. Particular attention was paid to
distributed leadership and its role in recent school improvement initiatives, as well as
related research terms like “site-based decision making,” “shared decision making,”
“teacher empowerment” and “transformational leadership.”

In doing so, this review focused more on things that schools and school districts could control (such as hiring good principals and empowering teachers and parents) and less on variables that were typically unchangeable (such as funding amounts or student ability levels). The findings of the literature review were sometimes surprising, though always logical. The initial review was around site-based management alone and its role in school improvement, culture-building and teacher and parent empowerment. The research, though, on site-based management was found to be mixed and the methodology questionable. No one can say for sure that site-based management leads to student learning gains (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Beck & Murphy, 1998; Fullan, 1991). An initial review of those studies led to other, more research-supported methods to improve student achievement – such as collaborative work cultures, professional learning communities and distributed leadership. The literature review also unveiled the importance of quality school leadership, starting with the principal.

No matter the amount of control provided the principal through decentralized decision making (or site-based management), schools tended to improve only when the principal engendered collaboration and a common purpose among the stakeholders (Leithwood & Riehl, 2009; Lewis & Murphy, 2008, Ouchi, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; Fullan & Watson, 2000; Beck & Murphy, 1998). In Distributed Leadership According to the Evidence (2009), Leithwood and Riehl culled together the recent research in support of shared decision-making. In schools with true distributed leadership, the focus was less on the principal as a “heroic leader” and more on the “unheroic” and sometimes messy
collaboration of the parties that were most connected with the school (teachers, parents, administrators, etc.). This type of leadership required the principal to be effective in shaping a shared vision and supporting the work of many hands in the fulfilling that vision.

The principal again was the key actor, setting the tone for teacher and parent empowerment, shared decision-making, and learning-centered schools (Leithwood & Riehl, 2009; Ouchi, 2003; Beck & Murphy, 1998). In their studies on school reform in England, Earley et al. (2002) concluded that the best school leaders collaborated with their staffs in shaping a mutual vision and purpose. Their research pointed to the transformational nature of effective school leaders, noting that the most successful principals were those who effectively articulated their personal and educational values to those around them. Moreover, in a multi-case study involving more than 40 interviews with principals, Kose (2009) found that teacher growth and student learning was positively correlated to the transformative nature of principals who serve as visionaries, learning leaders and cultural advocates.

Teacher and parent empowerment and collaborative cultures were made more likely when principals were given full control (even budgetary control) over the direction of their schools and were held accountable for student achievement gains (Beck & Murphy, 1998; Ouchi, 2003). In Making Schools Work: A Revolutionary Plan to Get Your Children the Education They Need (2003), Ouchi presented his results from a study of 223 schools in nine different school systems (including Edmonton, Seattle and Houston). He concluded that the principal and the school culture were the most important
aspects of school improvement. As a professor of management (and not education), Ouchi pointed out that when a business fails, the owners don’t blame the customers, the front-line employees or the budget. They go after the management. In other words, it’s all about the principal.

He outlines Seven Keys to Success for any school reform effort. Number one on the list is: Every principal is an entrepreneur (and not just a bureaucrat). “Bureaucrats, especially good ones, know the rules backwards and forwards and always follow them. In a routine, stable situation, that’s a good thing. When confronted with the non-routine, though, bureaucrats cannot act until a higher-up gives them a new rule that they can follow. In schools, where each day brings new and previously unknown situations, bureaucracy is deadly” (p. 14). Ouchi called for principals to be more independent in their thinking and to be empowered to carry out their ideas through greater decentralization.

The contention that principals needed to think “out of the box” and take control of their schools was supported by many of the studies that were reviewed (Anderson, 2009; Leithwood & Riehl, 2009; Ouchi, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; Beck & Murphy, 1998). In Advocacy leadership: Toward a post-reform agenda in education, Anderson (2009) went even further in suggesting that principals must become politically and socially aware in support of the unique needs of their students – especially those students who struggle the most. He called on school leaders to become culturally competent, social advocates who challenge teachers, parents and community members to be entrepreneurial in finding solutions for their schools.
Anderson was critical of the NCLB mandates and other aspects of the accountability movement that he described as top-down “social engineering” that harbors a deficit view of education and school leaders. At the end of the day, principals have been reduced to leaders who are “leading to the test” the way teachers are teaching to the test (p. 2). To get closer to an advocacy form of leadership, principals have to be trained and encouraged to take on more creative and activist roles than they do now (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). Traditional principal preparation programs give only token consideration to the ideas of social justice and transformational leadership. Too often, school leaders who desire more “inclusive, just schools find themselves constrained by rules, regulations, and state controls” (p. 202). The literature review showed that the most successful principals were more than just middle managers and bureaucrats (Kedro, 2004; Ouchi, 2003). Successful principals had a vision and spirit – an entrepreneurial spirit -- that filtered into all parts of a school. In short, entrepreneurial principals created entrepreneurial schools. This lead to other research-supported solutions: creative pedagogy, staff and student buy-in, staff and student empowerment, parent involvement, mutual accountability and professional growth (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Newman and Wehlage, 1995). In some of the largest studies to date on school reform, Newman and Wehlage (1995) concluded that site-based management in name alone was not enough. Instead, the most successful schools showed trusting, working relationships between teachers and administrators, professional learning communities, a focus on student work and assessment and an evolving instructional practice that changed with the times.

One immediate problem was that most districts didn’t train and mentor their
future principals (teachers and assistant principals) to be collaborative or transformational (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Ouchi, 2003). Most principals were trained and selected to serve in a role in which they typically served, as middle managers who were expected to blindly follow policy and then call on central office superintendents when things got messy. The review showed that most school districts in America didn’t empower principals to run their schools as they saw fit. Only one-third of all school districts employed some version of site-based management (Kedro, 2004). Moreover, the majority of principals didn’t have budgetary control, many were not permitted to interview and hire the teachers they wanted, and some didn’t evaluate the teachers at their own schools (Kedro, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003).

In the absence of true authority, some principals daringly moved forward anyway. The research shows that many have chartered their own courses, challenged the status quo and wrested power away from the central office by rallying their communities in support of new reform measures. In some extreme cases, movies (like Lean On Me with Morgan Freeman) have been made about these maverick principals. In less dramatic ways, some principals have been granted charge of their schools as the result of full-scale, site-based management initiatives in their school districts.

Two of the most researched examples of site-based management and distributed leadership in the United States were found in Seattle and Houston, two districts that gave their principals and teachers almost total control over their schools (Ouchi, 2003). While they have been among the most successful and progressive school districts in America, they were not always this way. Though Seattle didn’t change its way of work until 1995
and Houston until 2001, their stories began 30 years earlier in another country, in another city: Edmonton. The Edmonton school district (like most others across the globe) was very much a top-down, centralized organization for most of its history. The change to a fully decentralized, site-based approach began in the early 1970s with the hiring of a maverick superintendent whose story has reached legendary status in Canada: Michael A. Strembitsky, the outlaw superintendent. In short order, Strembitsky turned the district over to its principals and teachers and Edmonton remains the most mature form of site-based management in operation today (Archer, 2005; Ouchi, 2003). In that district, 80% of the district’s budget is controlled by the schools. The schools there pick their own programs, books and training. They decide how many people to hire and who to hire. They can reject district money and services (for example, lunch services) and contract on their own (Archer, 2005; Ouchi, 2003). Edmonton has also had full school choice, which has increased competition among schools. It is a district that has empowered its principals and teachers to be creative and to solve their own problems. It has engendered an entrepreneurial culture that has inculcated most school operations (Archer, 2005; Ouchi, 2003). Still, the more we know about site-based management, the more the research reveals a concept that “hides more than it reveals” (Fullan & Watson, 2000, p. 453). Though some successes were found in Edmonton, Seattle, Houston and other places, two problems were found in the research around site-based management. First, central office superintendents were still found to be angling to retain many of the key decisions that could be handed down to schools. Second, many school districts only provided principals with structural or
operational freedoms to make decisions with no true authority to make changes in personnel, curriculum and other factors related to school success (Fullan & Watson, 2000).

The full-scale decentralization measures that have worked in Edmonton were considered in many school districts across America, including those in Chicago, Los Angeles and Oakland, California. Most recently, the Pinellas County School District in Florida (comprising the cities of St. Petersburg and Clearwater) was challenged by its influential business partners to follow suit and decentralize. The district was considering in 2010 giving its principals full-scale empowerment to make all financial and curricular decisions for their schools (and to be held accountable if things go awry). Pinellas County Schools was prodded to make such a move by a controversial white paper that was submitted to the School Board in June of 2008 (Pinellas Education Foundation, 2008). The paper was written anonymously by members of the Pinellas Education Foundation – a collection of civic and business leaders who serve as a fundraising arm for the district.

The paper’s primary demands were as follows: Give principals full authority by giving them control over the financial and curricular aspects of their schools (in cooperation with some form of site-based council). Take control away from the central office administrators. Stop telling principals how to run their schools. Encourage schools to think out of the box. In turn, hold principals fully accountable as the CEOs of their buildings.

The paper’s claims are supported by the research of Odden, et. al. Odden has co-authored two books on school finance and site-based decision-making: Reallocating
Resources (Odden & Archibald, 2001) and Financing Schools for High Performance (Odden & Busch, 1998). The Okaloosa County School District in Florida has already followed an adapted model that is similar to the examples used in Odden’s books. The growth in Okaloosa County on many of Florida’s grading indicators is impressive and was used as evidence in the white paper.

Though some progress was made in Pinellas County during 2009 and 2010 to move closer to full decentralization, the school district was implementing the change slowly and was not yet providing the full-scale authority around personnel, textbook allocations, etc. that was found in other districts. This gives credence to the arguments made by Malen (1994) in her critical look at decentralization. In her research, Malen posits that site-based management efforts “may be enacted more for their political utility than for their substantive viability” (p. 249). In other words, central office superintendents gain a great deal of legitimacy for favoring school-based decision-making over centralized, bureaucratic structures. Still, research shows that “systems are prone to delegate tasks, but they are not inclined to redistribute power (p. 250).

The literature review presented in this chapter examined more than 100 sources (articles and books) related to leadership styles, school reform efforts, decentralization and teacher and parent empowerment in America’s school districts. It sought to provide a brief history of these efforts, reviewed the relevant literature, synthesized the findings in search of key themes, and generated some provocative conclusions for school districts that continue to seek out new ways to improve their schools and empower their principals, teachers and parents to play a role in these changes.
“Good education will be fully effective only when there are good social conditions and, among individuals, good beliefs and feelings; but social conditions, and the beliefs and feelings of individuals will not be altogether satisfactory until there is a good education. The problem of reform is the problem of breaking out of a vicious circle and of building up a virtuous one in its place.”

from Aldous Huxley (End of Means, 1937)

Decision-Making Theory

Decision-making theory involves the type, content and process of decisions and the who, what and why of those decisions. Wohlstetter, Van Kirk, Robertson, and Mohrman (1997) are among the lead scholars in creating a theoretical discussion of leadership theory related to decision-making and participation. One clear finding was that in schools where decisions were typically made only by the district or by the principal, moving toward a more collaborative structure didn’t automatically create a more democratic system or even better solutions (Beck and Murphy, 1998; Beach, 1993). When decisions suddenly shifted from one to many people, the process was influenced by factors such as personality styles, group pressures, group think, individual status, and competition (Reitz, 1987). School districts and principals were sometimes criticized for carrying out shared decision making “in name only” as they had a hard time relinquishing their control (Miller, 1995).

Bauer (2001) collected data on site-based councils from 12 schools as part of an evaluation of site-based decision-making in a major Midwestern city. The surveys asked about the scope, structure, process and amount of administrative support for the site-
based councils – as well as the newness of the council and related descriptive statistics. One key finding was that the councils that achieved some consensus on goals and that had a sense of true authority shared a stronger sense of confidence among council members who then believed that they had real influence on decision-making.

Participatory decision-making was often hindered by schools and school leaders who were not trying to think “out of the box” and so solutions were no more creative or innovative than when the central office was making them (Beach, 1993). Research on decision-making theory showed that, unless an organization was in crisis, most decisions were focused on keeping things as they were (Beach, 1993). In essence, too many times the participants themselves (following the patterns of the past) were hesitant to change what had been done before.

“We entrust to a principal the educational future of some three to four thousand students, a building often amounting to 10 or 15 million dollars but we do not trust him or her with ten dollars worth of petty cash.”
from Norman Drechler, former Detroit school superintendent

The Principal’s Role – A Review of Leadership Theory

There was general agreement among researchers that the principal was the one person who could impact school reform the most and that he or she was the key change-agent for impacting schools change and success (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987; Ouchi, 2003). Yet despite this belief, school principals steadily lost power and control since the 1960s (Wooster, 1994; Pellicer, et al. 1988). Until the 1960s, principals had a great deal
of freedom in shaping their schools. That changed with the rise of the teachers’ unions, which ensured that many decisions were made by union contract, not by the principal. Principals also had to deal with the rise of federally funded positions and the strings that were attached (such as special education positions) and that left them with even less power and influence.

In his book *Angry classrooms, vacant minds: What’s happened to our high schools?*, Wooster (1994) referenced a key study of principals conducted in 1980 by Van Cleve Morris from the University of Illinois (Chicago). Morris and his associates reported that over time principals had adopted “a low-profile, paper-shuffling, keep-the-lid-on-and-the-boss-happy style of caretaker management” (Wooster, 1994, p. 55). Chubb and Moe (1990) reached similar conclusions with a collection of surveys from 1987 that were conducted by Pellicer and his colleagues at the National Association of Secondary School Principals. In those surveys, 33 percent of principals said they had little or no authority to hire teachers, 42 percent had little control over staffing practices, and 39 percent had no say over the budget. In 1977, only 8 percent of the principals were limited in hiring teachers, 32 percent couldn’t tell teachers how to teach, and 33 percent were blocked from budget decisions (Pellicer, et. al., 1988).

Findings such as these fueled the movement toward site-based management in the 1980s and 1990s. Coleman and Hoffer’s *Public and Private High Schools* (1987) and Chubb and Moe’s *Politics, Markets, and American Schools* (1990) showed that public high schools where principals had more freedom to shape the school’s culture had students who achieved more than schools where principals were left in their roles as
middle managers. Ouchi (2003) made similar claims from his research on 223 schools in nine different school systems. He said that without full authority provided to the principal, schools would never be free to be creative and entrepreneurial in solving their own problems. Wooster (1994) makes this point: “Without some devolution of power, either via school-based management, charter schools, or school choice, principals are not likely to regain the power they have steadily lost.”

Studies conducted on the affective dimensions of school leaders (as well as leadership “styles”) showed that this newer type of principal must be multi-dimensional: an initiator, a researcher, a learner and a communicator (Clarke, 2000) and many saw their role as “teachers of teachers.” The principals generally espoused an “egalitarian approach” to leadership in which they viewed decisions as collaborative in nature (Loder & Spillane, 2005).

From the 1900s to the 1950s, researchers focused on the characteristics of leaders and followers in hopes of finding the single trait (or combination of traits) that could explain why some leaders were successful (see: Traits Model in Table 1). That research was met with much frustration because of the combination of factors and situations associated with leaders. Subsequent leadership studies attempted to distinguish effective leaders from non-effective ones.
Table 1: Five Common Leadership Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Related theories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traits Model</td>
<td>Focus is on an individual’s inherited traits – personality, intelligence, self-confidence. Some traits are suited to leadership.</td>
<td>Related theories: <em>The Great Man theory</em> - Leaders are born, not made. Leaders will rise to the forefront as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Model</td>
<td>Focus is on what leaders do and attempts to define and describe the actions of successful leaders. Leaders can be made, rather than born. Leadership is learnable, teachable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingency Model</td>
<td>Focus is on the situation, the task at hand, the abilities of the followers and the leader’s preferred style. Leaders may be effective in one place and time and less so at other times.</td>
<td>Related theory: <em>Situational leadership</em> - There is no one best way to lead. Effective leaders do not have a preferred leadership style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional Model</td>
<td>Focus is on external rewards and punishment to motivate others. A clear chain of command is paramount. People are motivated by their own self interests.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Model</td>
<td>Focus is internal motivation of others. Leader works to inspire followers toward a common vision. Collaboration and empowerment are key.</td>
<td>Related theories: <em>Advocacy leadership</em> – leading others to a common cause by raising their levels of morality and motivation; focus is on social justice and supporting marginalized subgroups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though no one style of leadership has proved sound in all cases and for all persons, the most modern interpretations support more collaborative (transformational) and activist (social justice) models. Smith and Piele (1997) defined five dimensions of leadership that shape the style and role of the leader in any organization: (a) decision-making, (b) perceptions of employees, (c) tasks and human relations, (d) innovation and risk-taking, and (e) psychological types. The researchers drew heavily on McGregor’s characterization of leaders as leaning more heavily toward Theory X or Theory Y. Those who believed in Theory X viewed employees as needing close monitoring, consequences and extrinsic rewards. Those who supported Theory Y saw employees as self-motivated,
collaborative, and seeking intrinsic rewards.

Much of the research around school leadership grew out of the flap caused by the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, a document that painted a disturbing portrait of American schools and called on school superintendents (and principals) to be saviors – reformers, visionaries and chief executive officers. In the earliest days of school leadership (beginning in about 1800), superintendents and principals performed functions that were largely clerical in nature and sometimes operational. The onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 1900s brought about a greater need for school leaders to increase efficiency and become more expert in the areas of budgeting and facilities.

Sparked by new research in the 1970s and 1980s, schools and school districts began to differentiate between leaders and managers and pushed for leaders who could articulate a vision and lead others to a higher calling. Though leadership is clearly a complex enterprise, vision and collaboration were seen as key pieces of successful leadership practice (Fullan & Watson, 2000). This was manifested in the current research around distributed leadership, transformational leadership and social justice theory.

“Our lower (secondary) schools are ridden by administrators; they are administration-mad. An arm’s length efficiency, conducted by typewriters from central offices, reaches into the classrooms where all the educational work is done and produces there the inefficiency of irresponsibility and routine.”

from John Dewey (1928)
**Decentralization and Site-Based Management**

States afforded schools more control as part of decentralization efforts to improve student achievement. Brown (1991) described site-based management as the structures and operational processes in which the principal collaboratively works with all school stakeholders. Among his findings were: 1. A collaborative approach to principal leadership is most favored. 2. A school-based management council can result in more organized and higher quality parental involvement. 3. School personnel must be given the authority and resources necessary for student success to be fully realized. 4. School principals in site-based management schools were no more likely to be using best practices than those in other schools.

We see the beginnings of centralized control in the 1800s with the Industrial Revolution (Wooster, 1994). Up until that point (around 1900), America’s schools were genuinely decentralized. For example, the average state education department had only two employees (Wooster, 1994). In rural schools, time was set aside every Friday for parents to visit schools and chat with their teachers. In cities, the “ward boards” forced parents to be involved and guaranteed them a say in how schools were run (Wooster, 1994).

Still, the Industrial Revolution brought increased demands upon rural education and tested the limits of school resources (Murphy and Beck, 1995). Those demands led to the consolidation of many small districts into fewer, larger districts as school reformers were demanding modernization, centralization, and professionalism of the system (Fuller, 1982; Ravitch, 1974). The reformers crusaded to eliminate local lay boards and to replace
them with a strong centralized bureaucracy. Centralization was initially construed as a means of reforming schools by getting the politicians out of education and putting educational experts in charge (Ravitch, 1974).

School districts in the urban United States were organized around neighborhoods and wards. This system satisfied a wide range of constituents, from community groups to minority parents and from teacher unions to local, state, and federal levels of the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government (Murphy & Beck, 1995). Still, this led to obvious abuses by the ward bosses related to school business and hiring practices (Ravitch, 1974; Mirel, 1990).

The phrase “Progressive education” has been used to label two distinct educational reform movements. The first lasted from 1890 until 1910 and it changed the way schools were organized and controlled. The second was between 1915 and 1955 and it radically shifted the curricular focus of schools (Wooster, 1994). The Progressives believed that a small school board and a strong superintendent would be a step toward improving school functions and ending the power (and abuses) of the decentralized ward boards (Wooster, 1994).

Another step in the centralization movement of the early 1900s was the growing emphasis on business-like efficiency in schools. It’s what some have called the “cult of efficiency” that leaders saw as central to American business operations at the time (Ravitch, 1974). The efficiency movement began with the now famous “time study” experiments conducted by Frederick Winslow Taylor and was helped along by the “Gary plan,” a space-saving, money-saving plan that had been praised by John Dewey and other
reformers (Ravitch, 1974). Efficiency was cemented in the schools after a dissertation was written by J. Howard Hutchinson at Columbia University’s Teacher’s College (Wooster, 1994). In his dissertation, Hutchinson found school systems to be terribly inefficient and he recommended that districts adopt 22 new forms (including purchase orders and time sheets). School superintendents, already gaining power as CEOs of massive school systems, jumped on the idea of tighter controls on schools and a more hierarchical school system (Wooster, 1994). Prior to their rise to power, superintendents served simply as master teachers who helped to set standards and lead by example. Prior to 1900, only few superintendents had gone through any training at all for the job (Wooster, 1994).

The decentralization movement was fast-forwarded by John Dewey through his support of teacher councils and greater community control (Murphy & Beck, 1995). The community control movement gained momentum during the 1960s and was fed, in large part, by black families who wanted to control their own schools (Ravitch, 1974). The decentralization efforts were aided at this time by the Ford Foundation, which supported social programs for the ghettos and supported local control of funding in an effort to get control into the hands of the people who most needed the help (Wooster, 1994). Additionally, decentralization garnered criticism from the public who saw the ward boards as personnel-heavy and wrought with procedures that did not change the distribution of power and were ultimately more divisive (Tyack, 1993). The modern reform measures that took root in the 1980s after the release of A Nation at Risk galvanized educators and reformers alike to push for new structures that would improve
school performance (Ogawa, 1994). That push continues today with calls for real, lasting systematic improvements that are more revolution and less evolution (Ouchi, 2003; Stone, Henig, Jones, and Pierannunzi, 2001; and Murphy and Beck, 1995).

“School-based management, then, is another way of controlling the schools within an essentially bureaucratic system. Unless all goes well, then, there is a built-in tendency for decentralized systems to gravitate toward greater centralization. *As long as higher authority exists, it will eventually get used.*”

from John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990)

*Research Studies*

The code that schools live by under a site-based management approach is that school administrators and professional educators, parents, community members, and the students should have full control over decisions that enhance their school’s effectiveness. School-based management also subscribes to a belief that decisions should be made at the lowest possible level in organizations. The problem is this: No research has been able to confirm that the benefits of school-based decision-making are positively correlated with student achievement (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Beck & Murphy, 1998; Fullan, 1991).

The research to date on site-based management (and related search terms like “teacher empowerment,” “shared decision-making,” “participatory decision making,” and “distributive leadership”) has been plentiful but is difficult to quantify in part because of the various definitions of site-based management and because of the limitations of the methodology.
The definition itself, or what one might call the “practical definition,” of site-based management appears to be different from school district to school district. In one place, site-based management is defined as full control of decisions and finances made at the school site. This includes decisions about the hiring and firing of teachers, curriculum and textbooks, funding for the facilities, lunchroom, etc. and other related operational endeavors. In this full-scale view of site-based management, the school is probably run by the principal in chorus with a school council in a true collaborative sense. Still, other districts use a narrower definition of site-based management – meaning only that principals have greater control to hire and evaluate their teachers and make some decisions about new programs and books.

In short, an obvious criticism of the research to date has been a lack of true comparison data as one district is so different from the next. Another shortcoming with the current research was the methodology that tried to find correlations between site-based management and student learning gains. In most studies, there were too many variables in play to credit site-based management with having any true affect on learning. With so many things contributing to student success, there was just too much statistical “noise” in most studies. The research review for this study also showed that most studies were limited to one or two schools (or school districts) and that any positive data on site-based management was hard to generalize.

Of the sources reviewed for this chapter, nearly all of them showed positive benefits to site-based management and shared decision making (though not always the benefits that the researchers expected to see). There were four key findings from the
literature review on site-based management. 1.) Site-based management, no matter what form is takes, is not directly linked to student achievement (ie. learning gains). There was a sense that teachers and parents liked it more as a way of work but kids were not necessarily learning more as a direct result of site-based implementation (Fullan & Watson, 2000, 1999). 2.) Site-based management was simply a process that supported better collaboration (but it was not a solution in and of itself). Though site-based management done well (with an instructional focus) did support many aspects of student learning, site-based management done poorly doesn’t help at all (Ouchi, 2003; Odden & Archibald, 2001; Fullan & Watson, 2000; Fullan, 1991). 3.) Site-based management was only connected to learning gains when it resulted in a collaborative culture with true “professional learning communities” in place (Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Louis & Marks, 1998). 4.) One clear benefit of site-based management (especially when it was done well) was that it allowed schools to change quickly as needed. It empowered the school to improve itself and that had some benefit (Fullan & Watson, 2000).

The continued research on site-based schools can certainly help provide perspective around the processes and roles that leaders play in growing participation among teachers, parents, and the community. While the notion of site-based leadership – or “distributed leadership” to use the more current term -- at the school level was valued by most practitioners as being more inclusive, more democratic and more efficient, the research simply did not find a direct link between the declaration of site-based authority and student learning gains (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Beck & Murphy, 1998; Fullan, 1991). Beck and Murphy (1998) spent one year observing site-based practices at an
urban elementary school. Their case study revealed that site-based decision-making empowered the teachers, administrators, etc. to act on their ideas (many of which promoted learning) but it did not influence the quality of their decisions per se. In other words, researchers could not prove that the decisions and ideas being shared were better than they would have been if the principal or central office acted alone in making them.

Beck and Murphy (1998) concluded that site-based management was a “fairly weak” intervention for school reform, especially when it came to having a direct impact on student learning. Still, site-based management appeared to have value as a decision-making structure and it did help to breed a sense of community and school collegiality. Through their studies, Beck and Murphy revealed several key “imperatives” that made the school successful: 1.) A learning imperative 2.) A community imperative 3.) A capacity-building imperative and 4.) A leadership imperative. Many of the benefits of the above “imperatives” were tied to site-based management.

Fullan and Watson (2000) agreed that site-based management was not a sure-fire fix for student achievement, but it opened the doors of governance in a way where true restructuring could occur and improvement could take place. Fullan own studies reported that good schools had in place a notion of continuous capacity-building defined as the development of the skills and knowledge of teachers and the examination of information. In his own work, as well as his review of case studies from England, Fullan showed that increasing the teachers’ roles in governance did not mean that they, themselves, collaborated more. Fullan (2005) suggested that teachers needed to be part of “collaborative work cultures” that required them to assume direct responsibility for
changing the schools. The only way to change schools in the long-term was from the inside out, not the other way around. Punitive accountability measures might improve test scores in the short term but the improvements were only on the surface and would not last (Fullan, 2005). For this sort of collaboration to occur, principals must be able to build a collective trust among the staff (Lewis & Murphy, 2008). “Such trust is needed if there is to be enough confidence to allow the vulnerability and exposure that involves sharing and working on weaknesses and engaging with problems in raising teaching standards” (p. 138). The research review supported the idea of a leadership team that carried out this task while taking some of the focus (and pressure) off of the principal.

In Ouchi’s exhaustive review of more than 200 schools, he rejected three common theories about the failures of schools: the teachers aren’t any good; the students (especially minority students) aren’t able or willing to learn; and more money is needed to improve schools. He offers seven keys to successful schools: 1.) Every principal is an entrepreneur (the opposite of a bureaucrat); 2.) Every school controls its own budget; 3.) Everyone is accountable for student performance and for budgets; 4.) Everyone delegates authority to those below; 5.) There is a burning focus on student achievement; 6.) Every school is a community of learners and 7.) Families have real choices among a variety of unique schools. He argued that all large organizations must decentralize to be effective – “thereby granting authority with accountability to sub-units” (Ouchi, 2003). If not, a large bureaucracy would defer to standardized procedures in every situation, creating an inflexible system and ignoring the local conditions at each site.

Schools districts that were attempting a site-based approach were categorized into
two primary types: “Unitary” districts that control things from the top, including a formulaic way of determining what type of teachers each school needs and “Multidivisional” districts where the principal received an allocation and got to decide how to spend it – ie. the principal as CEO. Ouchi (2003) reported that school districts that empowered their principals (including full budgetary control) saw great strides in collaboration and innovation. Collaboration and innovation are two variables that were tied to student learning gains (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Beck & Murphy, 1998; Fullan, 1991). The research showed that site-based management alone did not improve learning. It simply improved the “conditions” for better learning. Angus McBeath, the Superintendent for Edmonton Public Schools put it this way: “If you focus on decentralization, you’ll get a decentralized district, but with low student achievement. You’ve got to focus on student achievement” (Ouchi, 2004, pg. 18).

Site-based management, when fully realized in a school, can have distinct benefits, including empowering the principal and staff (though that also meant adding to their workloads) (Dempster, 1999). Research also shows that site-based management did not lead to greater decision-making flexibility (because schools are simply “branches” of the central office and they typically spout the corporate line) and it did not improve student learning (though it can affect improved planning and communication and improve the conditions for better teaching) (Dempster, 1999). There was also no direct nexus between site-based practices and increased innovation. But (again) conditions may be riper for innovation and creativity when site-based management is in play (Dempster, 1999).
“The one-room country school must have a different social structure from the city high school with five thousand students, but the basic fact of authority, of dominance and subordination, remains a fact in both.”
from Willard Waller (1932)

Teacher Participation / Influence / Empowerment

The role of teachers as decision-makers in most schools has been marginalized for most of the history of schools (Wooster, 1994). Though teachers sometimes served on committees or attend parent events, they were rarely put in positions to make (or even contribute to) substantive decisions that affected hiring, scheduling, facilities, textbooks or curriculum. Teachers have been thought of in most schools as independent contractors who were hired to teach a particular skill or subject and then go home. One of the early advocates for greater teacher input was Ella Flagg Young, a district superintendent for the Chicago schools. In 1898, she created teacher councils in her district so teachers could gather and offer advice on district problems (Wooster, 1994). Still, her efforts did not gain widespread support throughout the country.

As highly inefficient bureaucracies, schools are typically run by central office “experts” and sometimes the principal. Less than a third of all schools in the country used their teachers to set and carry out policy and procedures, dialogue about new ideas to improve the school or contribute to the hiring and evaluation of fellow teachers (or administrators) (Ingersoll, 2003). As schools were viewed by the public and policy-makers as inefficient and ineffective, “the obvious antidote is to increase the centralized
control of schools and to hold teachers more accountable. Their (policy-makers) objective has been to ‘tighten the ship’ in one manner or another, through increased teacher training and retraining requirements; standardized curricula and instructional programs; teacher licensing examinations; performance standards; more school and teacher evaluation; merit pay programs; and, more recently, state and national education goals, standards, and testing” (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 6).

In his book *Who Controls Teachers’ Work?*, Ingersoll (2003) described schools as “factorylike” and said they unduly deprofessionalize teachers. This, in turn, demotivates teachers who might be willing to help if asked. “Indeed, contrary to some critics, a close look at the job of teaching reveals that teachers are pushed to accept a remarkable degree of personal accountability, in the face of a remarkable lack of accountability on the part of the schools that employ them” (p. 13). Of course, the same might be said for principals and how they are treated by their bosses in the central office.

In a review of survey data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Shen (2001) found that most teachers didn’t feel empowered to make decisions that affected the school and that, conversely, principals felt teachers had more ownership of decisions than teachers perceived themselves to have. The survey that Shen reviewed is conducted every three years and is asked of 9,000 principals and 50,000 public school teachers. Using a Likert scale ranging from “no influence at all” to “a great deal of influence,” teachers and principals were asked to rate a number of school and classroom policies. Researchers reviewed data from the mid-80s to the mid-90s, right when the site-based movement was taking off.
As teachers gained more control over their school environments several benefits were realized, including improved staff morale, more lasting professional growth, and less teacher turnover (Smith & Rowley, 2005). In their review of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data, Smith and Rowley (2005) used a hierarchical linear model to predict a teacher’s level of professional growth and their reported level of control over their classrooms, instruction, policy, etc. The researchers found a positive correlation.

After reviewing action research projects related to the professional identity of individual teachers and learning communities, Farrell & Weitman (2007) advocated for teachers to control their own professional development (and professional practices) through their involvement in the design and implementation of classroom-based research endeavors. The authors pointed to teacher empowerment as comprising three interrelated components: increased teacher access to decision making, increased teacher knowledge, and increased teacher status. In essence, teachers were viewed as passive participants in school improvement. Instead, they must be viewed as school improvement itself. “Rather than serve as passive players and consumers of best practices, teachers actively engage in the entrepreneurship of best practices through familiar, trusting, and comfortable learning communities” (Farrell & Weitman, p. 40).

Teachers participated more when they trusted their school leaders (Verdugo, Greenburg, Henderson, Uribe, Jr. & Schneider, 1997) and increasing participation among teachers increased their feelings of self-worth (Salisbury, 1980). Cherniss (1997) reaffirmed these findings as a result of his interviews with 25 school professionals (mostly teachers and counselors) during their first year of their careers and again 12 years
later. He made a distinction between *political* empowerment – the power to run committees (like we sometimes have with site-based management) and work on school policy -- and *psychological* empowerment, which is motivational and behavioral (leading people to really seek change and improvement). His data showed that teachers were more willing to work on issues (or with a program) that they feel connected to or on something that they helped to develop.

After a review of action research projects related to the professional identity of individual teachers and learning communities, Galen (2005) suggested that schools were at a new point in their history where teachers were in need of true empowerment and part of that was a principal who cared about them on a more personal level – with more “high touch” time. Galen, a principal, said she garnered trust among her staff by respecting their time by giving them more time to meet, plan and train (with less “wasted” time). The more she increased the “touch time” the more she felt like she opened the door for greater change.

In contrast to instructional / classroom decisions, teachers had little input over decisions about their schedule, their class sizes, the office and classroom space they used, and the use of school funds for classroom materials. Teachers also had little input into hiring, firing, and budgetary decisions (Ingersoll, 2003). The SASS data (a large sampling of school principals) revealed dramatic differences in the decision-making power of school districts, principals and teachers. The lack of control held by teachers over their work stood out in contrast to the control exercised by others. At the top of this hierarchy were principals, who had influence over six of the eight important decisions.
made at a school site (including hiring teachers, setting teacher schedules, and establishing the discipline policy). At the bottom of the hierarchy were teachers, with some influence over only five of eight issues (such as deciding on the faculty inservice and determining student tracking) (Ingersoll, 2003).

While researchers and practitioners continue to weigh the value of site-based decision-making as it relates to student achievement, others see value in this way of work as an ingredient for greater collaboration, collegiality and staff morale (even if achievement, per se, doesn’t increase). “My point is that the academic goals and outcomes of schools and the social goals and outcomes of schools are not the same thing. Positive social relations in schools can themselves be viewed as an important indicator of successful educational performance. Indeed, as numerous polls have shown, from the public’s viewpoint and also from the perspective of teachers and administrators, the successful school is not simply a school with high achievement scores but is also a school with positive social relations and a positive climate” (Ingersoll, p. 193). Organization theorists have long held that organizational climate is intimately connected to organizational productivity.

While asking teachers to participate may have its benefits, not all teachers were comfortable serving in decision-making roles (Smylie, 1992). In his study, Smylie found that teachers were most interested in instructional and staff development decisions and less so in personnel and other administrative decisions. In later research, Smylie et al. (2007) found that trust placed a key role in true distributed leadership and that teachers were more willing to take on larger roles when a reciprocal trust relationship had been
Ultimately, involving teachers in decision making was seen as a way of improving collaboration and, in turn, innovation. Dee, Henkin & Pell (2002) surveyed full-time teachers in 11 elementary schools using site-based management. They were attempting to identify variables linked to “perceived support” for innovation and creativity. The teachers completed the Siegel Scale of Support for innovation (SSSI) instrument – a 61-item, self-report document using a Likert scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 6 (agree strongly). Teachers also completed communications and work autonomy scales. Positive associations were found between support for innovation and communication openness, formalization, and teacher autonomy.

“One way to achieve a major improvement, to bring learning back into the classroom, especially for the most disadvantaged, is to give all parents greater control over their children’s schooling.”

from Milton and Rose Friedman (Free to Choose)

Parent Participation / Influence / Empowerment

If parents are truly going to have some say in what schools are doing, principals and teachers have to make them part of the solution (and not part of the problem) (Marzano et. al., 2005). In his meta-analysis of effective school reforms, Marzano found one of the factors related to school improvement was parent and community involvement. He says that it involves three related elements: communication, participation, and
governance. Communication was defined as newsletters, phone call, home visits, etc. – even email and chat rooms. Participation is the extent to which parents and community members are involved in the day-to-day running of the school (ie. classroom aides, hallway and lunchroom duty, clerical assistants, etc.). Governance includes parent involved in decision making and policy and is closely analogous to citizen involvement in their government.

Research on whether parents were more involved in site-based managed schools was mixed. Some findings showed that lip service was paid to parents but no “real” involvement was present. Also, un-educated, low-income parents were also left with little say (much like they were typically treated in non-site-based managed schools) (Beck & Murphy, 1999). In their case study of parental involvement in one low income, urban school, Beck and Murphy observed classrooms and parent meetings and conducted interviews with parents to determine what kind of involvement (and impact) parents had.

They reported that attempts to improve academic performance and parent and community empowerment sometimes found the two goals working in opposing directions. While the professional educators were tying to incorporate a laser-like focus on student achievement, it sometimes excluded parents from the process (Beck & Murphy, 1999). The case study revealed a truth that other schools have reported -- that having more parents on campus doesn’t guarantee that they have any real influence over decisions, curriculum, etc. This led them to make a distinction between parental “involvement” and parental “engagement.”

In Dade County, Florida (Miami), schools began to decentralize in the late 1980s
by giving control over to their principals and teachers. Three years later, teachers
reported that they were fairly happy with the change, but parents reported that they saw
no difference. When parents with children in “site-based” schools were asked if they
were treated with respect, 62 percent said yes – the same percentage as those whose
children attended schools that were not “site-based” (Wooster, 1994).

Much of the research on parent involvement in schools showed that parents were
not always welcome in the schools and that some parents reported a hostile tension
between themselves and the school professionals (Bredeson, 1985). Bredeson found that
in only one out of five schools studied were parents highly involved and that most parents
were likely to have a “tangential” relationship with their schools and not a true
partnership. The extent of participation by parents and community members in decision
making was found to be dependent upon the perspectives they bring to the table,
including the parent’s socio-economic status.

Visits to many schools found parents talking with their child’s teachers or
attending a sporting event to watch their sons or daughters. Whereas, attendance and
interest in school council meeting tended to be a less (Fullan, 1991). Like other aspects of
site-based management, parental engagement and empowerment did not show a direct
link to school-wide student achievement but it did impact individual student success in
areas such as motivation and attendance (Comer, 1984; Jackson & Cooper, 1989). While
most educators were happy to have parents involved in their students’ lives, most
principals and teachers were unwilling to share their power over decisions equally with
parents (Van Galen, 1997).
“Most likely, a school is an admixture of positive and negative influences searching for a working equilibrium. To find proper balance and meet the needs of a changing society, school leaders must learn to adopt and adapt.”

from M. James Kedro (2004)

Organizational Conditions for Quality School Reform

Some of the research on site-based reform attempted to frame the strategies or conditions needed for this collaborative way of work to take hold and be effective (Grauwe, 2005; Bauer & Bogotch, 2006). Research had already been cited that points out the wide variety of site-based implementation plans and the varied definitions of what it looks like in schools. Grauwe (2005) reviewed the literature on leadership and school reform from several different countries and attempted to synthesize the key findings. He found several strategies that were in place to ensure quality site-based reform. 1.) Guaranteeing that all schools have certain basic resources. 2.) Developing an effective school-support system. 3.) Providing schools with regular information on their performance and advice on how they might improve and 4.) Emphasizing the motivational element in the management work of the school principal.

In trying to inform the variety of site-based practices already in play, Leithwood and Menzies (1998) identify four models of school-based management: Administrative control, where the principal is dominant; Professional control, in which the teachers have the authority; Community control, where a local group or board (usually involving parents) is in charge; and Balanced control, in which the parents and the professionals
share equal authority. Deciding what type of site-based management a school wants is one of the first steps in implementation.

In *Reallocating resources: How to boost student achievement without asking for more* (2001), Odden and Archibald presented an aggressive plan for schools to take charge of their own solutions and their own funds. Several authors on site-based management warned that any plan that does not provide schools with control of the money isn’t really site-based management at all (Ouchi, 2003; Odden & Archibald, 2001; Fullan, 1991). Some said “true” site-based management was not really in operation if the central office still controls the money; the central office still controls the staffing and/or hiring; and the central office has to approve decisions made by the principal or school council. If principals did not control the budget, they were not really practicing site-based decision making. “Follow the money – that’s where the control lies” (Ouchi, 2003, p. 15).

Before schools could move to site-based management, conditions had to be ripe (Odden & Archibald, 2001). Researchers who have studied large-school organizational change identify three key steps in this process (Mohrman & Cummings, 1989). The first step was called laying the foundation (determining the values, determining the needs, etc). For this step, principals should first educate the faculty (and other stakeholders) using data and then empower them (Odden & Archibald, 2001). “Given this detailed picture of their schools, staff members felt well equipped to investigate curricular programs that had proven effective elsewhere and that fit their needs and their school philosophy” (p. 13). The second step required analysis of the organizational elements
that produces performance improvements in the desired areas (designing the changes that need to occur). The third step in a large-scale organizational change process, which certainly describes both school restructuring and resource allocation, was implementation, monitoring, and continuous improvement.

With or without a mandate to operate as a “site-based” school, administrators who opened avenues of input and involvement developed stakeholders’ feelings of empowerment. To be sure, some principals have moved forward without an official decree from the central office (David, 1996, Murphy & Beck, 1995). Murphy and Beck (1995) and Wohlstetter, Van Kirk, Robertson, and Mohrman (1997) stated that while increasing student achievement is a goal of site-based management, the notion by itself will not foster improvement without a sustained interaction among stakeholders and a direction for those conversations that is tied to curriculum and instructional reforms.

No matter what, schools were most successful when they focused on instruction first – no matter how they reorganized themselves. Both Elmore and Peterson (1996) and Murphy and Beck (1995) found that schools that attempted site-based management without focusing on instruction were not successful. Fullan and Watson (2000) were critical of much of the research around site-based management because important conditions were rarely in place, starting with full control and authority.

In most cases, key aspects of authority were still retained at the district or regional level. Secondly, decentralization usually referred to “structural” elements (such as site-based councils) and that missed the day-to-day capacities and activities that make a school work (Fullan & Watson, 2000).
Site-based management was not presented by most researchers as a solution, per se. Instead, it was seen as a way of work that bred better solutions. Put another way, it was not viewed as an end, but as a means to an end (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Fullan, 1991, 1999; Murphy & Beck, 1995). The key “aspects” of site-based management were more important in the end: professional learning communities and a collaborative culture (Fullan & Watson, 2000).

Schools can be improved in many ways, including the school’s curriculum, culture and environment, when all stakeholders take a personal stake in the school because they see themselves as owning the improvements and impacting their own environment (David, 1996). Wohlstetter, Van Kirk, Robertson, and Mohrman (1997) found seven conditions that existed in schools that restructured successfully. Those conditions included the knowledge and skills around decision-making and problem-solving; a sense of power to make or influence decisions; a leadership style that provides focus and direction during the time of change; a guiding school vision or mission; district or state guidelines that are focused on instruction; and the resources needed to make change a reality.

Radford (2000) suggested that collaborative, critical inquiry takes lots of time (and that makes shared decision-making a hard sell when school staff members are already pressed for time). Making matters worse is that a collaborative culture presupposes that all staff members are familiar with the aims of the school. In fact, Radford argued that much is supposed – like whether teachers want to be involved in the first place and whether they even share the values and mission of the school. If
appropriate steps were not taken to ensure “buy-in” and methodical implementation, then the site-based transition failed (Bauer & Bogotch, 2006). Many of the past site-based management attempts failed solely on the basis of implementation and were replaced by pre-packaged programs with a mandate to principals and teachers that says: Here it is, implement it (Bauer & Bogotch, 2006).

In 1998, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the state had provided sufficient funds to the 28 urban school districts that were the focus of that state’s school finance controversies. In essence, the Court told the schools to figure out something different if they wanted to stretch their current funding and reform their schools (Odden & Archibald, 2001). Even with this mandate, schools in New Jersey (like those elsewhere) had to begin with some deep introspection before they could jump right into site-based management. “Without a new educational strategy – or vision – schools would not have a road map for which resources to drop and which resources to add” (Odden & Archibald, 2001, p. 7). Research showed that many schools were being forced to manage their own decisions and resources without any real sense of how to pull it off. In studies that were designed to show whether site-based management had any real effect on student learning, researchers found that there was a significant implementation gap among site-based schools (Ringwalt, et. al., 2004) and that made it hard to measure variables with any certainty or to generalize the results with any confidence.
“The distribution of control and influence in schools profoundly affects how well schools function.”

from Richard Ingersoll (2003)

The Struggle for Power and Control

School districts tended to function as bureaucracies. Using definitions founded by Max Weber (1946), bureaucracy is viewed as the modern embodiment of formal rationality – the methodical creation of systems of impersonal rules, routines, regulations, and procedures as the means to accomplish predetermined ends with maximum efficiency (Ingersoll, 2003). The bureaucratic model of organizational administration is characterized by a hierarchical chain of command, a specialized division of labor, standardized operating procedures and routines and, of foremost importance, control. “Its guiding image is that of the smooth-functioning machine” (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 31). Bureaucracy is certainly highly efficient and functional as a model but it is also, as Weber lamented, an “iron cage” of rigidity, inflexibility, and inhumaneness. It’s the ultimate system of rationalization (Ingersoll, 2003).

Organizational theorists, beginning in the 1970s, offered a new way to describe work and organizations that were difficult to bureaucratize (like schools). They called them “loosely coupled systems,” “organized anarchies,” and “decoupled organizations.” Schools are the archetypal loosely coupled system (Ingersoll, 2003). Ironically, school districts were not found to be this way. Most school districts in America had large central offices that operated more like insurance firms and less like schools. Many of the
professionals working in central office jobs worked out of cubicles or large offices, had no contact with children, and rarely visited schools or classrooms. While central offices continue to exist to serve schools, they are certainly not schools. The appear quite large in most school districts because they house the operation and maintenance functions, the transportation and food systems, and the business office, and also provide instructional support. Together these functions were found to comprise 25% of the overall operating budget of a district (Odden & Archibald, 2001).

Knowing this gives one a sense of how hard it is to decentralize with so much money (and so many central office personnel) at stake. Handing over the money and authority to schools means taking it away from the people who have it in the central offices. This means a transfer of power and it may help explain why some school districts haven’t given over total control just yet (Odden & Archibald, 2001). “Some districts are deciding that because schools may be better able to maximize budget efficiencies than the central office, they should receive lump-sum budgets and discretion to reallocate their budgets for different strategies. Still other districts are beginning to implement school-based management in a more general sense, where the district or state sets core goals and measures results, but school determine how to accomplish those goals” (Odden, Archibald, p. 4). In this way, power and control may be viewed on a sliding scale. While some districts are providing only monetary control (see Orange County / Orlando, Florida), others are providing schools no money but total curricular and operational control.

Controlling people and things was the idea behind centralization (and the
bureaucracy it creates). It is a “rational” notion – a way or ordering things, of controlling (Ingersoll, 2003). The problem is that schools are typically not that way. They are each different and dynamic. This is why critics suggest that centralized power runs counter to innovation and stifles individual creativity on the part of the school and the teacher (Ingersoll, 2003). “While the bureaucratic model is preferable from an administrative viewpoint, it is not, they argue, from a teaching viewpoint” (p. 34).

One critical study on decentralization and power/authority was the International Survey of the Locus of Decision-Making in Education Systems, conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in 1990-1991 and 1997-1998. Its objective was to determine the level of centralization or decentralization at the elementary and secondary education systems in different nations. The survey focused on 35 key decisions that could conceivably be made at a local school district or individual school level. It then determined whether these decisions were indeed made by school districts or schools themselves, or whether they were decided at the state/regional or national/federal levels of governance. The decisions concerned key administrative and educational issues. The survey asked, for example, who determines such things as the design of the overall school curriculum; the objectives and content for particular courses; the selection of course textbooks; the methods used to track or group students; the admission, promotion, and dismissal of students; the creation and staffing of new schools, etc. (Ingersoll, 2003).

The OECD studies distinguished between decision-making control exercised at the school-district level and at the school level, and the data show that in the United
States a relatively large proportion of decisions (50 percent) are either strongly influenced or entirely made by the schools themselves” (Ingersoll, p. 73). Still, budgetary control continued to be held (for the most part) at the district level.

Even if all resources were given to the schools, there was nothing to suggest that other power struggles would not ensue (Tannenbaum, 1968). The entire notion of site-based, collaborative decisions posited that human beings from different roles will give-and-take until a sound decision is made, but Tannenbaum argued that effective participation does not mean power equalization. Another way to look at it was this: Personalities and power struggles play a unique role in schools where leadership is distributed and decisions are made in collaborative ways. In short, it’s easier to make decisions when you’re the only one in the room.

Principals were also found to be caught up in power struggles at the school sites and blinded by input provided by others. People with power were often expected to identify the organization’s problems for the group (Hosking & Morley, 1988). Leaders exercised influence in other ways as well, including their efforts to shape how the decisions were made and how information was distributed (Razik & Swanson, 1995).

The assumption then that schools that are empowered to make their own decisions will make better ones was not always the case. The research also suggested that not all schools (and principals) will do right by site-based management – either because they lacked the skills to pull it off or because they chose to manipulate the system (Razik & Swanson, 1995; Bradley & Miller, 1991). True restructuring and shared decision-making increased the knowledge and skill sets of all stakeholders and lessened the likelihood of
“site-based” schools remaining hierarchical and/or feigning collaboration (Ingersoll, 2003). This disempowerment perspective sought to expand the scope of legitimate employee input and influence to include organization-wide policies and conditions. In this view, “Teachers are not (but out to be) treated as professionals; schools are (and ought not to be) top-heavy bureaucracies; and no significant improvements can occur in America’s systems of public education unless schools are fundamentally restructured” (Ingersoll, p. 57).

“Of course, I will follow them; I am their leader.”
Anonymous

Realizations / Ponderings / Provocations

In his book The New Meaning of Educational Change, Fullan (1991) looks at the Ferris wheel of “change” that schools have ridden for much of their histories. He sorts through the mess and attempts to distill the key lessons learned about how educators are to cope with and influence that change. He argues that only teachers, principals and parents can affect true change and that any mandate from above is sure to fail. To complete the metaphor, Fullan (and other reformers) suggested that it was time for educators and parents to get off the Ferris wheel and try a new ride.

This new vision of schools was presented as much more collaborative and collegial than anything seen in the past. It involves schools with nearly full autonomy and financial wherewithal to create their own futures. It sees teachers (and principals) as
“interactive professionals” – not isolated ones (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Fullan, 1991). “I see teachers and others working in small groups interacting frequently in the course of planning, testing new ideas, attempting to solve different problems, assessing effectiveness, etc. It is interactive in the sense that giving and receiving advice and help would be the natural order of things. Teachers would be continuous learners in a community of interactive professionals” (p. 142).

In this new vision of collaborative schooling, parents were to be key contributors in how kids learn and where the money is spent. Defining parent “involvement” is not easy in a system that has typically shut parents out (Beck & Murphy, 1999; Paddock, 1979). This new way of work would mean parents would do more than serve on boards (which if one form of site-based management). In 1979, Paddock wrote his controversial paper: “The Myth of Parent Involvement Through Advisory Councils,” that still has relevance 30 years later. In that paper, he claimed that the idea of parents participating as true decision-makers was a myth because principals dominated information flow and decisions.

If collaboration is going to work, the key to this new way of doing things is the principal (Ouchi, 2003; Fullan, 1991). Because the personalities and skill sets of principals varies so much, schools may succeed or fail based upon the types of principals that are put in place. In Fullan’s studies, one common trait of a good principal was his or her “collaborative” nature – a lead learner who was bent on creating collaborative and professional work cultures. Whatever they are, principals cannot be left as middle managers. They must move from being “manager principals” to serving as “initiator
principals” (Ouchi, 2003; Fullan, 1991).

This was viewed by researchers as more difficult by the very nature of schools themselves. As loosely coupled systems, they are dynamic and messy. One of the fundamental challenges this created was the problem of control and consent: how does one harness the skill and expertise of employees and still ensure the simultaneous need for both organizational accountability and employee commitment? (Ingersoll, 2003). “If they are to succeed, organizations must coordinate, control, and hold accountable their individual members, but organizations are also dependent on the cooperation, motivation, and expertise of those same individuals” (p. 218).

Schools improved only when restructuring combined accountability and capacity-building strategies (Fullan, 2005). With most accountability structures, mandates were typically imposed from above with a great emphasis on punitive measures for schools that didn’t meet the standard. Fullan reviewed studies that showed top-down accountability improved scores in the short run but provided no lasting change within the school building (ie. no increased capacity). Similar studies in England led policy-makers in that country to de-emphasize punitive measures around accountability standards and re-emphasize capacity-building, leadership development, and self-review.

Capacity-building in schools begins with the principal but includes teacher-leaders and parents (Kedro, 2004). “The people touched by the school, all those who comprise it – students, parents, teachers, administrators, and members of the community – must collectively grasp the reins of school leadership” (Kedro, p. ix). When that occurred, schools began to believe in their ability to solve their own problems. School
districts found that this did not happen quickly, especially when schools spent years relying on others to decide for them (Bradley & Miller, 1991). Teachers and parents (and even principals) were not always ready to take on this challenge, either from a lack of confidence in themselves (or in the system) or from a lack of understanding. Bradley and Miller (1991) provided a model of “functional responsibilities” that a principal must have in a site-based managed school but they also pointed out that most principals have never been called on to employ these skill sets and that many were not ready for this change.

The principals who have garnered the most success in shaping a vision for their schools and seeing significant achievement gains were those who dared to take charge of their school reform in spite of the suffocating nature of district and state bureaucracy (Kedro, 2004; Ouchi, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003). Leech and Fulton (1994) found that the more “risk taking behavior” exhibited by the principal the greater the teachers’ perceived their input in policy decisions (p. 638). Wooster (1994), asked this question: “If principals are barred from exercising their independent initiative, how can schools be successfully reformed?” (p. 48). The research seems clear that the most effective principals were those who engendered an entrepreneurial spirit and that kind of ethic was often made easier in schools that had a philosophy of site-based management.

Conclusion

The literature review showed that there were many success stories to draw upon after 30 years of aggressive school reform and management efforts in school districts around the world. The research also revealed that site-based management alone wasn’t
enough as each school and school district carried out the mandates of site-based control in different ways and in varying degrees. The most compelling research supported decision-making in its most distributive and transformative manner, even with a social justice / advocacy bent.

Nearly all of the successful school reform efforts found through this literature review began with a leap of faith that schools could run themselves better than the central office could. They also began with principals who were willing to take ownership of their buildings and share that responsibility with their teachers, parents and students: an uneasy trinity at best.

This literature review confirmed the critical role that the principal plays in carrying out changes in school culture and teacher and parent empowerment. The research findings supported the need for further data collection that included direct feedback from the principals themselves. Chapter Three will outline the key methodological steps that were used in this study to find additional data that is needed to add depth and context to the current research. The research design methodology, data collection methods and participant selection procedures will be further explicated in the following chapter.
Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines and explicates the research methods that were used to capture and document the experiences of secondary school principals at the center of site-based reform efforts. A rationale for the methodology, the selection of the participants, the data collection techniques and the researchers own biases are also addressed in this chapter. A discussion of phenomenology as a theoretical framework is discussed as well as detailed research structure. The qualitative paradigm and methods are explained and supported in light of the gaps in the literature described in Chapter Two.

Introduction / Rationale

For this study, the most fitting techniques for data collection and review came from qualitative methods that sought to capture the research subjects (in this case, principals) as they really were. It was obvious from the literature review that a number of quantitative studies related to site-based management and principal leadership styles were in place and most of the methods used to date involved the review of survey data and, to a lesser degree, observational data. I attempted to add context and complexity to that data by utilizing a number of qualitative methods, including multiple interviews with the
principals. This study endeavored to capture the actions and viewpoints of the principals as they attempted to build effective schools and collegial cultures.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) stated that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the means people bring to them” (p. 2). In his revised definition, Creswell (2007) suggested that qualitative researchers collect data “in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study” (p. 37). He adds that, in recent years, qualitative research designs involved closer attention to the “interpretive nature of inquiry and situating the study within the political, social, and cultural context of the researchers, the participants, and the readers of the study” (p. 37). Submitting to the idea that objective reality can never be realized, the qualitative researcher sets out to get a fix on the subject at hand, using whatever means necessary. As an alternative to the quantitative mission of validation, the qualitative researcher uses a number of methods to triangulate and hone in on the subject to best capture its nature. The subjective reality of that process is recognized and even embraced by the researcher, with full disclosure (Creswell, 2007). As a qualitative researcher, I used empirical materials (recorded interviews, field notes, and observation) and took a phenomenological approach. This approach requires the researcher to focus on the phenomena themselves – the principals and their lived experiences.

**Phenomenology: A theoretical framework**

Much of the research that is linked to phenomenology began with the
philosophical elucidations of Edmund Husserl (1913) and Martin Heidegger (1962) and was later shaped for social scientists by Alfred Schutz (1964). Phenomenology as a research focus endeavors to describe a phenomenon as it is, the subjective reality of an event. The researcher is tasked to capture the here and now as the only real truth, the only reality. In Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology (1931), Husserl makes clear the distinction between the sciences of fact (like psychology) and the sciences of “essential being” (like phenomenology) (p. 40). Husserl rejects the notion that phenomenology, a science of phenomena, is simply a subdomain of empirical sciences that views things as factual. Instead, he argues that everything is relative – existing in a spatio-temporal existence. “Individual being of every kind is, to speak quite generally, accidental” (p. 47). Husserl, Heidegger and later Maurice Merleau-Ponty broadened the definition of phenomena or “experience” to include more complex matters than most would include in the more common, narrow sense of these words.

In a text based on Heidegger’s lectures (1980), the philosopher posits a distinction between what is known and knowledge or, more precisely, “the mediation between what is known and knowledge” (p. 47). In a complex array of examples, Heidegger unfolds his philosophy of the now – that any attempts to place experiences in a larger context are flawed at conception. Heidegger puts it this way: “Mediation is in turn transmitted into the means by which the mediation knows what is known.” (p. 47). Stated a bit clearer, one person’s experiences in the moment are likely to be different than someone else’s (Schutz & Luckman, 1973). “The lifeworldly stock of knowledge is related in many ways to the situation of the experiencing subject. It is built on sedimentations of formerly
actually present experiences that were bound to situations. Inversely, every actually present experience is inserted into the flow of lived experience and into a biography” (p. 99). As a qualitative researcher, I attempted to capture those lived experiences that shaped the real-time biographies of the participants sitting in front of me.

In his rambling take on individualism and experience, Moustakas (1967) warns that there is no certainty beyond the moment and that any researcher / historian / biographer who attempts to quantify the experiences of others is doomed to misinterpretation. Moustakas claims that every individual and every experience is unique and that it is futile to talk about it or define it. “Only the person can fully know what he sees, what he hears, and what he feels to be fundamentally true” (p. 13). This is one of the reasons why I pursued a qualitative study that viewed my interpretations as my own, as subjective renderings of the truth (and yet a truer reality than I might find through quantitative methods). “It is the mystery of the reality that matters. Not why it exists, but that it exists. No why I suffer, but that I suffer…The existential moments of life do not contain a why, but only the reality that man is constructed as he is” (p. 21).

The complexities of man are what make the social sciences unique fields for study, and unlike the physical sciences. While experiments and findings in the physical sciences can be quantified, disaggregated and even replicated, the social sciences are rarely afforded such assurances. In this way, phenomenology rejects reality as defined by the physical sciences – known as “scientific realism.” As one example, phenomenology in its purest form rejects the dualism of mind and body as espoused by Descartes and others (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991). Researchers pursuing a phenomenological
study see no such dichotomy. They do not attempt to separate the mind and body of man because the two co-exist and cannot be separated.

At present, three schools of thought have formed since Husserl’s first conception of phenomenology. Husserl’s eidetic application is purely descriptive. The researcher’s aim is to describe the meaning of an experience from the view of person who is experiencing it. Heidegger offers a wider view of experience in his interpretation of phenomenology, called hermeneutic. It takes into consideration the context that surrounds the experience, leading to a more telling, interpretive description. A third school of thought combines the first two and is often referred to as the Dutch or Utrecht school.

Schutz (1964) argued that social scientists should focus on the ways that the life world is produced and experienced by its members. That kind of thinking runs counter to the idea that the life world is just out there – like an impulse item in the grocery story. To put it another way, social scientists who pursue phenomenological approaches recognize that nothing can exist and nothing has context or complexity without the messiness of lived experience. For this reason, I studied principals in their school settings. The study was intended to lead to a greater understanding of the principals and of myself as a researcher (and current principal). These are some of the reasons that I pursued qualitative approaches as more adaptable, more mutable and better fitting this research exercise.

*Portraiture: A Technique*

The notion of capturing the true essence of the research subject is a harrowing
task, wrought with a number of vipers that could be harmful (if not deadly). The first problem at hand is crafting a profile of each principal that accurately depicts the participant’s true nature, both the physicality and spirituality of their work. Social scientists who use quantitative methods are hard-pressed to capture this sense about people. Instead, they are focused on hard data that can be tested, validated and generalized. With a large sample size, some sense of what works and what doesn’t work in schools can be determined. Still, what remains is an inexact variable (the practitioner himself) and the untidiness of daily life.

Without conversations with the subjects themselves, we’re left to ponder what’s next -- panging for context. This reality is what drove me to a qualitative endeavor. I believe that profiling the principals was better accomplished with a smaller sample size and more aptly fitted to qualitative techniques. I considered several methods and decided to use the technique of portraiture as most fitting this study. This technique was popularized by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), whose profile of some of the nation’s best high schools (The Good High School) was written in a narrative style (unique at that time) that combined the story-telling techniques of the fiction writer with the research standards of the social scientist. Portraiture, a kind of “clinical storytelling,” is related to action research, case study and appreciative inquiry. It is a type of storytelling that is meant to reveal a true picture of a subject, a more complete picture than the subject might write about himself. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), the focus of any good portrait is the way it reveals the nuance and complexity of the whole – resisting the reductionism that comes with other techniques (especially those in the quantitative
Creating a portrait in this way involves the blending of art and science, shaped by a dialogue between the creative scientist (in this case, me) and the dedicated practitioner (in this case, the principals). I had made a couple of early (and sometimes crude) attempts at using portraiture as part of my doctoral coursework. I also read a number of examples of portraiture in an effort to comprehend the key elements of this technique. One that I found most useful and relevant was by three doctoral candidates who used portraiture to capture their experiences as students. In their article, Murakami-Ramalho, Piert and Militello (2008) use extended metaphors to tie their narratives into one unified tale. “We were collaboratively crafting images of each other, each sharing the paintbrush (p. 812). In the end, each writer helped the other craft a more complete telling of their story. Another helpful example was by a Yale researcher who used portraiture as part of her critical feminist research on African women (Ngunjiri, 2007). After several unsuccessful attempts to characterize African women leaders, Ngunjiri chose portraiture because she felt that the other techniques she considered provided a greater likelihood of bias and misinterpretation. She argues that portraiture provided a canvas for her studies that would be “emancipatory and empowering for both participant and the researcher” (p. 3). I followed the same path in light of my exploratory questions and of my search for a critical approach to the research.

In the tradition of portraiture, I endeavored to combine the five essential elements as outlined in The Art and Science of Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). The table below depicts the integration of the five features, which work together to
complete a scientific and artistic sense of the study participants. A goodly amount of data collection, reflection and relationship-building was required to complete each of the features: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes and aesthetic whole. This endeavor brought me closer to answering the research questions that I posed about how site-based management works best in schools and how these principals have travailed to build community in their buildings.

Table 2: The Five Essential Elements of Portraiture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Five Essential Elements of Portraiture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic Whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from The Art and Science of Portraiture (1997) by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis
In the light of full disclosure, I recognize that telling the stories of these principals was a subjective enterprise. There was no way that I could submit to the expectations (and limitations) of complete objectivity. To be sure, these were stories of four principals as I saw them (and as they saw themselves). This posits that another researcher would interview and observe these principals and see something else. In this way, all research tied to the social sciences is bound by time and context and that makes promising reliability nearly impossible. I can only promise that what I presented in this study was what I saw and that the themes that emerged were presented accurately. The research standard then for this qualitative study was “authenticity” rather than reliability or validity (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). Moustakas (1994) describes this level of reporting as intersubjective validity, a sort of back and forth between the researcher and researched that refines the information to a high level of accuracy and confirmability. “Reciprocal correcting of reality takes place in social conversations and dialogues” (p. 57). Janesick (2004) describes this social constructivist approach to research as more fluid and transformative – like the movements of a dancer. “Many qualitative researchers see research as participatory, dialogic, transformative, and educative” (p. 10). This constructivist model rejects the post-positivist practice of interviewing as unidirectional. I viewed the conversations with the principals as inductive, starting with broad questions and slowly searching out patterns of meaning. The constructivist worldview often manifests itself in phenomenological studies because it provides for individuals to offer up their experiences in an unfiltered fashion (Creswell,
I used this approach as a basis for learning more about how the principals managed their school environments.

The Role of the Researcher

The idea that the researcher and participant have a dynamic relationship is a key understanding in qualitative research (Janesick, 2004; Kvale, 1996). The data then is interpreted and in hopes of finding meaning and understanding. All research then is value-laden (Berg, 2004). As I qualitative researcher, I analyzed and interpreted the multiple realities that appeared before me (Creswell, 2007). I pursued this research from an ontological position that reality is subjective, as defined by the participants themselves. As a doctoral student and former journalist, I understood that thrusting myself into the role of interviewer would provide me a unique opportunity to be the primary research instrument for this study. This is common in a qualitative phenomenological study (Janesick, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). My work as a newspaper reporter has provided me with valuable experience in interviewing and listening, two skills that are key to good qualitative research and story-telling. I also have worked for seven years as a school-level and district-level administrator and I know that these experiences shaped my questions, my data collection and my sense-making throughout this study.

With an exacting approach, I attempted to report on these multiple realities in making a case for more complete pictures of the participants. I carried with me a phenomenological lens, taking a subjective stance that didn’t attempt to make sense of
everything. I have some limited experience in this regard, having taken a class on qualitative case methods at the University of South Florida. For the course, I conducted a pilot study that honed my research skills and helped me to appreciate qualitative inquiry as a research model. I learned in that class to conduct myself like a social scientist in the way I listen, take careful notes and review the transcripts of the interview for critical themes and symbols.

I was drawn to study the work of principals because I have come to view them as key agents for school reform. As a high school English teacher for 10 years, I worked for several principals and was struck by their variety of visions and work ethics. I also had the unique opportunity work with all middle and high school principals in Pinellas County, Florida, as the district’s Supervisor for Secondary Reading (a job that had me visiting all secondary schools in the district and serving as a lead trainer of principals in the area of literacy). Again, I came to view the principals as the key components to school improvement and culture-building in their schools.

I have been clear in this study about my previous and current work experience and the biases that I bring to this study. Though I have a fair amount of experience as a school administrator, I attempted to rely on the participant’s views of his or her surroundings with few (if any) preconceived notions on my part. To do otherwise would have impugned the research process. In their text on portraiture, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis speak to the balance that a qualitative researcher must find between crafting a good story and crafting good scholarship. “The shaping hand of the investigator is counterbalanced by the skepticism and scrutiny that is the signature of good research
The process of good scholarship begins with exhaustive data collection, using multiple forms of data. This course of action is a laborious one for the qualitative researcher (Creswell, 2007). “One helpful way to see this process is to recognize it as working through multiple levels of abstraction, starting with the raw data and forming larger and larger categories” (p. 43). My data collection steps are outlined below.

Data Collection Methods

The primary data sources for this study were in-depth, individual interviews (with field notes), documents from the school sites, and a researcher’s reflective journal. The qualitative interviews provided a wealth of information on the study participants (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). A good qualitative interviewer is able to delve into the souls of the participants and present their realities with great depth and credibility. Working from an interpretive constructivist paradigm, the interviews that I conducted revealed much about the participants – both the expected and unexpected. I also found that the interviews revealed a good deal about me.

The taped interviews were conducted in person, followed by a transcription of the interviews and an analysis of the data. I identified and coded variables using Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) five steps for data analysis. In the tradition of portraiture, I attempted to bring interpretive sight and analytic scrutiny to the data by searching out the themes that emerged before me (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). Using a responsive interviewing model developed by Rubin and Rubin (2005), I attempted to balance critical
inquiry with scientific ethics (even empathy). Having multiple interviewees as well as the data from the site-based documents and reflective journal allowed me to triangulate the findings and provide greater confirmability for the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, Janesick, 2004). Triangulation is a research procedure that calls for “multiple and different sources, methods, investigators and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 1988, p. 202). Below are the characteristics of the model by Rubin and Rubin that I employed to provide a fair and consistent research standard during my data collection.

1.) Interviewing is about obtaining interviewees’ interpretations of their experiences and their understanding of the worlds in which they live and work.

2.) The personality, style, and beliefs of the interviewer matter. Interviewing is an exchange, not a one-way street; the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is meaningful, even if temporary. Because the interviewer contributes actively to the conversation, he or she must be aware of his or her own opinions, experiences, cultural definitions, and even prejudices.

3.) Because responsive interviews depend on a personal relationship between interviewer and interviewee and because that relationship may result in the exchange of private information or information dangerous to the interviewee, the interviewer incurs serious ethical obligations to protect the interviewee. Moreover, the interviewer is imposing on the time, energy, emotion, and creativity of the interviewee and therefore owes loyalty and protection in return.

4.) Interviewers should not impose their views on interviewees. They should ask
broad enough questions to avoid limiting what interviewees can answer, listen to what interviewees tell them, and modify their question to explore what they are hearing, not what they thought before they began the interview.

5.) Responsive interviewing design is flexible and adaptive. Because the interviewer must listen intently and follow up insights and new points during the interview, the interviewer must be able to change course based on what he or she learns. Interviewers may need to change whom they plan to talk to or where they plan to conduct an interview as they find out more about their research questions.

I created an interview protocol to guide my efforts at the school sites (see Appendix A). Still, I found it necessary to adapt my intellectual agenda in a qualitative fashion to match the people and settings that I found. As I went, I kept a researcher’s reflective journal – a sort of reflective accounting of what I had seen, key interpretations, emerging hypotheses, and possible methodological and ethical problems. This record ensured the highest level of empirical and aesthetic resonance.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with a school administrator to test the interview protocol in an effort to clarify or modify the questions. I was especially mindful of bias, timing and the reactions from the interviewee. The questions were reviewed and adjusted per this process. A similar pilot protocol was created and tested in the fall of 2008 as part of a doctoral course in qualitative methods. As a result of those studies, I believe that the questions used were open-ended and general enough that the respondents were free to
articulate as they saw fit.

*Researcher’s Reflective Journal*

As I undertook this study, I kept a journal of what I saw and how I felt in an effort to capture the real sense of the participants and their settings. The reflective journal is a key instrument in qualitative research because it captures the key observations and insights of the researcher and recognizes that the researcher is a primary instrument of the study (Janesick, 2004). The journal helped me to resolve cognitive dissonance and provided a level of precision about what was happening in the study, a record of problems that came about, and a record of personal beliefs and biases that might have impacted the study narrative. Janesick (2004) provides five ways in which reflective journaling can support the researcher (and the research):

1.) Helps to focus the study

2.) Helps set the groundwork for analysis and interpretation

3.) Serves as a tool for revisiting notes and transcripts

4.) Serves as a tool to awaken the imagination

5.) Helps to keep the written record of thoughts, feelings, and facts (p. 149)

I also found that the journaling began to shape the narrative that formed much of my work in Chapters Four and Five.

*Site-Based Documents*

For this study, it was critical to get a sense of the organizational structures of the
schools, the school budgets and key correspondences between the principals and their teachers and staffs. A number of the interview questions were designed to probe these types of interactions. Each school’s detailed school grade data was also reviewed in order to form a more complete narrative. A verbatim transcript of the taped interviews was also kept in hard-copy form and reviewed for key themes and metaphors.

**Interview Format**

The interview should be a two-directional exercise that has reciprocal benefits for both the interviewer and the interviewee (Janesick, 2004; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). More specific to qualitative research, Janesick contends that the interview should result in “joint construction of meaning about a particular topic” (p. 72). To create an environment for social discourse between myself and the principals, I constructed open-ended questions that were meant to lead to greater understanding of the principals themselves (and a larger sense of effective leadership practices). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis put it this way: “A persistent irony – recognized and celebrated by novelists, poets, playwrights – is that as one moves closer to the unique characteristics of a person or a place, one discovers the universal” (p. 14). A good qualitative study views interviewers and interviewees as “conversational partners” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and characterizes their work as communal – leading toward a greater understanding of each other and the universal.

My approach mirrored McCracken’s (1998) long interview format that is intended to paint a complete portrait of each participant. Though some images may be less than
flattering, the search for goodness and triumph undergird the research questions and the research process. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) make the case for social science to focus its research on finding what works – not what doesn’t. Though some good can come from focusing on pathology, that approach can also magnify the problems and present them as more prominent than they are. “Portraiture resists this tradition-laden effort to document failure” (p. 9). Instead, researchers work to report on what’s right and what works.

*Interview Protocol*

The developed protocol included open-ended questions that were designed to provide the interviewee with free reign to do what Rubin and Rubin says is “the opportunity to answer as they see fit” (p. 157). The questions were also designed to be free from editorializing on my part. To put it another way, I tried to avoid “leading questions” the might box in the participant. Again, from Rubin and Rubin: “Be cautious about imposing your own understandings or examples in presenting a main question” (p. 157). I conducted two interviews with each participant. Since I secured four participants for this study, there were eight interviews total.

The following questions were included in my protocol (see Appendix A). I have presented each question below and a rationale for each.

1. *Describe your views on school leadership.* This question is meant to get to the participant’s big-picture beliefs about school leadership and reform. It’s what Rubin and Rubin (2005) calls a “broad-scope” question.
2. Describe your views regarding student achievement and what factors contribute to student growth. How does your leadership style impact student achievement? This question is designed to speak to the heart of my research questions around principal leadership styles and school reform. The question is meant to be open-ended and does not suggest that any one leadership style is or is not an ingredient to student achievement.

3. How do you impact change in your school in light of the mandates from the state and federal governments? This sort of insight and context is missing in the current research on principal leadership and school accountability. I also added this question because a good qualitative research study begins with broad questions and then moves into more focused questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). “At this point you are working out the questions that are intended to get the particular information you need to answer the research question” (p. 162).

4. Describe your relationship with teachers, parents and the local community. How do teachers, parents and community members impact decisions in your school? Certainly, the entire notion of distributed leadership is about empowerment (starting with the empowerment of the principals themselves). This question gets to the issue of how much control and power the principals wield and how much they feel that they share with others. The literature review addresses the idea that principals, teachers and parents who perceive they have more control are more contented in their jobs and feel more empowered (Smith & Rowley, 2005).

5. Describe the level and degree of collaboration and collegiality at your school.
How do you affect your school’s sense of collaboration and collegiality? This question is structured similar to the one above. Still, it is critical to get closer to what the principals’ perceive is greater inclusion of their teachers and parents in decision-making.

As I began to collect data, my research questions were further shaped and refined and I altered my forms of data collection to improve my chances of nabbing the morsels that were left after each visit. In this way, this study was not about me. I intended to remain humble to the task, knowing that I might need to alter my approach if I had any hope of capturing the universal essence. I know that if I were to be successful as a qualitative researcher, I must be able to reduce each individual’s experiences to some conclusions about what van Manen’s calls “the very nature of the thing” (1990).

Data Analysis / Interpretation

As each interview and site visit was completed, I carefully began the process of data analysis and interpretation. I reviewed the interview transcripts, site documents and reflective journal entries in search of direct references, narrative vignettes, and exact quotations that supported any empirical assertions that I had uncovered. Using the checklist from Janesick (2004), I highlighted themes that presented themselves across the data sets, revealed any conclusions or limitations based on my role as the researcher, and relayed any ethical considerations that needed to be shared in light of my conclusions. More specifically, followed the steps for narrative analysis outlined by Moustakas (1994) and simplified later by Creswell (2007). Those steps are as follows:
1. Write a full description of my experience with the phenomenon (the principals).

2. Compile a list of the significant statements from the data sources.

3. Group the statements into themes, often called “meaning units.”

4. Write a description of what the participants have experienced in their schools, including verbatim examples. This is called “textural description.”

5. Write a description of the setting and context for the phenomenon. This is called a “structural description.”

6. Write a composite description incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions that captures the essence of the phenomenon (with full context) (p. 159).

I attempted to present an exhaustive description of the principals, the settings, the common understandings and the themes that were founded by the data.

**Participant Selection / Criterion Sampling**

I chose to use criterion sampling because it allowed me to have greater quality assurance that all participants met the same standard (or criteria). In this case, all participants were experienced principals (minimum of five years) who worked in high schools in large school districts in Florida. All candidates were drawn from among the five largest school districts in Florida and were selected in part with input from the central office superintendents and associate superintendents in those districts. Because the sample size was so small (just four participants), the interviewees had to be
knowledgeable and had to have first-hand experience so as to increase the study’s credibility and likelihood that the results would be convincing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviews were designed to create an environment for social discourse between myself and the principals and to find what Janesick (2004) calls a “joint construction of meaning” (p. 72).

Participants for this study met the following criteria:

1.) High school principals who have served in their roles for a minimum of five years and work in large school districts. The principals were chosen from among the six largest school districts in Florida – Dade County (Miami), Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Palm Beach County (West Palm Beach), Orange County (Orlando), Hillsborough County (Tampa) and Duval County (Jacksonville).

2.) Principals who have been named as successful and innovative by the central office superintendents and associate superintendents in those districts.

3.) Principals who are willing to be interviewed at least twice during the fall of 2009 and spring/summer of 2010.

Dissertation Timeline

Once the research proposal was complete, the amount of time that this study took to complete depended on the nature and complexities of the data collection and analyses steps. Though I wanted to move forward quickly enough to maintain energy and momentum, I understood that problems would continue to arise and that timelines may
need to be adjusted accordingly. The table below is provided as an estimation of the study deadlines that were followed.

**Table 3: Dissertation Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept Paper Approval by Committee Chair</td>
<td>November 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Paper Completed, Accepted by Committee</td>
<td>January 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of Qualifying Exam</td>
<td>June 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of Proposal Draft, Reviewed by Committee Chair</td>
<td>August 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal Completed (Chapters 1, 2 and 3), Accepted by Committee</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal Pre-Defense Meeting</td>
<td>October 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal Hearing and Approval</td>
<td>November 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Approval</td>
<td>December 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation to Principals to Participate in the Study</td>
<td>December 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Round of Interviews / Transcription / Analysis</td>
<td>December 2009 – January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Round of Interviews / Transcription / Analysis</td>
<td>April – May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 Completed</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 Completed</td>
<td>December 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Draft of Dissertation Completed, Reviewed by Committee</td>
<td>January 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Defense Committee Hearing</td>
<td>February 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Defense</td>
<td>February 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Copy of Dissertation Completed</td>
<td>March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ethical Considerations*

I undertook this study with great purpose and with full knowledge of the ethical
protocols that have been crafted to guide research studies. I recognized throughout the study that all efforts must be made to protect the integrity of the participants and authenticity of the data. At a minimum, the processes of informed consent and institutional review were utilized to ensure that no one was harmed by this study. All due diligence was given to present a study that was accurate and ethical. In search of a set of guidelines, I reviewed the ethical procedures outlined by the American Educational Research Association (AERA). They included an understanding that no data should be falsified or misrepresented, that no data should be held in secret, that all research processes, problems and interpretations be fully explained, and that analyses and conclusions be presented in straightforward, readable manners.

I certainly understood that, as a researcher and portraitist, I had to build a bond of trust with all study participants in that conversations would sometimes stray into shadowy places that need not be revealed. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) offered this caution: “We engage in acts (implicit and explicit) of social transformation, we create opportunities for dialogue, we pursue the silences, and in the process, we face ethical dilemma and a great moral responsibility” (p. 11). I endeavored to create narratives that were complex and provocative but also ones that were scientifically rigorous and morally upstanding. This was my charge.

Conclusion

I attempted in this chapter to present the methodological underpinnings of a study that explored the understandings and processes of secondary principals in the era of
accountability. I endeavored to adequately present the theoretical and procedural aspects of this study. I explained the theoretical framework for the study, provided the processes for data collection and analyses and explained my role as a researcher within the accepted research practices for a qualitative study. I anticipate that this study will faithfully add to the current literature on principal leadership and school reform and be viewed as true to the highest standards of qualitative research design. In the following chapters, I will provide the results of the study and suggest some next steps for further research on the topics presented herein.
Chapter Four

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the perspectives of secondary school principals regarding their leadership styles and empowerment efforts in this era of accountability. The study attempted to siphon and cull the critical actions that principals take in making decisions, fashioning consensus and building community in their schools. This study focused on how principals build collaborative cultures because the research shows that principals and teachers who work closely together are more likely to make lasting change in student achievement.

The following exploratory questions were used to guide this study:

3.) What elements constitute the principals’ perspectives about school reform and shared decision-making?

4.) What factors influence the principals’ perspectives about school reform and shared decision-making?

The protocols and research methods were designed to garner the insights of high school principals regarding some of the reform methods that were uncovered through the literature review, including site-based management and shared decision-making,
collaborative school cultures, transformational leadership, and social justice actions.

Setting / Context

The study centered on four high school principals who were recommended by their district-level administrators as being successful in leading school reform. As per the recommendations of my doctoral committee, I did not attempt to qualify what was meant by “successful” principals. We agreed per my proposal defense that I would contact the superintendents of the six largest school districts in Florida and ask them to provide me with the names of two high school principals who they saw as successful. It is important to note that the school district in which I work is not among those six large districts and, therefore, was not considered as part of this study.

In every case, the superintendents’ secretaries put me in contact with another district-level administrator who dealt more directly with high school principals: directors of curriculum, area superintendents or associate superintendents. Each of them was cordial and helpful, though only three of the six districts supplied me with names. Two principals were contacted from three of the state’s largest districts, though only four of the six principals who I contacted agreed to take part in the study.

In communicating with the district-level administrators, I tried to be clear in our conversations that I did not want to limit the choices of principals to only those whose schools performed the highest on state and national assessments. Again, this was advice received from my doctoral committee and agreed upon by myself and my chair. In Florida, the school accountability system (using the state’s FCAT test) provides each school with a letter grade: A to F. In light of this common measure of “success,” I was
purposeful in explaining that the principals did not have to come from “A” or “B” high schools. To put it another way, I asked that any high school principal be considered who was seen by most as “successful,” no matter the type of school he or she oversaw. I sought out principals from school districts of similar size so that their experiences might be more similar than not. The four principals who agreed to take part in the study were interviewed during the fall of 2009 and spring of 2010.

Data Collection and Analysis

As a qualitative researcher, I attempted to stay true to the empirical methods of face-to-face interviews, field notes, and observation in an attempt to triangulate the data. In light of my phenomenologist viewpoint, I tried to capture the participants as they really were both textually and structurally. The figure below is provided as an outline of the research timeline and verification methods that were used.

Figure 1. Summary of Data Collection and Analysis
In light of my use of portraiture as a story-telling technique, I have presented the data by first crafting profiles of the principals and the schools and districts in which they work. In light of privacy concerns, pseudonyms were used in providing names of the principals, the schools and the school districts. The pseudonyms were chosen as a color that most closely matches the participant’s responses and the nuances of their personalities. The settings and context for each principal and school are provided as they are critical in presenting an authentic account of the participants in both a physical and spiritual sense (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). More specifically, I attempted to follow the steps for narrative analysis outlined by Moustakas (1994) and simplified later by Creswell (2007). Using the checklist from Janesick (2004), I highlighted themes that presented themselves across the data sets, revealed any conclusions or limitations based on my role as the researcher, and attempted to relay any ethical considerations that needed to be shared in light of my conclusions.

I recorded each interview using an Olympus 4100 digital recorder and then transcribed the interviews accordingly. I also took field notes as part of my researcher’s reflective journal. Most of those notes related to my impressions of the schools and the participants themselves. The notes I took also helped me to revise my protocol for the second interview and to crystallize my thinking and conclusions regarding the data. At three of the eight interviews, the digital recorder was not set properly and I missed 5-10 minutes of data at each of those three. In each case, I used my field notes to review and reconstruct the key points that were not included in the transcripts. I do not feel that any valuable data was lost per those mishaps.
The Participants

Each of the four participants was quite supportive of the study and open to spending the time necessary to answer my questions. The principals all served mid-to-large high schools (1,800 – 3,200 students) in three of the six largest school districts in Florida. In Florida, the size of the school districts is aligned to the size of each county. While that is not as common throughout the rest of the country, it is part of Florida’s school landscape and it has created enormous and sometimes unwieldy school districts where 120,000-plus students is not uncommon.

In turn, Florida’s largest metropolitan areas (Miami-Dade, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Orlando, Tampa and Jacksonville) are all part of large school districts that rank among the top 20 largest districts in the United States. Only principals from the six largest school districts were considered for this study so as to include only those persons who knew of the unique needs and considerations of large districts and because the participants would be more alike in their experiences than different. The table below is provided as a quick summary of the similarities and differences among the principals and their schools.
Though four principals agreed to participate, two others who were contacted decided not to take part. My doctoral committee was in agreement that four participants was sufficient, but I was personally disappointed that the study did not include at least one of the other two participants as one was African American (including another female principal) and he or she might have provided some unique perspectives. As a result, three of the four participants were male and all were Caucasian. I believe that the study was successful in involving principals who all ran medium-to-large, comprehensive high schools in large school districts in an era of strong state and federal accountability.

Of the four principals, two of them -- Mr. Jack Ruddy and Mr. Sean Rust -- were from different districts and two of them -- Mrs. Sheila Stone and Mr. Gabe Brightly -- were from the same district. Mrs. Stone and Mr. Brightly were colleagues and told me that they knew of each other’s schools. Neither Mr. Ruddy nor Mr. Rust knew any of the
other participants in the study. I did not know any of the participants before the study began. All of the interviews – two per participant -- were conducted at the school sites in the principals’ offices. Each of the participants was on time for the interviews and supportive of the research. I found each participant to be friendly and accommodating, though Mrs. Stone provided a sense that she was rushed and the most interested in having the interviews over with so she could get onto other things. For this reason, the interviews with her were shorter than the rest. Though I told each participant to plan for an hour for each interview, nearly all of the interviews lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. One of the interviews with Mrs. Stone lasted only 20 minutes.

The data is presented below on a case-by-case basis and in a narrative voice. Each case is presented in the same way, beginning with a “prologue” that outlines each principal’s school district and what I feel were the principal’s impressions of the study itself. Following that are the “setting” and “context” for each participant. This narrative section attempts to capture the principal as he or she really was and results from both their assessments of themselves and my own. Finally, I attempt to relay each principal’s views on leadership, school reform and shared decision-making.

*The First Case*

*Jack Ruddy / Orange City High School*

Prologue – Principal Ruddy

Principal Ruddy was one of two principals from the Central County School District who was suggested by the Central Office administrators as befitting this study.
As previously stated, one of the principals from the same district decided not to take part after my initial contact. In contrast, Mr. Ruddy was accommodating from the start and appeared eager to take part and honored to be asked. We communicated at first through email in the fall of 2009 and then had one short phone conversation before we agreed on a date and time for our first interview in December of 2009. My sense was that he had no apprehensions about me or the study. It was as if he had seen it all and done it all as a veteran principal and that he was no longer apprehensive about much.

He appeared during our early communications to be confident and cheerful, with an assuredness that most principals I encounter don’t have. I could tell over the phone that he had a charisma that drew me in, the alluring manner of a larger-than-life leader. His interviews with me only served to confirm my early impressions. We agreed on two in-person interviews with follow-up phone or email communications as needed. I interviewed Mr. Ruddy in December of 2009 and again in May of 2010 – both times in his office at school.

I noted in my reflective journal that Mr. Ruddy wanted to be seen as a nice guy, friendly to visitors (like myself) and to his staff. I also noted that he wanted to be in control and that his decision-making style was more top-down that he would probably admit to others. He spoke several times about getting input from those around him so he could make the decisions that he felt were best.

Principal Ruddy – Setting / Context

Orange City High School sits among the dotted landscape of look-alike homes
and same-old stores in a new-money enclave of Central Florida. There are many communities like this one in and around Central County, built around their cookie-cutter schools that look and feel as if you’ve been there before. There is a Starbucks near by and other restaurants with familiar names and menus. Orange City High sits there, safely platted among sizable homes – many of them with two stories, three-car garages and screened-in pools. The houses are all beige. Orange City High looks a lot like the planned community that it serves.

The school is on the outskirts of the Central County School District, a sprawling district of more than 150,000 students and more than 20 high schools. While larger than most school districts around the country, this district fits with Florida’s unfettered growth and penchant for large, county-wide districts that offer a variety of schools and a phalanx of problems.

Orange City High opened in 2002 just as the housing boom in Florida was reaching its zenith. It’s a community of new-money white families on new-money white streets. The streets are clean here and the lawns are well tended. There is an order to things. Orange City High was built next to Orange City Middle School, which is next to Orange City Elementary. The high school has a student population of 3,200 – larger than most around the country but pretty typical for the suburban centers of Florida. It is a school that one year grew to 4,500 kids and it has the feel of a small college. There is a full-sized coffee shop on campus, as well as a bank. It’s like the school is its own city and Principal Jake Ruddy is both the mayor and the sheriff.

The school is hard to find, as if someone planned it that way. There’s no way you
would drive by it by accident. It is not one of those schools right off the interstate. It’s not especially handsome or aged. It is not near downtown or any major thoroughfare. It is just there, conveniently dropped alongside a community road that looks as if it were constructed only to serve the school and surrounding businesses. I found that I underestimated just how long it would take to find the school, as most of my experiences are with city schools that are close to each other and close to major roads.

Mr. Ruddy is the school’s first principal and the only one it has ever known. He’s a sizeable man with a hardy handshake. In my two visits to the school he greeted me each time with a kindly tone and sporting a coat and tie. He is just over six-foot tall, in his mid-40s and carries a rounded belly that has me wondering if he would play a good Santa. I find him to be a good-natured man with white hair and a ruddy face, a jolly-old fellow.

My first visit to the school was in December of 2009 and the school day was over when I arrived. Still, the parking lot was nearly a quarter full as students were staying after school to take part in sports and club activities. It seemed to be a busy school. I found Mr. Ruddy to be friendly and ready for my arrival. He was finishing up a meeting with his assistant principals in a messy conference room that had data charts on the wall and stacks of paper on the corners of the sturdy, rectangular table. I noted that the conference room was befitting a school on the move -- a school with something to do and somewhere to go.

Mr. Ruddy wore a charcoal gray suit coat that softened his pear shape. He wore khaki pants, a brown belt and a simple white dress shirt. I thought that he could have
been an accountant or a banker if not for his apple red tie with yellow school buses
sketched on the front. It was his tie that I noticed first. He was also a bit sloppy for an
accountant, his shirt tucked in but bunched near his belt and his pants wrinkled and over-
sized – like he had slept in them or stayed up too late working on someone else’s taxes.
As he spoke I thought I might been have been talking to Willy Lowman but he was much
too confident for all of that.

I interviewed him both times in his office which, like the conference room, was
filled with stacks of white paper – some appeared to be memos, others were clearly data
reports or drafts of the master school schedule. His tie for the second interview also had a
school theme. This time it had a math focus: $E=MC^2$ stitched on it. I’m guessing that it
was a gift from his wife or maybe a student, though I forgot to ask. On both occasions he
offered me a drink from the mini-fridge in his office. The fridge was filled with waters
and Mountain Dew. On my first visit, he gave me the choice of plain water or some new
version that someone gave him that included extra vitamins and minerals. I took the plain
water, the safe choice. He took the other. He is one of those leaders who is willing to try
new things.

In his own words, he calls himself a risk-taker. He said that he is one to make
decisions that he believes are good for the school, even without asking permission from
his bosses at the Central Office. That’s how his school ended up teaching a class in
Mandarin Chinese and another in Arabic. He gave me a tour during my second visit in
May of 2010 and he proudly showed off his school and all of the gambles that paid off –
like partnering with a credit union and allowing students to do their banking during the
His office is square, about 10-feet in each direction, and his L-shaped desk takes up most of the space. There is an outer room for his secretary and he was sure to introduce me to her. In his office, a large executive, wrap-around desk is hard to see with all the papers scattered about. There are four chairs facing his desk. The chairs are leather, straight-back chairs and comfortable to sit in. He sat behind his desk for both interviews and each time treated me with a great deal of respect and dignity. He smiled a lot and rocked casually in his chair. I surmised that he had a lot of visitors and that he worked hard to make them feel comfortable.

During the interviews, he had his computer on and the emails were coming in and “dinging” each time he got one. Still, he never looked at them and kept his focus on me. The walls of his office are covered with pictures of the school mascot and other school memorabilia is stationed about. Like Ruddy himself, his office is a little messy, a bit disheveled. Some of the papers on his desk are food stained as if he’s had a number of lunches – or dinners – at his desk. Though my first interview didn’t end until after 4 p.m., he never hurried me along. He told me that he was in no rush, that he had cleared his calendar to accommodate our interview and that he often works until after 9 p.m. On this day, a Friday, he said he was expecting to leave much later than that.

Principal Ruddy – Views on Leadership

When it came to questions about leadership, Mr. Ruddy continually sent signals that he was in charge of both his school’s sense of community and collegiality and of the
decisions being made there. I noted in my reflective journal that his responses and demeanor led me to see him as daring and confident -- not afraid of a challenge. He never made any apologies and he appeared to be clearly in charge, even in charge of the interview itself. Though his school had some levels of collaboration, decisions appeared to end up on Mr. Ruddy’s desk – much to his liking.

He was adamant about his belief that good leaders must be hands-on and approachable. When he was relaying a recent incident in which a student got in trouble with the police at a local McDonald’s he was sure to tell me that he wanted to meet with the boy and his mother privately and make his own decision about whether to allow the student back in school. I asked him: How do you think that characterizes the way you lead? I mean, what signal does that send?

That I am hands-on and that I am on top of that kind of thing. But, at that the same time, I have to weigh if this kid would bring this to the McDonald’s, you know, there’s a safety issue here and there’s 3,200 kids. And I have to sleep at night.

During another part of the interview, Mr. Ruddy again made the case for a hands-on leadership style when he pointed out that he personally handles the hiring of teachers and sometimes leads his faculty trainings.

I think those are just such important pieces of the running of the high school that a principal can’t just let that go. You know, I’ve heard of principals letting their API (Assistant Principal for Instruction) do all the hiring. I’m like, but that’s such a critical area where you really get such an input. The other area where I really involve myself is the whole professional development piece. Not necessarily doing the
trainings myself where I’m putting them on but once in a while I think it’s important that they see the principal up and actually doing the presentation on, like this whole AYP thing where we’re under that whole Correct II and the new way of the state and the DOE is looking at us. That whole training I did myself. I spent like two hours pre-planning, did it myself personally, showed all the data and then did that.

As the researcher, I attempted to ask open-ended questions that allowed the participant to go in whatever direction he or she decided. For example, I asked: What do you think good leadership looks like in a high school? Mr. Ruddy suggested that a principal has to be hands-on in part so he or she can maintain control and show the faculty and staff that he or she has things in order.

I do think, a little bit of what I just said, I think you have to be very hands-on, and you have to, as they say, walk the walk, and talk the talk. You can’t be, you know, that you just totally delegate. I know delegation’s a good skill and you should trust your people, and I do. But you can’t, you know, there are some principals that just aren’t in their buildings a lot. And I don’t think that you can be that in a big comprehensive high school; I think you do have to be visible. You have to be, a little bit to everyone, you know.

During both interviews, Mr. Ruddy kept bringing the conversation back to children. He made several overtures around keeping a school student-centered and student-friendly. He believed strongly that giving students a voice and having an “open door” is part of being a strong leader.

Keeping all your groups in a big whole school, understanding you have so many
stakeholders, and just, the students, starting with them, everything starts with them and keeping that in mind, as a leader, that it’s about students, first and foremost. I think our PBS, Positive Behavior Support approach, the fact that we have so many different clubs, student organizations, ways for students to get engaged, listening to students, having a kind of open door with students.

Principal Ruddy – Views on School Reform

School reform didn’t seem to scare Mr. Ruddy. Even with his school on a new state monitoring “watch list” (called Correct II), he made several comments about still being in charge of the school’s vision and he was sure to tell me that he still felt empowered and in control of the school’s present and future. In speaking to the issue of improving schools in an era of top-down accountability measures, Mr. Ruddy didn’t flinch and didn’t make excuses. As an example, he said he didn’t feel any real urgency to raise his school grade though the school had dropped to C (down from a B the previous year) at the time of the interview. He said he viewed his school as successful in a broader sense than in the narrow view that the state uses to rate schools (using mostly test data). He seemed to suggest that good principals must be willing to look beyond the state measures and take bold approaches to make their schools successful. He used the example of starting a course in Mandarin Chinese even though that wouldn’t help his school grade and despite the fact that he had no teacher and no funding.

The question I asked was: What I hear in your voice a little bit is, “I’m going to do it anyway; I’m going to find a way to do it.” Do you think that might be a quality of good
principals? Or just a quality of you? He told me: I think that I take risks; I think you do need to take risks.

In support of research that seems to align school improvement to strong curriculum leadership, Mr. Ruddy was sure to point out that sees himself as a teacher first and principal second.

I think a good principal definitely should have a good curricula background and it doesn’t mean like, at a high school, that you have to know everything about everything, certainly you don’t. The good principals are the ones who admit that they don’t. But, to me, yeah, first you should be a master teacher.

To put a finishing point on his belief that good school leaders should be strong teachers, he recounted a number of times that either he or one of his assistant principals took over a class when a teacher was out and an adequate substitute could not be found.

And just as far as governance and structure goes, one thing I do that’s probably not so wise, I’ve done it in the past but I’ve promised not to do it this year, was, when we have a vacancy, like last year we had a couple of vacancies that we were having trouble filling, like our drama teacher kept calling in. She’s be out a week, be here one day, out two weeks, be here, out two weeks. So with these three Drama I classes, they were starting to have issues, I divided them up. One of the deans and I taught one period. Two of my APs (assistant principals) taught another period. And then my other two APs taught another period.

I asked: For how long?

His response: For about a semester…I’ve done that. I’ve taught creative writing,
I’ve taught integrated science. I’ve taught math since I’ve been here. And have had my APs teaching things.

Principal Ruddy – Views on School Culture / Decision-Making

Building relationships with his staff and students seems to come naturally for Mr. Ruddy. He is one of those nice guys, large in stature and big on charisma. Though his answers seem to suggest someone who wants to be in control, he provides opportunities for his teachers to collaborate and he appears to be open to their ideas. As a researcher, I wonder if that may be the reality of “shared” decision-making in large high schools where it is unlikely that more than 200 teachers will feel equally empowered. While the research suggests that a collaborative culture is one of the keys to a good school, the research on shared decision-making is less clear. I asked Mr. Ruddy about his willingness to share decisions with his faculty and staff and the following is his response regarding the master schedule.

So it’s a lot of people giving input but ultimately it’s the API (Assistant Principal for Instruction) and I -- and the other assistant principals -- that work and hash it out because everybody sees their little piece of that world but then it’s up to me to really seen, then, the whole picture and fit it together.

Pressing further, I asked: In other words, is there any level of shared leadership or decision-making here? Can you talk about that?

Even all of that is shared. Even the master schedule, it’s all shared. You know, first the department chairs give their input, then we all sit just like that and hash
through things and it’s shared. But I’m involved with things. The same with the budget. You know the budget. We are site-based. Basically, we are just given a pot of money, which mine (the last two years) I’ve been given a six percent cut so that’s been over $2 million. Just in this school, nothing to do with class size. You know, and so, we just got our October recount (our FTE) and, you know, ours actually came up a little. We increased so I just got $550,000 put in the budget. Well, even that, I’ve already sat with the Leadership Team. We’ve looked at it. I wanted to know more about his school’s Leadership Team that was making final decisions after input from the faculty. I asked him: So who is on that Leadership Team? Are you talking about just the administrators?

The APs (assistant principals) are really primarily on that team. But, so, like budget, that’s another area where ultimately I’m going to make those decisions. I’m going to be very involved with budget. Things that I delegate that I don’t really want to be involved with – facilities stuff.

The research shows that a key aspect of shared decision-making and overall school success is a teacher’s “sense” that he or she has a say in what’s going on, that his or her has a voice and is being heard. I asked Mr. Ruddy if he thought there was collegiality at his school.

Of yes, very much so. And I think it’s just come over time through those PLC relationships. And the teachers having a lot of voice through their departments.

I followed up with this question: So if you have 200 faculty members how do they have input in anything if there are so many of them? How does that work?
For a long time we’ve been in PLCs. We’re in the professional learning communities pretty much revolving around subject areas, though we’ve had other little offshoots – like we’ve had our new teachers. They’re their own PLC. Every year we’ve had our own beginning teacher PLC. They meet weekly. They get a lot of extra support.

I asked: Do they feel like they can be innovative and creative and, I guess what I’m getting at is, if you think that’s yes, how do you impact whether they feel that way?

I think they do. I think they’re very collaborative and collegial, both. Because they’re different, but I think they’re both. We’ve had a PLC structure in place for all 10 years since we’ve opened. We haven’t called them Professional Learning Communities, but they’ve evolved over the time.

While Mr. Ruddy felt that his teachers were collaborating, he was less specific about whether they had actual “power” to make decisions.

Well, things like, for example, I have an art vacancy right now. All I’m going to do is get with my two, I have three art teachers, but one’s very experienced and one is like a fourth-year. I’m just going to tell them here, here’s 50 applicants, go through and start screening them, talk to some people and then bring me like your top two or three choices, in order.

I asked: And then you’re going to pick the one?

He said: And then I’ll look at the top two or three, and I’ll make a final decision.
Epilogue – Principal Ruddy

While Mr. Ruddy is clearly a likeable guy and forward-thinking in his ideas, I wouldn’t consider him all that untraditional in that he is a leader who likes to lead. He wants to be in charge. Like others who ascend to positions of authority, I see him as wanting to run things. As with the other participants presented in this chapter, I have attempted to capture Mr. Ruddy’s leadership tendencies in the following table. In short, I found each of the principals in this study to have some attributes in common, though often the attributes were overlapping and sometimes more pronounced in some participants than others. The four participants tended to be *I*-focused, *We*-focused, *Servant*-focused and *Learning*-focused. These observations serve as the bases for my findings in Chapter Five.

**Table 5: Data Findings for Mr. Ruddy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Key Leadership Tendencies</th>
<th>Key Attributes and Indicators</th>
<th>Notes from Interviews and Reflective Journal re: Mr. Ruddy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I”-focused</td>
<td>Controlling</td>
<td>Not afraid of a challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confident, Bold</td>
<td>Makes no apologies. “Just do it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top-down tendencies</td>
<td>He makes the decisions, wants to have a say.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We”-focused</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Relationship-builder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collegial</td>
<td>Trust-builder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust-building tendencies</td>
<td>Laid back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Servant”-focused</td>
<td>Activist leadership</td>
<td>Open to ideas from his faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caring, Hands-on</td>
<td>“Walks the walk” – leads trainings for staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risk-taking tendencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Learning”-focused</td>
<td>Curriculum savvy</td>
<td>Interested in all kids. Friendly to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data savvy / linear</td>
<td>Not “disconnected” from his school. In tune.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type-A tendencies</td>
<td>Wants to control; to know what’s going on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What makes Mr. Ruddy unlike most high school principals that I’ve encountered are his bold approaches to curriculum (the Chinese elective as an example) and school governance (starting PLCs years before they were popular) in wanting to stay ahead of the curve. I found him to be someone who is eager to build relationships and steadfast in his promise to be open to good ideas from his students and faculty. Still, I sense that the reason for that is that Mr. Ruddy is interested in forwarding his school’s sense of community and collegiality more so than in fashioning any true sharing of power and decision-making. Not that any of that is good or bad. It just is the way it is.

The Second Case
Sean Rust / Cityside High School

Prologue – Principal Rust

Principal Rust agreed to take part in the study after I mentioned to him that a Central Office administrator told me that he was one of the more effective principals in the school district. As stated earlier, the other principal from the West County School District wasn’t so easy to convince and he, in turn, decided against taking part. Mr. Rust was quite nice when I reached him on his cell phone to ask him to consider two interviews to share some of his school’s struggles and successes. Still, I felt it was the last thing that he wanted to do – as if I were one more thing on a long “To Do” list. I sensed that he was doing this only out of duty; he was a company man and he was going to take part because that is what his Central Office bosses wanted him to do. He never verbalized it, but I was certain he was thinking: “Great, one more thing that a suit in the Florida
Legislature or Central Office thought was a good way to take up my time.”

We agreed on a date and time for our first interview in March of 2010. He appeared more confused than the others about the intent of my study and a bit wary of what might be going on. Still, he was more than willing to schedule a time and answer all of my questions – rather to get it over with than to embrace it. He came across early on as a busy man with short, direct answers and nary a smile: Nice but not friendly. I later found that he was not unfriendly as much as he was serious, determined and unpretentious. We met twice, both times on Wednesdays because both his school and mine got out early on those days and it was a bit easier for our schedules to align. The first interview was in March of 2010 and the second was in May of 2010.

The school where Mr. Rust serves as principal is not near the city’s downtown but is close enough to be along a busy stretch of roads where some of the urban sprawl is present. The West County School District is another of Florida’s growing districts of 160,000 students and 25 high schools. It is a mix of older schools that pre-date the population explosion of the past 20 years and some newer schools that serve the planned communities in the county’s more rural areas. Mr. Rust’s school lands somewhere in the middle and the man himself appears to be one of so-many principals that worked his way up the ranks quickly and became a young guy principal at a time when new schools (and jobs) were opening quicker than the school district had people to fill them.

Principal Rust – Setting / Context

Cityside High School is hard to miss if you travel anywhere near the malls and
planned neighborhoods that sprouted up during the past 20 years along Florida’s mid-section. It’s not an especially attractive school, typical of those built in the late 90s to serve families who were escaping the less-appealing neighborhoods near downtown. The school is a gaggle of forgettable structures that need a good painting, each joined by a labyrinth of concrete walkways that need the gum stains bleached and hemmed in by a football stadium, a parking lot and enough chain-link fence to circle a couple of city blocks. It is an expansive, open campus that would seem a bit unwieldy for those who work and attend school there. The weeds peer up above the hedges and the droppings of broken pencils lead a visitor to and from each classroom.

Like his school, Mr. Rust is a principal who is not much for how things look as he is for how things are run. Just stop by his office and you will see for yourself. If the school could talk, I think it would speak proudly of what it has done (its reading, math and AP scores) and not sound too much worried about how it looks. I know for sure that the principal would say that. Both Cityside High School and its principal would tell you that it has more important things to think about. They would tell you that they are much more concerned about reading scores than whether the grass gets cut.

Mr. Rust is a golfer and he looks the part – thin arms and a skinny waist. Others would describe him as lanky. He is slightly over 6-foot tall, in his late 30s and all arms. His light skin and freckles fit with his red hair that is trimmed close to his head. If you picture an elf in a Polo shirt you have some sense of Principal Rust – only he’s a bit taller. During my first interview, he let me know that he always has sun screen and a hat nearby because he has battled skin cancer in recent years. We meet for both interviews in
his office and both times he has on tan or Khaki trousers and no tie. The first visit finds him wearing a Havana-style shirt with short sleeves and an open collar. During the second interview, Mr. Rust is wearing a Polo shirt with the school name stitched on the front. He tells me both times that he doesn’t normally dress that casually, though I sense that he does. I figure he is just that guy.

As he spoke, he leaned back in his chair and nodded his head a lot. He was so casual that I noted in my reflective journal that I felt I was chatting with one my college buddies. I found him to be straight-forward and uncomplicated with a pinpoint focus on fixing his school. He spoke candidly and with a confidence that belied his age. He dropped in just enough about pedagogical best practices that I fashioned him an instructional leader of some repute. He is clearly smart yet not someone who has to tell you that. Like him, his office is pale and thin. The walls are white and the one, large window is covered with white vertical blinds that make the whole room feel like a college apartment.

His desk is standard-issue school furniture – brown and hard to recall even moments after you leave the office. The blue-green carpet is tightly woven and nothing seems to match. I think about offering some decorating advice but then I realize my role as a researcher. I don’t think he would get it anyway. The only high-dollar items in the office are a flat-screen TV and a trophy case. In a way, his office is a bachelor’s pad.

Mr. Rust is no bachelor, though. He is married and has pictures of his wife and family in cheap brown frames under the window. While we chatted, his Blackberry buzzed over and over and he resisted the temptation to glance at it. He had a name plate
on his desk and some certificates on his walls. There was a picture of the school mascot mounted on one wall and a small, white fan circulating the air in the room. I asked him about the TV and he said he uses it to watch the morning show. I joked about ESPN or the Golf Channel but he swore that was not the case. Still, I’m not sold.

He was direct in his responses and respectful of my time and questions. I never felt rushed during the interviews and he was ready for me both times that I arrived. I noticed sunglasses on the corner of his desk – at the ready. I think of Joe Cool with red hair and freckles. He seemed to be a guy on the move, equally ready to visit classrooms or break up a fight (whatever it takes). Still, I observe that he’s a guy who would drop everything and go golfing if I asked him to. He swears that’s not true. Again, I am not sold.

Principal Rust – Views on Leadership

Mr. Rust is clearly on top of things, from his calendar to knowing what he wants for his school. He tells me that he wants to express this feeling of security and vision to his faculty and staff – both a confidence in himself and in his plan. Still, he is willing to admit that he doesn’t know everything and that he needs help from others to move the school forward. To do that, Mr. Rust says he feels the need to be accessible. He talked about that when I asked him if certain leadership styles work better in large, modern high schools.

Well, I think the total key is your door has to be open. You still have to set up your structure of where people are supposed to go to get the help they need, because you
can’t be effective if everybody’s coming to you for everything. But, like right now, we just gave out schedules, for example. So teachers got their schedules before the transfer period…That can change over the summer, but I’m saying to them, this is what I think you’re going to be teaching next year, and we have choice now, so we may have some changes. But, and then, my door’s open. I mean, because I let them know, as a faculty, I take, your department head gave me a recommendation, my assistant principal gave me a recommendation, but I signed off on everybody’s schedule and where everybody’s going to be. Because a lot of time I based it on where I think you’re going to be the most beneficial to the school and where you’ll be the happiest and most effective, because a happy teacher is more effective.

These statements from Mr. Rust present a complicated mix of what appears to be mutually exclusive considerations in leading a school staff: getting teacher input in decisions, being efficient in making those decisions, being willing to make decisions that may be unpopular with the school staff, being open to new ideas, and knowing when to micro-manage and when to macro-manage. I see Mr. Rust as representative of someone who wants to do all of the above things well. This may be a telling sign of successful school principals. Whatever you call it, Mr. Rust has a “can-do” attitude and is clearly in charge. In recalling a decision he made years ago to focus on reading improvement, he decided to attend a national training himself and then return and present it to his staff.

We went in and did many trainings after school in each department and showed them, with their curriculum, and I sat—and that is one of the things I’ve learned, can be very powerful, if you’re in the meeting while they’re being trained, obviously you’ve
shown it’s important. So I made the conscious effort to be there.

Mr. Rust’s interest in training the faculty and sitting in the room with them speaks to a spirit of servant leadership that seems to fit with his view of school governance. Another story he told was about carrying his Blackberry with him all the time and allowing the teachers to text him anytime with their needs. This principal seems interested trusting his teachers and empowering them to improve themselves. I asked him this question: What are your basic philosophies about how to lead people?

Well, I do not micromanage. And that’s probably because I never liked it when people did it to me. You know, sometimes my best day is when one of my assistant principals comes up and says (and it just happened), “You know that health thing you wanted me to do? I just emailed it to you.” And I couldn’t read up on it, but I said, “Yeah, I know you emailed it, but it’s ready to go. Just take a look at it.” So there was no reminder, I asked, handed it to her in a staff meeting (she’s like my English person) and I didn’t micromanage it, and I didn’t say, “When are you getting it done.” She just got it done.

There is certainly a gritty determination to Mr. Rust and a sense that he is not afraid of hard work or of getting his hands dirty. He said he is continually responding to teachers’ needs, running and reviewing data reports and getting things done in a “roll-up-your-sleeves” fashion. I asked him about leaving his door open during our interviews and this was his response: The door’s always open. If I can’t meet with you at that time, I’m not held by that, send me an email to remind me.
Principal Rust – Views on School Reform

Mr. Rust is a principal who is always learning and he believes that school reform is possible only when teachers continually grow in their craft. In fact, during neither interview did I hear him mention his facilities, athletics or clubs. Instead, we had a conversation focused on teaching and learning, and the data to support it. His recent work with his staff has been around aligning the curriculum and lessons in his school, something he believes is key to school improvement.

Because I know I had objectives when I taught. I had a couple questions. But aligning everything, to me, it’s just what we should be doing. I think the art of lesson planning, as a profession around the country, is something that we kind of like say, “Oh, I did that in college, but I’m good, I know what I’m doing, I’ll just do a little outline.” But, if you’re going to be effective and take it to the next level, I think you need to do that stuff.

When I asked him about how he ensures that his teachers are teaching to the standards, he told me that he takes a critical look at their teaching ability and that he personally oversees their evaluations. Mr. Rust said: A lot of the evaluations that, when I was a teacher, were just put in my mailbox. Now, I meet with every single teacher. In a related comment, Mr. Rust talked about modern principals being data savvy and that he uses data to inform his thinking about teachers.

The other thing, I’m very data-driven, as we talked. One of the big things I looked at were my teachers who had really good exam grades, Category 1 exam grades, cause we could compare them to every other school in the county.
Those high expectations for his teachers are part of what Mr. Rust sees as key ingredients for school improvement, starting with having high expectations for his students and having a structured plan for how things should be run in an orderly and efficient manner.

Well, I actually start with them being in a safe environment, that’s always what I think first, before we get to the learning and that. When they come to school, in a safe environment, they arrive on campus at, we don’t let them off the bus till 6:55 so we have supervision. So there’s breakfast for them, there’s a clean cafeteria; we want them to start their day in a comfortable environment. When they’re moving about the halls, there’s adult supervision. So I try and curb any behavior issues that might come up by having a lot of eyes out there. So, any time we have that opportunity, I encourage teachers to be at their doors, that’s an expectation. And I think it seems to work for me, because when kids are unattended, they tend to make poor, or worse, decisions. So this campus losing the 26 portables and opening a new school has helped, because we have more eyes in few places, technically, but that’s a good thing because the kids are being supervised. So, start with that. I expect them to be respectful, we’re trying to preach that, there’s ways to handle decisions. If I’m yelling, it’s an act, believe it or not, and I’ll do it in a situation where someone has violated something that’s so across the board that I’ll raise my voice in the Student Affairs office or something like that to show the disgust and almost like an act. I mean, even in front of parents, but it’s never disrespectful, it’s just a, this is serious, this is how we’re going to handle this.
I asked him: And who sets the expectations, or who sets the tone? Do you think you set that expectation and that tone?

His response: Yeah, I think.

Principal Rust – Views on School Culture / Decision-Making

Let’s be clear. Mr. Rust is not the “touchy-feely” principal who is going to rally his staff and students with some teary-eyed soliloquy. He is more of a big brother to them, a mentor, an equal partner. The staff appears to do things out of respect for his determination and vigor. I get an idea that there is a positive culture at the school, but more of a can-do culture and than a close-knit one. As an example, Mr. Rust’s recitations about struggling kids and his plan to have teachers mentor them sounded a bit more like marching orders than a rallying cry.

So I said we’re going to take these bottom-quartile kids and we’re going identify them, and we’re going to give every single one of them a mentor. And, it wasn’t really a fun meeting for me and the people there because I was basically saying you’re going to do this and your evaluation is going to be tied to it. I didn’t even know if I had the power to do that, but I just said it.

In my attempts to understand his interest and ability in creating a shared decision-making model, I got the sense that he was open to lots of ideas but that he was the key decision-maker, communicator and evaluator. In another recent decision about who was going to teach the Advanced Placement courses at his school, Mr. Rust talked about his call to place more mid-ability students in those classes and offering his teachers an
ultimatum around it.

So we talked about all those types of kids and said those are the kind of kids you are going to get, so if you want to teach AP, that’s what’s happening…That meeting went pretty well. There were obviously some people who were hardliners and said, “That’s ridiculous, there should only be Level 5 kids.” And then different people teach AP.

While some of Mr. Rust’s comments might sound a bit top down, that is not an accurate description of him. He is more a straight-shooter than a hard-liner. He likes to get the data and then relay that to his staff it in a straight-forward manner. Still, he appears to hold himself and his administrative team to the same high standards and he believes that the teachers appreciate that level of honesty and integrity.

And I, at the end of each evaluation, whether I rip them or you know, praise them, whatever the situation might be, I’ll ask them a question. I’ll say, “Is there anything that we can do as an administrative staff that would make things better for you in the classroom?” And, I kind of just keep a little tally of where maybe we’re not as, our radar might be off on some things. So, I do ask that question and, you know, I also ask for their view of how we can solve that, within the confines of the school system.

Though he is clearly in charge, Mr. Rust said he was purposeful in setting up department meetings, department chair meetings and a steering committee (comprised of various teachers) for the purposes of garnering teacher input. He also meets with students from time to time when large-scale changes are forthcoming. One of those decisions involved moving the school from one to two lunches, something that the students were
It was never calm (at lunch). So, they (the teachers) agreed. And then what I did was, I reached out to the Student Government kids who had just gotten (inaudible) and they were livid. They’re like, you can’t do that, you’ve got to rethink it. So that was a big, like, but I tried to get all those stakeholders involved.

The faculty steering committee at his school, which typically has fewer than 10 people, is available to provide input and offer school improvement ideas. The following is Mr. Rust’s assessment of the group’s focus:

So, I’ve got a group. They’re allowed to bring up anything they want, but they have to have a solution. And it has to have an academic focus, an academic impact, but I’m open to like hey, if the air’s not working, that has an academic impact. So I don’t want to hear about they don’t like the cafeteria food, or they don’t…I mean, obviously everything can be tied to academics, but…

More so than asking his staff to “share” in decisions, Mr. Rust’s view of decision-making may be more related to keeping open lines of communication with his staff.

So, I’m pretty open. I think being open like that is an effective way to do it, because that’s how I want to be treated. I don’t know if it always works, but I’ve worked in secretive environments where I felt like it didn’t really affect me, because I just kind of did my job. But I think if I was a department head or in a minor leadership role, I would want there to be more openness, so everyone knew the direction we were going.

One of the key understandings from Mr. Rust is his belief that disagreements have
to be met head on in an effort to keep a positive school culture in place. He said he wasn’t always that way but that, in an effort to be a more successful principal, he learned to keep his ego in check and reach out to others.

It’s always something I’m working on, because I think there’s always room for improvement. I have made some relationship mistakes with teachers earlier on, where the teacher made mistakes as well. We both were not doing things the right way. But I’ve worked through those and worked those out. Now, I think both of us are happy that it’s worked out. And the teachers are happy being here and I want them here. Because getting good teachers in front of your kids is one of the most important things. So, in getting your ego out of the way, and working through any issues you might have, is to me, a very effective way to lead.

Epilogue – Principal Rust

Mr. Rust was both candid and personable in his responses and that seems to match his leadership style, which is direct and determined. He seems to have a plan of attack for improving his school and he doesn’t spend much time getting input from others in any formal way. As with the other participants, I have attempted to capture Mr. Rust’s leadership tendencies in the following table.
Many of his statements during the interviews were “I” statements and he talked a lot about his own expectations and not those of others. He even suggested that empowering his teachers and parents was unrealistic because the school was too large and there are too many of them to include in any efficient manner. I did not find Mr. Rust to be a complicated person and that also makes him seem approachable. His straightforward, I-am-who-I-am persona seems to go a long way in building relationships with his staff and a lot to do with why many perceive him as successful in his leadership role.

Table 6: Data Findings for Mr. Rust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Key Leadership Tendencies</th>
<th>Key Attributes and Indicators</th>
<th>Notes from Interviews and Reflective Journal re: Mr. Rust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“I”-focused</strong></td>
<td>Controlling</td>
<td>Candid. Confident. Direct and determined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confident, Bold</td>
<td>Wants to control things. Directly involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top-down tendencies</td>
<td>Clearly in charge. “I want it this way…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“We”-focused</strong></td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>A take-charge mindset.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collegial</td>
<td>Shared decision-making is too inefficient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Servant”-focused</strong></td>
<td>Activist leadership</td>
<td>Not pretentious. Straight-forward and real.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caring, Hands-on</td>
<td>Nothing fancy. Just get it done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risk-taking tendencies</td>
<td>Ego-less.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Learning”-focused</strong></td>
<td>Curriculum savvy</td>
<td>Data-driven. Laser-like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data savvy / linear</td>
<td>Knows his school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type-A tendencies</td>
<td>Ready to help kids anytime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focused more on curriculum than operations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prologue – Principal Stone

Principal Stone was one of two principals that I interviewed from an expansive and ever-growing school district that still holds true to the state’s southern roots. The North County School District has grown up fast – some would say too fast – during the past 30 years of white flight and urban sprawl. The county has seen so many new schools built that different district employees give you different answers when you ask them how many high schools there are. Among the principals interviewed, Stone appeared the least interested in taking part but still agreed right away and was ready for me each time that I arrived at the school. I observed that she was extremely busy and more interested in appeasing me (and the school district) than she was in eagerly supporting the research.

We communicated exclusively through email and set up the first interview for a cold day in January of 2010. There were no kids in school that day – a district-wide training day for teachers – and that seemed to fit her need (and mine) to meet face-to-face on a day when the pressures of the school day were not bearing down on us. That was the same thinking that led to our second interview being set for after school in June of 2010. Both interviews were shorter than the ones that I conducted with the other participants. The interviews were well under the hour that we scheduled and seemed to meet her need to get them over with so she could move on to more pressing matters. I found her to be nice enough to meet with me but more interested in getting the interviews over with than in chatting for hours on end.
As I reviewed my reflective journal, I noted that Stone appeared during both interviews to be eerily stressed and burdened by her job. The overwhelming impression that I had while interviewing her was that she was taxed to the point of burn out. Her eyes told me so. For the first interview, she had an end-of-day tiredness about her even though it was mid-morning when we met. As she spoke, she ran her fingers through her hair – her palms pressing down on her scalp and her fingers spread apart like she were answering questions under oath. Both interviews were in her office and she was always running right on time and respectful of our arrangement.

Her school is a sprawling affair that sits hidden down an industrial road, under an overpass and behind acres of gray fencing and black parking lots. The only difference between the feel of Stone’s school and a “big box” store like Wal-Mart or Best Buy were the lack of shopping carts and cigarette butts. Actually, there may have been cigarette butt but I didn’t think to look. Southern High School sits in an area of little consequence on the outskirts of the North County School District. The district itself has a similar feel, with more than 120,000 students and more than 20 high schools. It is another of Florida’s super-sized, county-wide districts that offer a variety of schools – including many with large-school district challenges and many of little consequence.

Principal Stone – Setting / Context

Southern High is expansive and doesn’t give up. As I walked the campus I flashed back to those early trips I took to the mall as pre-teen. It was the 1970s and all of the malls looked alike. There was always a main thoroughfare that was fairly easy to manage.
but also a number of skinnier arteries where one might find the food court and always an Orange Julius. It was easy to get turned around down those corridors, lost in a mix of same-looking store fronts. The same could be said for Southern High. It is a school that you have to experience from the inside out. It was built in the 70s, with so many hallways and byways as to overwhelm the visitor – and maybe the principal.

Southern High is a one-story structure with the gym at one end and cafeteria at the other. There were 2,800 students in attendance in 2010 and it had the feeling of a large, imposing school. The Dijon mustard color of the school’s exterior is in dramatic contrast to the bright, crayon blues and yellows that besmear the walls and lockers on the inside. The paint on the walls and lockers is thick from years of touch-ups and hard times. There is a pool on campus and an imposing gray football stadium.

Principal Stone has been in charge here for seven years. She says she was brought in to get the place under control first and to build up its academic reputation second. She has done some of both. She was dressed for the first interview in a silver-gray blouse and black pants. A gold watch lay loose around her thin wrist. For the second interview, she wore a suit of pale blue that could be a dull gray if you didn’t look closely. She seemed rushed as she spoke, sitting forward in her chair and searching for her thoughts.

She was different than the other principals that I interviewed. She was more professional in dress and manner, more formal. She reminded me of the modern, professional principal – far from the athletic coaches who were asked to run schools during much of the past three decades. She is the power-suit principal, the Blackberry principal. Her hair is blonde and just above her shoulders. She wears a lot of make-up.
and I wonder to myself what burdens she is trying to cover up.

Her stress was clear and I couldn’t help but feel like I was adding to it by scheduling the interviews in the first place. I felt for her. I observed that she felt a great deal of pressure juggling her job, her kids and her faith. It appears that she takes a lot of pressure on herself and doesn’t want to show any signs of weakness. It matters to her that she is seen as successful, probably because she always has been. She was pleasant and cooperative during both interviews but took much longer than the other principals to open up about what she really thinks. During the second interview, I found that she is strong in her Christian faith and that this job has as much to do with mission and ministry as it does with salary and benefits.

The oversized letters hanging on the walls of her office spell out “Dream” and “Believe” and I suspect that she does plenty of both. A collection of penguin trinkets and posters also dominate the landscape. I asked her about them and she said she has always found them to be cute and irresistible. She swears that there is nothing more to it than that. There is a poster-sized photo of two penguins behind her desk. On it, one penguin follows behind the other and the phrase “Walk the Talk” is sketched across the bottom. Again, she says there is no real meaning to it. I beg to differ.

Her office is in the middle of the school and adorned with the school colors and mascot. It has a more decorated interior than the offices of the other principals that I’ve interviewed. There are potted plants about and pictures of her children. There is a stylish book case in the corner, with hard lines and an asymmetric shape. It is like one of those trendy book cases that you find at Ikea and that you have to put together yourself.
Principal Stone closes her eyes a lot as she speaks, searching for answers both to my questions and to her problems. If someone were to play her in a movie it would be Jodie Foster, thin and pretty but always in the middle of a mess (like Clarisse in *Silence of the Lambs*).

As she told her story, it seemed linear and that matches with her background as a math teacher and policy wonk. She talked openly about her school and the problems that she found when she got there. She said her first task was to get policies and procedures written for everything. She proudly showed me her book of procedures. She says she likes to look at data, to make informed decisions and to follow processes rigidly. I noticed that she doesn’t smile a lot and I can’t imagine her getting a lot of “high fives” from her students in the hallways. Still, I sense a deep kindness to her that she doesn’t feel comfortable sharing for fear of letting her guard down.

During the second interview, she seemed more human – even spiritual. She told me that God is in charge of her life and that she lets Him have control. This seems to fit with her modest, Sunday-best appearance and her sense of passion about her work. The muted colors of her wardrobe seem to match the grayness of the school’s exterior – the fence, the football stadium. I can’t help but think of this as a gray, concrete school and she as a gray, concrete woman -- not overly flashy and not colorful, but hard as stone and unshakable. Like her sprawling school, she seems a bit distant and less intimate than other principals. In the end, I’m not sure if she mirrors her school or if it mirrors her. Still, I know that they are both expansive and complex – with their own demons to conquer.
Principal Stone – Views on Leadership

The serious tone of Mrs. Stone’s comments seemed to reflect her leadership style as tough and determined, appearing less concerned with collaboration and collegiality and more worried about getting things done. I noted in my reflective journal that she appeared to be focused and linear in her thinking, a policy wonk who was more comfortable reviewing data reports than in planning the next staff luncheon.

I’m extremely analytical. Being a math person, I analyze data more than anybody would ever want to. I’ll wake up at night thinking, “Oh, my gosh. I wonder…?” And I’ll go and try and find the data to say, “Okay, yes it is” or “No, it’s not.” And then I’ll go put it in someone’s face and say, “Is it really the way that data is saying?” And I’m always just looking for figures. That’s the math part of me.

I asked her about her growth as a principal through the years. Her response again spoke to her growing use of data and her interest in being out in front of the solutions.

I’m different now in many ways. First of all, I’m more proactive now. In the beginning, I certainly didn’t know where I was going or what I was doing. Now, I’m truly able to use my teachers as resources in being proactive. And I’m able to use data.

Mrs. Stone continually stressed her feeling that more and more was expected of principals in the era of accountability. I questioned her about whether the state and national mandates squelched her ability to lead.

Yeah, I mean, I have some restrictions. I have. Sometimes, I feel like I’m operating on one foot with an arm tied behind my back. But yeah, I can do it. And
yes, the stakes are extremely high. No matter who you are, I need to be able to pull out the data to document what I’m doing and why I’m doing it. I pressed further in asking: Do you think you can be creative and innovative as a principal today, in light of the mandates? Or does that restrict your creativity?

It restricts me, but I can be creative. It’s no different than what we tell our teachers, when they say, you’re telling me what to teach every single day. No, I’m telling you the standards, but you can teach it in your own fashion. Well, I think the state did the same exact thing to us. You can be as creative as you want, within the guidelines. And so, if you keep an open mind, you can do it. It’s not easy.

As for her leadership style, Mrs. Stone admitted that her quieter, contemplative demeanor sometimes provides her challenges in today’s school climate. She suggested that a more animated, visionary principal might be a better fit in modern schools, as opposed to the organized, operational leader that might have succeeded previously.

The older I get, I think the more I find that, as it relates to high school, the role is a little bit more charismatic and a little bit more political than I originally thought that it was. I’m extremely a type-A personality, I felt like, just being on my A game and being very organized, knowing the instruction, coaching teachers and things like that, were going to make me a strong high school principal.

I asked Mrs. Stone to describe her leadership style and she immediately spoke to her willingness to “walk the walk,” something that appears to be in concert with the other principals interviewed for the study.
I dive in and help. I think that one thing people can say about me is, I’m out there doing the work; I’m not telling you to do it. If I’m asking you to get out there and do something, my hands are in there with you, doing it at the same time. There isn’t anything at this school that I don’t know how to do, and I haven’t done, from running an ID badge machine to unstopping the toilet.

I noted in my reflective journal that this kind of activist, hands-on approach is something that is found among many principals and is likely to build credibility with teachers. I also noted that she, like the other principals that I interviewed, saw these qualities as unique to themselves.

And, I think that’s what makes me a little bit different from other principals. I think, I mean, I schedule kids. If I tell my administrators and my counselors I want you to schedule 10 kids a day so that we’re done by such-and-such time, I schedule 10 kids a day. And so, no matter what, I’m doing it also.

This kind of work and attention to detail speaks to Mrs. Stone’s work ethic and strong will, something that was clearly evident through the study. She appears to be very much a workaholic who sees the long hours and her willingness to “roll up her sleeves” as part of the success plan for modern principals.

Principal Stone – Views on School Reform

Mrs. Stone takes a systems approach to school reform. She is clearly not the leader who sees school improvement as the product of an impassioned leader who carries her school into battle. I noted in my journal that Mrs. Stone is a quiet technocrat who sees
school change as programmed and conditioned through repeatable and reliable processes. She is more of a lead thinker and lead planner. Though she prefers to be in charge, to be the general, she seems content to let others carry out the battle plans.

I’m extremely contemplative. I don’t make sharp, rash decisions. I almost always stop. Everything for me has a reason why I do something, either it’s a lesson that I learned or previous baggage that I’ve been through, as to why I do something. And, even more recently, meaning within the past two years, I want to have something written up front as to why I’ve done something. I’ve walked into schools, this one being one of them, where there wasn’t a manual for this or a procedure for this. And there’s a lot to be said for that and, I think, because we don’t allow principals to stay for two and three years, there isn’t time to develop that. So now that I’ve been here long enough it’s now at the point where, “Okay, we have locker room procedures.” And so, when the new person walks in the door, you can actually say, “Here, you don’t have to go figure it out yourself. You just follow this.”

When I asked her about improving schools, she described her role in putting teachers and students in the best situations to teach and learn. One of my questions was: So, the aspects of good high schools, or good schools, you said instruction, you said rigorous instruction. Anything else?

Well, the curriculum that you’re teaching, and then, the teachers that are teaching it. And then, basically just the kids and everything that it takes to make them feel safe, make them feel accepted. And that’s huge. We just started, thanks to the
Wee Birds with the Jaguars, they gave us money to start a full-service school here. I guess it’s been open for a year and a half now, where we have social workers here. And that was something that wasn’t in place before, but now, giving them…because guidance counselors can’t do it.

Mrs. Stone brought up more than once that several of her teachers have gone on to be assistant principals at other schools and that she believes in growing her teachers and building capacity in others. She specifically spoke to her interest in mentoring young leaders as her way of giving back. It also appears to fit her interest in letting others lead as a way of building capacity and allowing her to stay in the background.

I honestly think that they (her staff) would think that I was a thinker. I really stand back a lot. I don’t get, probably, by standing back…I don’t want to be the forefront and I don’t want to be the one getting the attention. And I don’t ever accept accolades.

This fits with her servant leadership style and is similar to what I found with the other principals. Though the others appear to be more out-front and charismatic, they each view school reform as related to the principal’s willingness to work hard and serve others as a model for what they want out of their staffs.

Principal Stone – Views on School Culture / Decision-Making

The school’s formal decision-making processes include a Leadership Team (mostly administrators) where most decisions are hashed out and a Shared Decision-Making Team (mostly teachers) that is designed to give faculty input regarding a wide
range of curricular and operational issues. When I pressed Mrs. Stone about the level and degree of true openness and real influence of those teams on school improvement, she suggested that her influence as principal was still the strongest.

First of all, it’s anybody who wants to (be involved). So if you want to come you can. I think the interest was higher in the beginning and now they’re kind of like, “Well, she’s going to…this is what’s going to happen and it’s going to be based on this and so, you know, I’m not going to waste an hour of my time every week.”

More specifically, I asked Mrs. Stone about the amount and degree of teacher collaboration. The following exchange during our second interview speaks to the difficulty of creating a true sense of collaboration in a large high school and the principal’s lack of confidence as to whether it is even needed or effective in large organizations.

**DJE:** Last time, I was talking to you a little bit about the collaboration and it’s hard with this large of a faculty, I would imagine. Do you think that the faculty regularly collaborates here?

**Principal:** Not as a whole. They collaborate in small groups.

**DJE:** What about, among those groups, or among the faculty as a whole, a level of collegiality? How would you describe it here?

**Principal:** Um, clique-y. Because, it’s by all means there, but within each clique, or each subject area, or each grade level, or each house. Not, you know, schoolwide, not with over 200.

**DJE:** Do you think it needs to be? Do you think it would be a more effective
school if it were like that?

**Principal:** No. No, because I don’t know how you could do that. No offense, but I don’t want to talk to 200 people myself, you know what I mean? I don’t have that much time.

It’s probably more accurate to describe the decision-making at Southern High School as shared “input” or shared “conversations” than shared “decisions.” While Mrs. Stone appears to have open access for teachers and staff to voice their concerns and ideas, she is the filter for the solutions and changes. More specifically, she is ultimately in control.

Our Shared Decision-Making Team meets at least once a month and everybody anonymously puts their ideas out there, they email them to the chairperson who puts everything on the agenda. We sit and we talk about them. And, they allow me to give input too, and they can immediately tell, I’ll say, I don’t see how that’s going to work. But, I mean, that’s a rarity, maybe one out of 10 items I’ll say, “I don’t think so, that’s you know, way out in left field.” So, they see that they can do things, although at the same time, they realize that OK, we can’t do everything.

A telling dynamic that I found in each school that I visited was the principal’s sense of maintaining control versus their willingness to allow for freedom and autonomy. Mrs. Stone appears to the type of leader who would prefer to be hands-off but who feels that some (or much) of her faculty members needs her guidance to see things through. In light of the mandates and accountability measures that teachers face, I asked Mrs. Stone if she felt that her teachers can still be creative and autonomous.
My teachers can, because I will quickly look any of them in the eye and say, if you produce results, I will leave you alone. I’m not going to mess with you. I’m not going to tell you how to do anything. But just produce results and show me those results and I will leave you alone.

I pressed further about whether she feels that a principal can impact teaching and instructional creativity, and to what degree. This speaks to the principal’s sense of empowerment, and to the degree that the principal can make the teacher feel empowered.

My question was: How do you impact their feeling that they can be creative?

Those who are producing results, they see it in each other, because they’ll say, you know, how come you don’t go in there and watch so and so, how come you’re always in my classroom? And so they see that those who are producing results can do what they want to do. Now, as for being creative, I do ask questions when I go in and visit rooms: Well, why are you doing it this way? And oftentimes, that develops conversation and coaching. “Well, could I really do something else?” And you say, “Why do you think you have to do it this way?”

Even the English teachers have started, they’ve started their own lesson study, they’re probably my second tier in those who are high achievers. And they’ve gone out of the box in some creativity.

I noted in my journal that Mrs. Stone is a strong-willed leader with a great deal of confidence in her skills based on previous experiences as an assistant principal and principal. She gave repeated examples of experiences that she believes have shaped her as a leader. I observed then that leaders like Mrs. Stone may be so confident in solving
problems and installing new procedures that they don’t feel they need help along the way, which could work to stifle true collaboration. This, again, gets to the nature of who is in control and who is willing to share in that control. When pressed on this matter, Mrs. Stone insisted that she didn’t want to control her teachers.

**DJE:** Do you feel it’s important for you to feel like you have control?

**Principal:** Not control, control of the kids, yes…

**DJE:** Or that you’re in control, maybe I should say?

**Principal:** Of the kids, yes. I don’t need to feel in control of the adults. I feel like they know more than me, as it relates to teaching, anyway, especially of their individual subject areas.

This paradox of having control of the processes that are necessary in running a school while providing autonomy to teachers may be the reason we see Mrs. Stone and the other principals vacillate between owning the decisions and sharing in them.

**Epilogue – Principal Stone**

Mrs. Stone is a serious person who doesn’t take the mission or ministry of her job lightly. She is confident more in a been-there, done-that sort of way – as if nothing surprises her anymore. I found that she didn’t talk as much as the other participants about collegiality and her statements tended to be more “I-focused” and less “We-focused.” Strangely, I didn’t attribute that to being self-centered and self-conscious. Quite the opposite, I found Mrs. Stone to be other-centered and servant-centered but I noted that all of this talk of shared-decision making was probably too inefficient for her tastes. As with
the other participants, I have attempted to capture Mrs. Stone’s leadership tendencies in the following table.

Table 7: Data Findings for Mrs. Stone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Key Leadership Tendencies</th>
<th>Key Attributes and Indicators</th>
<th>Notes from Interviews and Reflective Journal re: Mrs. Stone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I”-focused</td>
<td>Controlling</td>
<td>Linear in her approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confident, Bold</td>
<td>Rushed, hurried. Pressure to improve now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top-down tendencies</td>
<td>Creates processes, policies to affect change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We”-focused</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Views real collaboration as unrealistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collegial</td>
<td>“Fun stuff” not really practical in her school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust-building tendencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Servant”-focused</td>
<td>Activist leadership</td>
<td>Willing to “get her hands dirty.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caring. Hands-on</td>
<td>Not afraid to step in when needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risk-taking tendencies</td>
<td>Doesn’t view herself as “above” any task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Learning”-focused</td>
<td>Curriculum savvy</td>
<td>Data savvy. Really knows her data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data savvy / linear</td>
<td>A ‘numbers’ person. Show me the evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type-A tendencies</td>
<td>Serious-minded. A policy wonk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focused.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To put it another way, I am certain that she would tell you that true teacher-administrator collaboration is more research-talk than reality. I found her to be quite linear and laser-like, more operationally strong than curricular-focused, and driven to succeed almost to a fault. I’m not sure she ever said that but she didn’t have to. My observations told me that. I could hear it in her voice. I could see it her eyes.
The Fourth Case
Gabe Brightly / Beachside High School

Prologue – Principal Brightly

Principal Brightly was the other principal that I interviewed from the North County School District and he was eager to take part in the study. He saw it as his way of helping me out, even though he didn’t know me or fully understand the project as of yet. I didn’t know it then but he is someone who likes to help others – it comes naturally to him. Though he and Principal Stone work in the same school district, their schools are not at all alike. While I found Mrs. Stone to be overwhelmed by the breadth of her mission, Mr. Brightly appeared a great deal more relaxed and in charge at his charming school on the beaches. He is a veteran principal of 15 years and had all the confidence of someone who had seen every problem and considered every solution. We stayed in touch as needed through email and phone and set up our first face-to-face interview for January of 2010. Our second interview was in June of 2010 – both times in his office.

Mr. Brightly is in a comfortable job in a comfortable, beach community that has sent all of its children through Beachside High since 1964. It is so far apart from the other schools in the North County School District that you would think you are in another city – or on another planet. It sits alone and over a bridge from the rest of the district, far from the rest of the world and from the harangue of downtown. The wind blows sand across the road and onto the campus, the buildings are squat to the ground and the surroundings seem less busy and less noisy than most high school settings.
Principal Brightly – Setting / Context

At Beachside High School, the students mingle after school and blend naturally with the tourists and beach bums who come to and from the sandy shore across the street. The kids wear shorts and flip flops and I have to wonder if they have every worn anything else. Most of them live around here and most of their parents went to Beachside High as well. The students hang around the school the way they hang around the nearby park or the 7-Eleven. The school itself is a postcard mixture of terra-coda and orange brick. Built in the 1960s, the school would have been a good spot for an on-location, Elvis movie. The school is not especially historic in an ornate, notice-the-features way, but it has aged gracefully and come back into fashion like most things from the 60s. It is a tidy and timeless campus, more Ava Gabore than Zsa Zsa Gabore.

The colors of the outside remind me of the sand, a mix of hues that is hard to pin down. The outside walk-ways are tin-roofed and painted a blue-green shade that mimics the sea. There are a few portables out back and the whole place seems low to the ground as if someone didn’t want to block out the sun. Mr. Brightly’s office is in a newer part of the campus and I found him for the first interview to be typing feverishly at his computer, catching up on emails. We met for the first interview on a day when school was closed, a training day for teachers. Mr. Brightly was dressed down, wearing a faded, blue sweatshirt. Two things are immediately obvious: 1.) He wants to be comfortable and he wants to make me feel the same and 2.) The sweatshirt he is wearing has been through the washing machine many, many times. I didn’t ask, but I’m betting it is the same one he wears each year to put up his Christmas lights.
For both interviews, he was welcoming and in no rush to get started or to end our discussions. His door was left open and both times we met someone came in and asked a question. It is clear that he is an open-door guy and he means it literally. Our first interview was interrupted by a call from a local newspaper reporter who was asking about a possible fight on campus. Mr. Brightly wants to be the nice guy but I see a tougher edge to him in dealing with the reporter than I saw when he was dealing with a teacher. He is a former coach and he looks the part. He is what you would picture if thought of ex-coach or a former New York City cop. Though he wasn’t a cop, he could play one on television. He has a deep brown tint to his skin and he sounds like someone who could fit in well in New York or New Jersey: “Hey, how ya doin’?”

Mr. Brightly is thick around the middle, more filled-in than pudgy -- like he’s had one too many beers and maybe a dozen too many chicken wings. He reminds me of some of the other coaches turned principals that I’ve known – firm but friendly, strong and in charge, out of coaching but still in the game. He has a balding head that is shaved close to the scalp and gray-black beard that is trimmed tightly to his face. He wears rimless glasses that give him an aged and sophisticated look.

His office is typical of a busy principal, with piles of data reports and master schedule drafts. He never apologizes for the mess, which makes me think that he no longer sees it. The furniture is a high-end, red-cherry mix of flat work spaces, hutches and one small table. Dated, slate blinds cover the window that looks out onto a grassy courtyard. There is a football in his office, pictures of sports teams and photos of his family. His diploma from the local university hangs on the wall.
He rocks back and forth in his chair as he speaks, keeps his arms folded a lot and is clearly in charge of the conversation. He is overly friendly and wants me to feel supported. I appreciate that. I find him to be a guy’s guy and a good guy – like an old-school football or baseball coach. He wants to be nice and he wants to lead, though he is not afraid to chew you out or make you drop down and do 50 push-ups. He is clearly a principal who wants to be visible and who wants to know his teachers and students by name. I observe that he is the kind of guy who will walk down the hallways and “high-five” the kids or will shake their hands with a steady grip or will, maybe, just maybe, have them drop down and do some push-ups.

Principal Brightly – Views on Leadership

Mr. Brightly doesn’t stray far from his comfort zone. It seems to come naturally for him to be nice but tough, friendly but firm. He has been a coach a long time and I think he is still coaching today, whether he is encouraging a student to get to class or a teacher to improve his or her instruction. It is hard to separate Mr. Brightly’s leadership style from his personality. During both interviews, he was purposeful in keeping his door open and he told me that if a parent stopped in he would make time to see them. He seemed eager to talk to people, more so than most principals that I have encountered. That is likely tied to his belief in relationships as the center point for change. In trying to determine how his personality and leadership style were aligned, I asked him to define his way of work.

I don’t know that a leadership style can be consistent from one person to the next,
because I think it’s really, you have to be who you are and what your personality is. My personality is probably different than (others). I’ve even tried sometimes, we might have talked about this in the past, I can’t remember, you know, to maybe try to change that and I think it’s very difficult to do and I think if you do that, you start to head down a little bit of a slippery slope, because now you’re trying to be something you’re really not. And I think when you do that, you’re not comfortable. I was not comfortable with that, where people said, you need to be tougher, you know, with teachers who were five minutes late, or tougher with this, or tougher with that, or you need to be tougher with the kids or something, and that’s not really your style, I think it’s very difficult. So, while there’s best practices, I think, for curriculum, and programs, and how we handle discipline, or how we do grade recovery, I think there’s best practices for that. I don’t know if there are best practices for a leadership style. So I think you have to take what your personality is and work with that.

When I pressed him further to narrow his style to a few words, he spoke again about relationships.

Consensus-building, relationship-building. You know, I make a mistake, I fall on the sword, I made a mistake and we need to make it right. I had to do that with a couple parents this morning, who we omitted from last night’s program by mistake. And I think honesty. I think everybody tries to do that, but, I don’t try to bluff teachers and everything. I try to be very honest about why we’re doing something and if we can’t do something that we want to do, why.
If you picture a larger-than-life figure who will shake your hand and say: “Good morning” you are picturing Mr. Brightly. He is the type of person who believes in others, maybe even if they don’t believe in themselves. He comes across as an inspiring sort of fellow who will look you in the eye and challenge you to speak up.

I always make a point to tell the secretaries, I tell them, I said when I walk through the office and I see a parent sitting there, I’m going to go ask them, “Are you being helped, or can I help you.” I said, I know you’ve help them, so I don’t want you to get put out by that, I said, but they need to see that other people are interested in their well-being and interested in why they’re here.

In chorus with his views on leading by building relationships, Mr. Brightly was clear on a principal’s need to see and be seen.

I think in high school, visibility and accessibility are number one. When you survey kids, they will tell you visibility. They want to know who the principal is. So I am at almost every single class change, morning and afternoon, and I get on the TV. I try to get on the TV about once a week for morning announcements and all just to talk to the kids.

The research is there that supports principals who are visible and visionary, unconventional even to the point of recalcitrance. Mr. Brightly spoke often about his maverick style that sometimes puts him into conflict with his bosses.

So, I think the willingness to maybe take a risk on some things that may be frowned on by other people or something, you do it if it’s in the best interest of the kids.
I asked: But what does it say about you? You know, you’re the leader.

Yeah. I think it says that I’m willing to maybe fight something from downtown if I don’t like it, or I’m willing to say, hey, we’re going to do it this way and we’ll worry about the slap on the hand later. And I think downtown, some people would tell you that.

During the interviews, Mr. Brightly continually came back to his interest having an open-door policy to send the signal that he is open to input from others, open to their criticisms and suggestions.

You know, this morning, I get here about 6:30 this morning, and that’s kind of my, what I try to be my time to listen to any voice mails I’ve received, after the close of day yesterday and this morning, emails that came in overnight. I try to take care of all that before about 6:50, when I run down the halls. Well, a parent shows up this morning, my secretary says, hey, Mr. Herdman only needs two minutes. Well, that was 40 minutes. It was not a lot of anything that was important, but I sat here and listened to him and we kind of knew each other. So, yeah, I would have preferred to have my door shut and we tell, well, I wouldn’t say prefer it, it might have been better for me to have my door shut, my secretary says hey, I’ll have Mr. Granderson call you, make an appointment, or you can come see him at 2 o’clock today, you know, but I’m not comfortable with that, so.

Even more telling was Mr. Brightly’s interest in talking to kids, having them know him. In an attempt to get him to describe himself more specifically as a leader, I asked him: But you would advocate for a leadership style that was what?
Open and accessible, absolutely. And years ago, there were some surveys out there and some data that they talked to kids, high school kids and the No. 1 thing important to them about the principal was, “We want to see him. We want to know who he was.”

Principal Brightly – Views on School Reform

Mr. Brightly is certainly not the type of principal who feels the need to impress people with his appearance, intellect or resume. He is more comfortable in his own skin. He is not the professional-looking, business-suit-wearing principal, for sure. He is more likely to be buried behind a pile of data reports, with his sleeves rolled up and mustard on his tie. I noted in my reflective journal that he feels the need to be “in the trenches” as a way of reforming his school.

A review of the site-based documents at Beachside High shows this his school has not made AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) for several years. That puts his school under state watch – called Correct II status. I encouraged him to talk about his interest in keeping a positive school culture and meeting increasingly demanding state mandates. My question was: What about managing the mandates, back to the accountability, managing that? You talked a little bit about protecting teachers from some of that. So, how do you, as a principal, affect how they are doing, how they get to it all without being overwhelmed?

So, you know, it’s a fine line between urgency and ahhh, we’re OK with this. But, I think probably more this year, we’ve had to heat up the urgency a little bit and
become compliant with a lot of the directives.

Like the other principals, I asked him about whether the mandates inhibit his creativity or effectiveness as a leader.

Well, I think you have to work within those mandates, but I think you can still do that where, this is our interpretation of this mandate, okay, and while we have to meet the mandates, there’s a lot of different ways we can meet this mandate. And I think to get back to the original question, too, is you certainly have to be able to express and communicate your vision for the school, and make sure that everything you do is pointing toward meeting that vision.

Mr. Brightly points out that meeting the vision and improving a school come down to good teachers.

So, yeah, I think that’s very, very key…I thought that was the most important thing, getting good teachers in there. And, you’ve got to try to make it fun. School should be fun. We get more and more difficult, but school should be fun for teachers and fun for the kids.

Mr. Brightly spoke more about how teachers (and kids) need to continue to have fun and be creative for schools to improve, resisting the urge to follow lock-step in line with typical school reform protocols. I asked him: How do you impact that as a leader, to provide them with more of a sense of that?

I think I let them know that they can be comfortable with straying from the learning schedule by a week. You know, if you think your kids need more on isosceles triangles, don’t worry about if you’re going to end up a week behind on
the learning schedule and someone from the district complains about that. I’ll take that hit. And as long as I feel that I can justify those differences, and I can justify a document that this is in the best interest of the kids, then I’m OK with it. I don’t want to do that just because it’s easier for us. And there’s got to be, yeah, this teacher’s a week behind the learning schedule because, look at this data, when they took their progress monitoring on these skills, their kids didn’t get it.

I noted in my journal that Mr. Brightly appears to be bold and confident enough to change things as he sees fit, even without the backing of his district bosses or even if it doesn’t align perfectly with state mandates.

Well, I think you can’t become a renegade, or a rebel, OK. I don’t think that’s good for anybody. But I think sometimes it is where you’ve got to make decisions where this is best for our high school and we’re going to do it, the heck with them.

Principal Brightly – Views on School Culture / Decision-Making

Mr. Brightly’s interest in building relationships with his students, parents and faculty members is already noted as party to his leadership style but it is also tied closely to his views on school culture. During one of my visits, I noted that a teacher who walked in appeared to be exceedingly comfortable talking with the principal about some problems he was having, not worrying one bit that a visitor was present. This gets to a sense of trust and collegiality that is clearly evident at this school, something that Mr. Brightly spoke about often during my visits. One of my questions was: Let me ask it one
last way and maybe you’ll reach the same conclusion. What are the best ways to lead
people to a common vision?

Consensus-building, I think is extremely important, especially in education. The
teachers are much more expert in their fields than I am, and if I’m not gathering
their opinion, then I’m not doing my job very well. Obviously, we have policy we
have to follow, so, as far as leadership style, you need to know policy, you need to
know state statute, and you need to follow that. Communication with kids,
teachers, parents. I think it’s very, very important that we communicate and
sometimes we lose sight of that when we get real busy as well.

While Mr. Brightly stressed consensus-building and community-building during
the interviews, he also reminded me that he still in control. In fact, I found him to have a
controlling nature that prevented him from giving complete ownership of decisions over
to his faculty and staff.

So, we try to build consensus with things, with our different leadership groups
and collaboration groups. We try to build consensus. But then, I think a leader
also has to have the ability to say, you know, I’ve got to step in and make this
decision for what’s the best for us.

The true dilemma for leaders around how much power and control to hand over
and how much to retain is evident at Beachside High. While Mr. Brightly appears
comfortable making decisions and running his school, he also seems to recognize that the
school will be stronger with others in the mix. The research shows that a level of shared
decision-making begins with a certain trust and collegiality among the staff. I asked Mr.
Brightly: Do you think there is any level of collegiality among the teachers?

Yeah, there is. It’s difficult at a big school and I think it’s always more difficult in high school because high school teachers are more subject-oriented and sometimes even kid-oriented and you don’t have the, we have not done a real good job here they have at (others) schools with the smaller learning communities. We’re making some steps forward and more attempts next year to do that. We did not have the small learning community grant that a lot of other schools did. But we’re still supposed to be looping towards that. So, we have done very well with our professional learning community time. And I think that has helped build collegiality and teachers working together for the best interests of the kids.

Like most schools in Northern County, Beachside High has a mandated shared-decision making team. The school district contract requires it. The group meets every other week and spends most of its time on non-instructional, operational issues like tardies and dress code.

We actually tried to evolve that more toward instruction and it really didn’t work that well. Although they do control some school recognition funds and everything that goes toward student achievement and all. We have department chairs that we meet with every other week, that’s called our Senate, where we deal with scheduling and more of the academic end of it. Then we have, every other week, we have an early dismissal, and that time is sacred time for collaboration. And we have PLC groups, Professional Learning Community Groups that look at data,
look at results and talk about that.

As we continued to discuss how close his school comes to sharing in big
decisions, I asked him about the school’s budget and the master schedule.

The decision is pretty much made by me, and the assistant principal that handles
the master schedule. And then we go to the shared decision-making group, which
we’re required to do by our contract.

He paused for a moment and then added:

Here, it’s kind of, I meet with them, they kind of give me some priorities.

Priorities are always teaching positions, but they might say, oh, you know, we
think we need a little bit more security, and maybe a little bit less clerical. Or, we
want some money to be put into technology. And then I’ll use those as kind of our
guide to what we do.

I then asked: So, they’re like an advisory to you. So, I want to hear more about who’s on
that. Who comprises that shared decision-making team?

Shared decision making? It’s pretty much a representative from each department.

And that department kind of chooses who that person is.

But, besides the infrastructure, the question really is about, who makes the
decisions and then, a sense of control. So the question I have for you is, how can you
have others share in the decisions at this school and still maintain some control over those
decisions? How do you do that?

Principal: Well, I think the teachers expect me to have control. You know, they
want input on decisions, but I don’t think they want to control or manage those
decisions.

**DJE:** Oh, that’s interesting.

**Principal:** Yeah. Sometimes I wish they would manage them more, because then it takes some of that off of me. But I don’t really think they want that. They want me and administration to manage sometimes what their decisions are.

In an effort to involve his teachers more in decisions, Mr. Brightly pointed out that he sometimes is absent from meetings so everyone doesn’t turn to him to solve the problems. Of course, this has to be balanced with the principal’s interest in having the last say on things. The following exchange during one of our interviews is an example of this struggle for control.

**DJE:** Is it important for you, as a principal, to feel professionally--however else you want to characterize it--in control?

**Principal:** Yeah, I’m little bit, I think most leaders are a little bit of control freaks.

**DJE:** Why is that?

**Principal:** I feel ownership. I get real worried sometimes if I don’t know what’s going on, or if I don’t feel in control. But at the same time, I am not a micro manager and don’t want to ever be that.

Epilogue – Principal Brightly

Mr. Brightly is keenly aware of what is happening in his school and he is comfortable being in charge. He is also aware of the need for others in his school to feel
comfortable as well, to feel involved. I found him to have more of an open-access to his office than most principals that I encounter. He had a personality style that was inviting and comfortable. This may be a reason why his school has an air of collegiality even if he is clearly in control in a decision-making sense. As with the other participants, I have attempted to capture Mr. Brightly’s leadership tendencies in the following table.

Table 8: Data Findings for Mr. Brightly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Key Leadership Tendencies</th>
<th>Key Attributes and Indicators</th>
<th>Notes from Interviews and Reflective Journal re: Mr. Brightly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I”-focused</td>
<td>Controlling</td>
<td>Takes charge / sometimes micro-manages. Others “advise” but he decides. Wants it “done right” if it has his name on it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confident, Bold</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top-down tendencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We”-focused</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>A relaxed, shake-your-hand style. Wants to be visible. Likes his teachers and staff. Trusts them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collegial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust-building tendencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Servant”-focused</td>
<td>Activist leadership</td>
<td>Wants to send message: “I don’t know everything.” Willing to “roll up my sleeves.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caring, Hands-on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risk-taking tendencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Learning”-focused</td>
<td>Curriculum savvy</td>
<td>Busy. Data reports on his desk. Directly involved in Master Schedule, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data savvy / linear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type-A tendencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a veteran principal, Mr. Brightly also offers a level of confidence that leaves little doubt that he knows where he wants the school to go and how to get there. This is common among the principals in this study and may affect the feelings among parents, students and staff that they have much to offer. Mr. Brightly seems to have a mix of the traditional, take-charge principal demeanor with the more progressive sensibilities of a team-leader, facilitator principal. It’s a mix that is hard to quantify but clearly visible.
Chapter Five

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The study was designed to describe and explain the perspectives of high school principals who work in large school districts in an era of high accountability. The four principals were selected by the school districts themselves as among their most “successful” veteran principals. The following exploratory questions were used to guide this study:

1.) What elements constitute the principals’ perspectives about school reform and shared decision-making?

2.) What factors influence the principals’ perspectives about school reform and shared decision-making?

Principal leadership styles and practices have been at the center of educational research for decades. In turn, much of the research during the past 30 years has been specific to the principal’s ability to lead large-scale change through times of increased accountability. Related studies have focused on the principal’s ability to empower teachers, students and parents in sharing in school reform under headings like shared decision-making and site-based management. Researchers have been unable to tie site-
based management or shared leadership directly to student achievement (i.e., learning gains) (Fullan & Watson, 2000). Instead, the literature has been more compelling in connecting learning gains to schools that have collaborative cultures in place and where true “professional learning communities” are evident (Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Louis & Marks, 1998). More specifically, the literature shows that schools tend to improve only when principal themselves engender collaboration and a common purpose among the school stakeholders (Leithwood & Riehl, 2009; Lewis & Murphy, 2008, Ouchi, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; Beck & Murphy, 1998).

These findings led to a review of the literature on principal leadership styles and the impact of principals on school reform, collaboration and empowerment. In most studies to date, there was too much statistical “noise” to draw any real conclusions about the amount and degree of collaboration and empowerment in schools and increased student achievement. The literature review also showed that most studies were quantitative in nature and rarely spoke to the unique qualities and actions of the principals themselves.

Using qualitative methods, this study was intended to address a gap in the literature in providing the insights of four principals who were in the midst of school reform efforts. The focus was on the principals as people and as leaders because nearly all of the studies reviewed in Chapter Two showed a connection between effective principals and student achievement (Leithwood & Riehl, 2009; Lewis & Murphy, 2008). This was especially true in schools where principals and teachers were collaborative partners in learning, where distributed leadership practices were in place, and where
principals, teachers and parents shared a common vision (Leithwood & Riehl, 2009; Lewis & Murphy, 2008, Ouchi, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; Fullan & Watson, 2000; Beck & Murphy, 1998). The focus of the interviews with the principals was on their leadership styles and their perspectives around school reform, collaboration and shared decision-making.

In light of my phenomenologist viewpoint, I attempted to understand the participants as they existed both textually and structurally. It is important to note here that I only spoke with the principals themselves (and no other school employees) so as to capture the principals’ own perceptions of themselves, their schools, and their reform efforts. As explained in Chapter Three, I sought out high school principals from among the six largest school districts in Florida and then conducted two interviews with each of them as part of site visits to their schools. Extensive field notes were also taken and recorded as part of my reflective journal. The four cases presented in Chapter Four included narrative portraits and direct quotations that were intended to provide context in contrast to the large amount of survey data that exists in the current literature. The interview transcripts and reflective journal notes were reviewed carefully and relevant themes were noted across the data sets. Those conclusions are presented in this chapter.

**Key Themes / Findings**

Each of the principals relayed a great deal about their leadership styles, their tendencies regarding collaborative decision-making and their viewpoints regarding school change in an era of increased state and national accountability. A review of the
data collected during the interviews and recorded in my journal showed four key themes or tendencies that emerged. In summary, the principals tended to be *I*-focused, *We*-focused, *Servant*-focused, and *Learning*-focused. These four styles of leadership were found to be both overlapping and paradoxical. They are a complex set of notions that are hard to define and that are, at times, in conflict with one another. Though each of the participants had slightly different leanings, all of them shared aspects of the four tendencies. Working definitions of each are presented in the table below and then explicated in more detail so the reader has a better understanding of each. Afterwards, a discussion is presented related to the four tendencies as both mutually related and mutually exclusive.

Table 9: Data Findings / Four Key Tendencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Key Leadership Tendencies</th>
<th>Key Attributes And Indicators</th>
<th>SAMPLE Notes from Interviews and Reflective Journal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I&quot;-focused</td>
<td>Controlling, Confident, Bold Top-down tendencies</td>
<td>&quot;Take-charge&quot; Principal sets the vision Teachers as advisers, not decision-makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We&quot;-focused</td>
<td>Collaborative, Collegial Trust-building tendencies</td>
<td>Shared mission / vision Principal as coach / mentor &quot;I don’t know everything&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Servant&quot;-focused</td>
<td>Activist leadership, Caring, Hands-on Risk-taking tendencies</td>
<td>&quot;Walk the walk&quot; &quot;Role up my sleeves&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Learning&quot;-focused</td>
<td>Curriculum savvy, Data savvy / linear Type-A tendencies</td>
<td>Putting the needs of students first Kid-focused moreso than teacher-focused Principal as lead &quot;teacher&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I-Focused Leadership

Though much of the literature review for this study was around shared decision-making and collaborative work structures, I found these four principals to have tendencies that were more top-down and controlling than I expected. The data shows that the principals in these four schools are clearly in charge and wanting to control many of the decisions in their schools. In contrast to a more collaborative work culture where faculty, staff, parents and students have buy-in and input to decisions, these four principals tended to see that as admirable but unrealistic. This excerpt from one of the principals (Mr. Brightly) is just one example of that. “Well, I think the teachers expect me to have control. You know, they want input on decisions, but I don’t think they want to control or manage those decisions…Sometimes I wish they would manage them more, because then it takes some of that off of me. But I don’t really think they want that. They want me and administration to manage sometimes what their decisions are.”

The data from the interviews were striking in the frequency of “I-statements” that were noted. To be clear, each principal had some appreciation for collaboration and collegiality and, in many ways, the schools were highly collegial or conversational. Still, all four participants appeared most comfortable in making the key decisions that they felt would move their schools forward. That is not be confused with a closed-door, top-down approach. On the contrary, the four principals seemed sincere in having open-door policies and in providing open “access” to various stakeholders. Still, none of the four appeared willing to give key decision-making power over to others. To put this another way, the participants seemed willing to allow for shared “access” or shared “dialogue”
but less so in shared “decisions.” Though the data shows that the principals sometimes asked for the input of others, there is no data to show that the principals were intent on giving others final approval over anything substantive.

Interestingly, all four schools had some form of site-based, decision-making teams in place. These were in place, for the most part, as part of a district or state mandates. For example, each school had active professional learning communities (PLCs), department meetings, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Advisory Councils (SACs). Still, these committees appeared to be acting much more in advisory roles than as decision-making bodies.

A review of the data showed a number of common factors or qualities that can be categorized as I-focused. Below is a table that outlines some of the prominent attributes of I-focused leaders as found through this study. Each of the principals, to some degree, showed moderate to strong I-focused tendencies.

Table 10: Qualities of I-Focused Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Qualities of I-Focused Leaders</th>
<th>Mr. Ruddy</th>
<th>Mr. Rust</th>
<th>Mrs. Stone</th>
<th>Mr. Brightly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to be in control, take charge</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averse to sharing leadership, decisions</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer managing projects to ensure quality</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly self-aware and self-critical</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident, bold, entrepreneurial</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: As a point of clarification, it is impossible to fully quantify the degree to which each of the principals possesses the qualities or attributes listed in the chart. Though all of the principals showed all of the*
attributes to some degree, each attribute was marked only if the data suggested a *strong* connection existed.

The data review shows that each participant wants to retain a great degree of power and control. Each of the participants had a strong personality, clear convictions and a vision for change. Though some principals might be seen as caretaker principals or as bureaucrats who simply manage their schools each day, these principals clearly do not fit those descriptions. Instead, these principals are leading the change in their schools, taking bold steps along the way. One example of this is from Mr. Ruddy from Orange City High School. Since he has been principal, the school has moved forward with ideas that others were skeptical of, including opening a bank branch on the campus and building a new football stadium.

This “take-charge” attitude was evident in all four schools. I observed that this might also be a reason why the school district administrators viewed these principals as successful. It is interesting to note that all four schools showed different levels and degrees of learning gains per the state accountability metrics. Still, the principals themselves are considered effective in their districts and all four of them are clearly tied to everything that their schools are doing to affect change. One observation from this study is that these principals are not disconnected from the changes happening in their schools. They are not distant. They are not figureheads. On the contrary, they are the key agents for the change happening in their schools. They are driving all of the change, good or bad. I would describe all four principals as strong in their own ways and as principals who are active and on the move. These observations support current research that finds the principal to be the key ingredient, the key mover-and-shaker, in most school
improvement initiatives (Anderson, 2009; Leithwood & Riehl, 2009; Ouchi, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; Beck & Murphy, 1998).

We-Focused Leadership

A review of the data showed that each principal valued, to some degree, a measure of collaboration with faculty, staff, students and parents. This is not to say that the principals shared in making decisions with those stakeholders as much as they shared in some sort of dialogue with them. The principals also appeared to be open to the ideas of others and in providing open access for discussion and debate. This is one of the many paradoxes in play in this study. While it is obvious that each of the participants was interested in maintaining power and control, they also seemed genuinely interested in creating buy-in and trust among stakeholder groups.

Two of the four principals (Mr. Ruddy and Mr. Brightly) were observed as being charismatic and highly accessible, equally comfortable high-fiving their teachers in the hallways as they are with their students. One of the other principals (Mr. Rust) was a bit more reserved in his demeanor but was also high accessible, even to the degree that he was taking text messages from his teachers during the interviews. The other principal (Mrs. Stone) seemed more distant and less comfortable in having a direct relationships with her faculty and staff. Still, that appeared to be more related to her personality type than her lack of interest in collaborating with others. All four principals agreed for the need to have a “team” mentality for change to move forward successfully. They also
agreed that it was unrealistic to have all or most team members involving in making the
decisions.

The literature review for this study found that effective principals are those who
attempt to empower their teachers and foster collaboration (Leithwood & Riehl, 2009;
Lewis & Murphy, 2008, Ouchi, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; Beck & Murphy, 1998). The
four participants in this study would all agree with that assessment of good leadership
practice. Still, the data from this study suggests the following paradox: Empowering
teachers and fostering collaboration should not be confused with shared or collective
decision-making. Though they are related concepts, they are not the same. I observed that
these principals still wanted to be in control and preferred that key school-based decisions
remain in their hands.

A review of interview data and journal notes provided the attributes of a We-
focused leadership style that each of the principals employed to some degree. The
following table provides five of those key qualities. Three of the four principals appeared
to be highly We-focused and talked a great deal about building team and trust. I found
them to be very comfortable and confident, welcoming and approachable. It seemed to
me that all three of those principals viewed their collegial style as a prerequisite for
accomplishing change in a large organization.
Table 11: Qualities of We-Focused Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Qualities of We-Focused Leaders</th>
<th>Mr. Ruddy</th>
<th>Mr. Rust</th>
<th>Mrs. Stone</th>
<th>Mr. Brightly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committed to a true open-door policy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek collaborative opportunities with staff</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly relational, collegial with others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting, approachable, conversational</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process-focused, prefer substance over style</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: As a point of clarification, it is impossible to fully quantify the degree to which each of the principals possesses the qualities or attributes listed in the chart. Though all of the principals showed all of the attributes to some degree, each attribute was marked only if the data suggested a strong connection existed.

The other principal (Mr. Stone) appeared to have fewer of these qualities. In one of the interviews with her, I asked her to describe her interest in building a sense of collegiality at her school.

**DJE:** What about, among those groups, or among the faculty as a whole, a level of collegiality? How would you describe it here?

**Principal:** Um, clique-y. Because, it’s by all means there, but within each clique, or each subject area, or each grade level, or each house. Not, you know, schoolwide, not with over 200.

**DJE:** Do you think it needs to be? Do you think it would be a more effective school if it were like that?

**Principal:** No. No, because I don’t know how you could do that. No offense, but
I don’t want to talk to 200 people myself, you know what I mean? I don’t have that much time.

I found Mrs. Stone to be no less kind, just less interested in using a collegial work environment to move her agenda forward. I observed that the other three principals valued a We-focused approach as a way of getting broader change accomplished with more buy-in. It is more accurate to describe these four schools as empowering teachers to act as decision-makers within their departments and less so as actors in school-wide decisions.

An attribute that is hard to define but should be mentioned is principals’ believes in being trustworthy and genuine. This is true of all four principals and is why the controlling, I-focused qualities in these principals should not be confused with a rigid, untrusting manner. The principals in this study were not, in any way, focused only on themselves. They were much more interested in focusing on solutions that worked for kids and teachers. They also had an honesty about them; they were all comfortable with themselves people and leaders. In their own ways, each told me that they don’t try to bluff teachers or play games. I observed that to be accurate. This genuine side of each of the principals is also part of a We-focused approach that is evident from the data.

Servant-Focused Leadership

The principals in this study all displayed aspects of Servant-focused leadership. The data shows that they were not centered on themselves first. Instead, they most often put the interests of students and teachers first. They each described their interests in
helping out in any way possible to move their schools forward, from teaching classes to unplugging the toilets. This activist, hands-on approach is something that I found among all four of the principals and is certainly related to their increased credibility with their teachers and staffs. I also noted that each of the principals viewed this quality as unique to themselves.

To put it another way, the four principals said that they preferred to work in the trenches and to “roll up their sleeves.” Three of the four principals have been described earlier as being more out-front in their leadership styles, but all four viewed their school’s reform efforts as related to the principal’s willingness to work hard and serve others. They also saw their “hands-on” work ethic as a model for what they wanted out of their staffs.

The following table shows some of the attributes of Servant-focused leadership that were emerged from the interviews and my reflective journal. I found all four principals to be interested in improving their schools and, in one way or another, to be willing to take on any role to get that accomplished.

Table 12: Qualities of Servant-Focused Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Qualities of Servant-Focused Leaders</th>
<th>Mr. Ruddy</th>
<th>Mr. Rust</th>
<th>Mrs. Stone</th>
<th>Mr. Brightly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activist tendencies, looking to change things</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to do tasks not related to their job</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in helping / “walking the walk”</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk-taking, creative, willing to jump right in</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Humble, comfortable “in their own skin”

Note: As a point of clarification, it is impossible to fully quantify the degree to which each of the principals possesses the qualities or attributes listed in the chart. Though all of the principals showed all of the attributes to some degree, each attribute was marked only if the data suggested a strong connection existed.

It was clearly evident that all four principals were comfortable “in their own skin” as it related to being a principal. Of course, all four of them had been principals for more than five years and each displayed a confidence that sounded a lot like they wanted to improve their schools at any cost and less like they were trying to impressing people along the way. This sense of activist, Servant-focused thinking appears related to We-focused tendencies in that the principals viewed themselves as part of a team of people who were working to improve the schools. Still, the Servant-focused qualities found in these principals go beyond being a team player and showing a good work ethic. It is more accurate to describe these servant-minded tendencies as more of a “calling,” a feeling that there is a greater good at stake in improving these schools and that the principal needs to step in and help like everyone else. The ultimate extension of this line of thinking is to view the principal as an agent of social justice. Though the tenets of Social Justice Theory are only related to this study in ancillary ways, all four of the principals shared in thinking that was linked to social justice in some ways. The following commentary during one of the interviews with Principal Stone is presented as a good example of this servant mindset.

Principal: I dive in and help. I think that one thing people can say about me is, I’m out there doing the work. I’m not telling you to do it. If I’m asking you to get out there and do something, my hands are in there with you, doing it at the same
time. There isn’t anything at this school that I don’t know how to do, and I haven’t done, from running and ID badge machine to unstopping the toilet…and, I think that’s what makes me a little bit different from other principals. I think, I mean, I schedule kids. If I tell my administrators and my counselors I want you to schedule 10 kids a day so that we’re done by such-and-such time, I schedule 10 kids a day. And so, no matter what, I’m doing it also.

Though not fully explicated in this study, the entire notion of servant leadership is related to a risk-taking mentality – a “maverick” mentality as one principal put it – that fosters a “do whatever it takes” approach to school reform. In many ways, I found all four principals to possess this attitude in one way or another.

*Learning-Focused Leadership*

The principals in this study were clearly focused on curriculum and learning. There was no question that the learning improvements in these four schools were coming out of the principal’s office. None of the four principals was hesitant in any way of talking about instructional leadership and their interest in improving student performance. As one example of that, none of the four principals even suggested that I speak with another person (such as an assistant principal or department chair) when I asked questions about instructional best practices, student course offerings, scheduling, performance data, etc. All four principals clearly knew their school’s data and what the school’s deficiencies were. Moreover, the principals clearly had a plan in their heads for improving performance indicators related to reading, writing, math, science and AP
course offerings.

To be clear, their thinking related to improvement in these areas was more linear than not. I observed that the four principals were informed – maybe even “consumed” – by the school grade data. As explained earlier, Florida schools are graded mostly based on the numbers of students who show proficiency in reading, math and science, on those students who take and perform well on AP tests, and on the school’s graduation rate. It was obvious that the principals lived and died with these numbers – almost to a manic degree. While I have described these principals as focused on learning, it more accurate to describe them as focused on improving student test data. While I recognize that those are related ideas, there are not mutually exclusive. For instance, I found only one of the three principals (Mr. Ruddy) to be interested in talking about some of the more creative aspects of his school’s academic reputation (such as a new elective program or how the band was doing). The other principals were more comfortable talking about the performance indicators that were tracked by the state. In this era of accountability, I observed then that being data-driven and school grade-driven were common attributes among the four principals.

The table below provides some of the common attributes found in the interviews and journal notes related to Learning-focused leadership. Though secondary principals are often described as operationally focused, these principals were not much interested in talking about the day-to-day functions of running a school. I could tell from my interactions with them that they spent most of their days thinking about improving student achievement and classroom factors moreso than discipline issues or extra-
curricular matters. I’m not sure that I would find this kind of thinking in many schools but it was certainly common to these four.

Table 13: Qualities of Learning-Focused Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Qualities of Learning-Focused Leaders</th>
<th>Mr. Ruddy</th>
<th>Mr. Rust</th>
<th>Mrs. Stone</th>
<th>Mr. Brightly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum-minded / Data-centered</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear, a laser focus on school improvement</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting of the process and staying the course</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More student-centered than teacher-centered</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type A tendencies, interested in fixing things</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: As a point of clarification, it is impossible to fully quantify the degree to which each of the principals possesses the qualities or attributes listed in the chart. Though all of the principals showed all of the attributes to some degree, each attribute was marked only if the data suggested a strong connection existed.

It should also be noted that all of the principals were interested in improving things for students in their schools moreso than teachers. It is also interesting to note that each of the principals felt the need to point that out, as if to suggest that improving student learning was everything to them. The answer below from Mr. Rust is an example of this line of thinking. His response is to my question about how his teacher would describe him as a leader:

I would hope that they would say I think about the student and the needs of the student first, before I deal with the needs of the teachers, and then I deal with the needs of the parents. If they were asked what order I put those three, I hope they
would realize that’s the order I put them in…I think I try and hire teachers that want kids to come first.

While not all four principals had strong Type A personalities, each of them had tendencies to control things and fix things. This is related to the Learning-focused leadership that I am describing here in that all four principals were working on a clearly defined plan and process for improved student performance in their schools. There was a great deal of data from this study to describe the principals as planners and process-driven leaders.

Implications of the Study

This study sought to provide qualitative data in support of the growing body of literature related to effective principals and the amount and nature of teacher collaboration, collegiality and shared decision-making. The data from this study support the growing research that views the principal as the key ingredient to most school improvement initiatives. Though all four schools from this study show different levels and degrees of learning gains per the state metrics, all four principals themselves are considered effective in their districts and all four are clearly tied to everything that their schools are doing to affect change. This study supports the notion that principals are not disconnected from school change. On the contrary, I have observed that principals are driving all of the change, good and bad.

The rest of this chapter will address the results of this study as they relate to several areas, including the complexities of research related to schools and school
leaders, the impact on future studies, responses to the current literature, implications on professional practice and the impact of the study on the researcher.

Research Terms / Complexities and Criticisms

In light of my interest in gathering data related to distributed leadership and shared decision-making, I want to reiterate that many of the related terms that are presented in the current literature are overlapping while other seemingly related terms are mutually exclusive. For instance, I found in these schools that the whole notion of school culture-building should not be confused with shared decision-making. In the same way, terms such as collaboration, collegiality and empowerment are clearly related but not at exclusive intertwined. An example of these uncertain distinctions comes from this study: While these principals were very much interested in school culture and shared relationships, they were not equally devoted to sharing their power and control over key decisions with others in their buildings. These examples are provided to help the reader understand the difficulties of research around schools and school leaders and to provide fair warning as it relates to generalizing results from the current literature.

As it relates to this study, the figure below is intended to show the complexities and similarities of the terms presented and the overlapping nature of each. To help matters, I have grouped the tendencies associated with I-focused leaders with similar tendencies found in Learning-focused leaders. Similarly, the We-focused tendencies found in this study are related to those found under the heading of Servant-focused leadership.
It has already been explained that the four principals in this study expressed a competing set of variables that made it impossible to place any one principal under any one (or even two) headings. I have thus observed that the difficulty of capturing these principals under any one style of leadership is related to the complexities and messiness of leadership itself. Still, it is safe to say that the structural and spiritual leanings of the four principals toward a more *I-focused / Learning-focused* approach were oftentimes in conflict with their interest in taking a more *We-focused / Servant-focused* approach.

While each of the principals attempted to find their own balance, I endeavored to capture the principals as they were and present them as a mixture of each of the styles presented. I resisted the temptation to quantify them to a narrower degree and I would also caution future researchers in the same way.
**Impact on Future Studies**

In summary, I have concluded that the modern interpretation of an effective school principal may be tied to the collaborative and activist models, which is a notion that is supported by the literature review and by this study. This style is characterized by leaders who are collaborative, hands-on, visionary and curricular-focused. This is closely tied to transformational leadership, an area of study that may need further investigation.

While this study is not designed to prove anything or provide any true generalizations, there are a number of key renderings that I would like to share. Each of the following conclusions is based on a review of the current literature and a review of the data that is present in this study. Each of the conclusions below will need further consideration and closer inspection through future studies.

- My findings cannot support or deny a tie between effective school principals and the nature and degree of site-based authority or decentralization present in the schools. Still, there are enough data in this study to support further consideration that effective principals might prefer more authority in their hands than less authority.

- My findings also cannot find a link between effective principals and shared decision-making. On the contrary, the principals in this study view the notion of distributed leadership or shared decision-making as generally undoable or simply disconnected from school success.

- My observations of the data are that the formal processes of shared decision-making (like having a Shared Decision-Making team) seem to be in place more
out of mandate than for any true collaboration. All four principals in this study seem to be genuinely interested in “empowering” their teachers to be lead teachers, to grow professionally, and to collaborate with each other around learning but not in empowering them to make school-wide decisions.

- My conclusions also suggest that teacher collaboration and professionalism (through professional learning teams, for instance) may be tied to effective principals and, in turn, to effective schools. This is already supported by a number of studies that are reported in Chapter Two. Still, this is not to be confused with teacher decision-making. In all four of these schools, for instance, there is no sense that teachers are making any real decisions outside of their departments. There is then no real data present to support the idea that distributed leadership exists in these four schools.

- My observations from the data also support the notion that effective principals may have qualities related to transformational leadership – especially as it relates to vision-building and empowering teachers to work toward a common cause.

- All four reported that they still felt in control and empowered to make great change in their schools – even in this age of accountability. The data suggests that all for principals had a can-do attitude and sense of wanting to be “in charge.”

- Though all four principals were deemed effective by their peers, not all four schools were consistently effective by state data measures. This leads me to observe that our definitions of success for principals may need to be much broader than some might think.
Response to the Current Literature

The initial literature review for this study was around site-based management and its role in school improvement, culture-building and teacher and parent empowerment. As previously stated, the literature has not been consistent in connecting site-based management to student learning gains (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Beck & Murphy, 1998; Fullan, 1991). The review of those studies led to other, more research-supported methods like collaborative work cultures, professional learning communities and distributed leadership. The literature review also included studies on school principals as the key players in these reform efforts. The current literature is clear that no matter the amount of control provided to the principal through decentralized decision making (or site-based management), schools tended to improve only when the principal was able to create a sense of collaboration and common purpose among the stakeholders (Leithwood & Riehl, 2009; Lewis & Murphy, 2008, Ouchi, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; Fullan & Watson, 2000; Beck & Murphy, 1998).

The conclusions from this study support the findings from the current literature that place the principal at the center of reform and as the key player in school change. The data from this study also supports the findings from the current literature that sees little connection between the amount of site-based authority and an increase in student achievement data. Furthermore, this study raises questions about whether educators and researchers are clear on common definitions for site-based management, distributed leadership and other research terms already mentioned.

The contention that principals need to think “out of the box” and take control of
their schools was supported by many of the studies that were reviewed in Chapter Two (Anderson, 2009; Leithwood & Riehl, 2009; Ouchi, 2003; Earley et al., 2002; Beck & Murphy, 1998). Anderson (2009) calls on school leaders to become culturally competent, social advocates who challenge teachers, parents and community members to be entrepreneurial in finding solutions for their schools. All four principals in this study were found to strong, confident and entrepreneurial in their own ways. The data clearly show that none of the four were caretaker principals. None of the four were simply operational bureaucrats who showed up each day to take care of discipline, parent complaints and other day-to-day affairs.

Though the current literature has not proved that one style of leadership is sound in all cases and for all persons, the most modern interpretations support more collaborative (transformational) and activist (social justice) models. I found all four principals to have some of these tendencies and two of the four (Mr. Ruddy and Mr. Brightly) to have strong collaborative and activist bents. The work of Beck and Murphy may be most closely linked to what I discovered in these four schools. Those researchers found that site-based management appears to have value as a decision-making structure only as it fosters a sense of community and school collegiality. Through their studies, Beck and Murphy (1998) revealed several key “imperatives” that made the school successful: 1.) A learning imperative 2.) A community imperative 3.) A capacity-building imperative and 4.) A leadership imperative. Many of the benefits to schools that are found in the above “imperatives” are tied to site-based management. The imperatives are also closely tied to the leadership attributes described in this study as I-focused, We-
focused, Servant-focused, and Learning-focused.

Implications for Professional Practice

Current and future school leaders have much to gain from hearing about these four schools and their principals. If nothing else, school leaders will benefit from hearing about school reform via the “words” of the principals themselves. In truth, I benefited the most from sitting quietly and listening to the principals speak over and over again as I transcribed their interviews. They certainly articulated best what they were attempting to do in their schools, much better than I could as a researcher. What I intended to provide to practitioners through this study was a level of synthesis related to the four narratives, some offerings of wisdom that might prove helpful and some words of caution that might be prophetic.

In light of this study, practitioners might be mindful to find a balance when leading school reform. While I found each school’s struggles to be more alike than different, I found each school principal and each staff to be quite unique unto themselves. In this way, a principal should be cautioned about applying a leadership “model” to any one school setting without considering the personalities of the school and the people in it. Practitioners should also be considerate of their own tendencies that might push them too far in one direction or another – toward a fully trusting, collaborative approach or toward a more cautious, controlling approach. The data from this study shows that principals might be more successful when they find a more give-and-take / flexible style of leadership.
**Impact of the Study on the Researcher**

Though the study is complete, the impact of these four principals on their schools and on me is not. Those impacts are lasting. What I found through this study was a common set of skills and understandings among the four principals that can and should be shared with other principals. While I came into this study interested in learning about how principals reform their schools through a greater sense of collaboration with teachers and parents, I leave this study with a better understanding of the complexities of that task. I also see a greater link between principals and school improvement. In fact, I can’t separate the two. I now see the principal as the number one agent for change in schools—though more like the head coach than the headmaster.

It should be noted that I came to this study with some pre-conceived notions about the importance of collaboration and shared decision-making. For example, I would have told you before the study that the only true school reform can come from teachers who are collaborating and sharing in the key decisions of the school. I would have said the same about parents and their involvement in school change. While I still hold these values as an ideal, I recognize that this level and degree of collaboration is not a pure imperative and is not even possible without a principal in place who has the skills, vision and confidence to create that kind of lasting change.

I should note as well that my views of the common definitions related to school reform have shifted somewhat. For instance, I am convinced that the working definition of “site-based management” is so ever-changing as to be completely unreliable from a research standpoint. I simply do not see any real consensus about what site-based
management should look like and how one interpretation of it trumps another as a school reform protocol. While am I remain a true believer in providing authority to schools and principals, I no longer subscribe to any one view on how it looks in schools. I also have no confidence that simply mandating a site-based approach will solve much in schools. I would say the same about other terms related to this study, including “decentralization,” “distributed leadership,” and “shared decision-making.”

Finally, I feel compelled to disclose that during the time of this study I have moved from a position as an assistant principal to my new role as a principal. In fact, the completion of this study was delayed by approximately six months because of my recent promotion. I am now leading the reforms in a high school setting that is quite similar to those presented in this study. For this reason, I have reflected on the common themes presented in this chapter and I now have a greater sense of what each of these principals means when he or she talks about leading schools in ways that are I-focused, We-focused, Servant-focused and Learning-focused – all at the same time. I have thus observed that the principal’s role is a complex web of variables that is impossible to deconstruct and replicate with any certainty. To put it another way, I have found that leading is much more of an art than a science. If nothing else, this study has provided me that insight.

**Conclusion**

The end of this study coincides with my first opportunity to be a principal. I find that to be both telling and humorous at the same time. I must admit that there were times
when I thought that neither would come to pass. The end of this study also marks the end of a four-year journey to obtain my doctorate. Though there have been times of struggle and uncertainty, I never doubted that I would be a better person for having done it. I have many strengths and weaknesses, but I have never been afraid to take risks. You can call me brave or ignorant. Either way, I am a bit of a maverick and I like leading my life that way.

I can recall when my doctoral cohort group met for the first time and we were all deciding whether or not to start down this path together. A friend of mine who later decided to drop out told me: “It’s going to take years to finish this thing. I mean, you’re going to be in your mid-40s by the time you’re done.” I didn’t know what to say but somebody else chimed in with. “I say, ‘Go for it. You’re going to be in your mid-40s anyway.’”

I could cry when I think of the number of Saturdays that I spent huddled over my laptop computer. Some would say that those are days that I can never have back again. They are right about that. Still, I would argue that those are days that I don’t want back, for they are no longer needed. At times, those days left me bereft of my spirit and uncertain of my path. Still, here I am. At times, those days shaped me in new ways, challenged my thinking and inspired my soul. Still, here I am. I say that those days were not wasted; it is better to say that they are days that are no longer needed. Anyway, I prefer to look upon the days that lay ahead. For here I am. In my mid-40s.

And I will not be afraid.
References


Archer, J. (2005). An Edmonton journey: Educators from the United States flock to the Edmonton, Alberta, district in Canada to learn about its experiences with site based management, an idea that is gaining new traction here. *Education Week*, 24 (20), 33-36.


Dachler, & C. Schriesheim. Emerging leadership vistas (p. 80-106). Lexington,
MA: Lexington.

Books.


America’s schools. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Janesick, V.J. (2004). Stretching exercises for qualitative researchers (2nd ed.).


Kedro, M.J. (2004). Aligning resources for student outcomes: School-based steps to
success. Lanham: Maryland: Scarecrow Education.

Kose, B. (2009). The principal’s role in professional development for social justice: An
empirically-based transformative framework. Urban Education. 44 (6), 628-663


Leech, D., & Fulton, C. (1994). Faculty perceptions of shared decision making and the
principal’s leadership behaviors in secondary schools in a large urban district.
Education, 128 (4), 630-644.


185


Appendices
Appendix A
Interview Protocol

1. Describe your views on school leadership.

2. Describe your views on student achievement and what factors contribute to student growth. How does your leadership style impact student achievement?

3. How do you impact change in your school in light of the mandates from the state and federal governments?

4. Describe your relationship with teachers, parents and the local community. How do teachers, parents and community members impact decisions in your school?

5. Describe the level and degree of collaboration and collegiality at your school. How do you affect your school’s sense of collaboration and collegiality?

6. Is there anything else you want to tell me at this time?
Appendix B
Letter to Interviewees

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Department at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. I am pursuing my dissertation topic on school leadership and school reform. Your participation is requested because of your experience as a principal and your school reform efforts.

I am requesting that you permit me to visit and conduct this study at your school. Your participation will require two in-depth interviews that will last between one and two hours. The interviews will, with your permission, be taped and transcribed for accuracy. Each participating principal will not be named in the study and no information will be given that could be used to identify the principal or his/her school. Each participant will be provided a copy of the audio files and transcription. The participants and I will be the only ones with access to audio files. The master audio file will remain in my possession and will be destroyed three years after the publication of the dissertation.

Interviews will be arranged at your convenience sometime during the fall of 2009 and spring of 2010. The tentative schedule calls for one interview in December of 2009 or January of 2010 and one interview in February or March of 2010. In addition, you may be asked to share relevant artifacts and documents and to complete a limited amount of journaling or free response writing related to your role as principal. Your name and school name will be kept confidential and these items will only be used for educational purposes.

The dissertation will be completed in a narrative style called portraiture that seeks to describe you, your thoughts, and your school in a fair, honest and highly readable way. Your thoughts and actions will be depicted in a creative, narrative form that is akin to novel-writing. Every effort will be made to paint an accurate and authentic picture of you
and your school. All aspects of this project will be conducted in a respectful, ethical and scientific manner.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my request. I look forward to your participation in the study.

Respectfully,

Daniel J. Evans
719 92nd Avenue North
St. Petersburg, Florida 33702
Appendix C
Consent Form for Interviewees

This study involves interviewing high school principals about school reform, and is therefore research.

1. The purpose of this study is to describe and explain the perceptions and actions of principals who have implemented school reform.

2. The study is expected to last from December 2009 until November 2010.

3. The number of people to be interviewed is expected to be five persons.

4. The procedure of the research involves asking participants about their views on leadership, school reform and school culture.

5. The interviews will be one hour each in length and each participant will be interviewed twice. The audiotapes will be protected in my home and will be kept for two years.

6. There are no foreseeable risks to the participants and they may leave the study at any time.

7. Possible benefits are educational, that is to contribute to the body of knowledge about school leadership, school culture and teacher and parent empowerment.

8. Members may choose to be completely anonymous and all names will be changed for reasons of confidentiality. This information will only be known to me and the chair of my dissertation committee.

9. For questions about the research you may contact me, Dan Evans, at 727-576-1249 or at danandjudy@tampabay.rr.com

10. Participation in this study is totally voluntary. Refusal to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits.

11. There is no cost to you to participate in the study.

12. The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board, IRB, may be contacted at Please contact: John Arnaldi, Coordinator of Education, at (813) 974-7363 or jarnaldi@research.usf.edu. Division of Research Integrity & Compliance Mail: 12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd, MDC35, Tampa, FL 33612-4799 Phone:
(813) 974-5638 Fax: (813) 974-5618. This IRB may request to see my research records of the study.

I ______________________ agree to participate in this study with Dan Evans. I realize this information will be used for educational purposes. I understand I may withdraw at any time. I understand the intent of this study.

Signed________________________________________
Date________________________

193
Appendix D
Second Reviewer Form

I, Connie Kolosey, a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida, have served as a second reviewer for ‘Secondary Principals the Center of Site-Based Reform: Portraits of Leadership” by Daniel J. Evans. In this role, I have worked with the researcher throughout his study in capacities such as reviewing the analysis of transcripts and assisting in emerging issues.

Signed: ________________________________________________

Date: _____________________________
November xx, 2010

Dear ________________________________

Thank you for an enjoyable and insightful interview. Attached please find the draft copy of the verbatim transcripts of the interview. Please review the transcription for accuracy of responses and reporting of information. Please feel free to contact me by phone at 727-576-1249 or via email at danandjudy@tampabay.rr.com should you have any questions.

Thanks you again for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Evans
Appendix F
Sample Reflective Journal

Principal Rust
June 2010

Observations re: Mr. Rust
- Young guy (late 30s, early 40s), tall (slightly over 6 ft.). Golfer, athletic, skinny. Skinny long arms – he is all arms. Opie-like in his appearance.
- Irish-looking – red / orange hair / hair-short-curly / cut close to his head
- Skinny, thin beard – elf-like…pale skin-freckled skin (has had skin cancer problems). Always has sun screen around. There was some on his desk.
- First-interview: Tan trousers. Rust-colored, Havana-style shirt – short-sleeved. Open collar. No tie. Very casual. Casual, relaxed. Looked like someone who was very relaxed, though he commented that he normally dresses up a bit more but this was an early-release day and that they had a party after school…I’m not so sure. I think he’s just that guy.
- Second-interview: Khaki pants. School polo shirt.
- Leaning back in his chair. Very relaxed style. I thought I was talking to one of my college buddies. Not a complicated guy. Straight-forward.
- Speaks candidly, confidently. Seems smart, with-it but not complicated. I am what I am. I am what I appear to be. Not pretentious
- His office looked like a single guy’s college apartment – no aesthetics – white walls, blue-green school carpet (tightly woven). School-standard-issue principal desk and chairs. No personality…but a nice TV (funny)...like a bachelor’s pad. I think he could care less about decorating it.
- Pictures on his desk of his wife and family. Had on a wedding ring. In cheap frames, brown -- $1.99 frames. Had a little white, circulating fan on the table/desk behind him that was blowing.
- Had a hutch on the opposite wall – with a nice, small flat-screen TV. He said it was to watch the morning show. I’m guessing the Golf Channel or ESPN. He’s just a guy’s guy.
- His Blackberry kept buzzing. He glanced at it, was mindful of it but was nice enough not to let it distract our conversation. Respectful of me.
- Had his sunglasses on his desk – at the ready. Joe Cool sunglasses. Seemed like if I asked him to drop everything and go golfing that he would much prefer that over anything else.

Observations re: Mr. Rust’s school:
- 1,800 or 1,900 students (check this). School with lots of buildings. Expansive campus.
• Traditional-high-school looking. A little dingy. A little dated – like his office. Like he’s not really worried about the school’s aesthetic – there’s more important things to worry about. Let’s just get it done in the classroom.
• School has sort of disheveled feel to it – like there too much going on – unruly, maybe.
• Gum, gum wrappers and half-broken pencils laying on the ground. Hedges are topped by some weeds. Paint peeling a bit.
• Beige-colored school. School is beige – not fancy.
• Seems like an active school after school. Football practice. Teachers hanging around.

Conclusions about him, about principals:
• He was candid.
• This principal is very direct, very determined.
• He is really involved, directly involved – wants to control the change a bit
• Doesn’t involve a lot of folks in decision-making. It’s just too inefficient. Not really time-worthy. He seems to believe that there are just too many people (teachers, etc.) to involve a lot of people in the change. He definitely thinks that is unrealistic to involve parents.
• So, no so real sense of a shared leadership mentality – more of a take-control sort of guy
• A control-freak. Data-driven.
• Not teacher-focused but kid-focused. Student-centered. Student-focused. Ready to help kids anytime.
• Principal, though, is a servant leader, really involved.
• Will step right in, fix problems, attend a training and not just send his teachers there (this typically helps gain the respect of teachers).
• Good principals seem confident – they know where they’re going.
• Not pretentious. Straight-forward. I am what I appear to be. Not a complicated guy.
• Good principals… They take charge. Are direct. Roll up their sleeves (servant leaders). Laser-like in their focus.
• Put curriculum first. Put kids first.
• Use data.
• Open-door guy – roll-up-your-sleeves guys
• Laid, back. Relaxed
• Confident
• In charge – seems to be common among all the principals
• Focused more on the classroom than the facilities – curriculum-focused
• Not a fancy guy. His office is under-decorated…like himself. A bit disheveled – somewhat like the other principals. Too busy to worry about all of that.
• He said a principal has to be ego-less and approachable. My sense is that he has an ego but his first concern is the kids, the school
• HE sets the expectations…A lot of ‘I’ statements. “I want this to be this way…” He has really clear expectations and he wants things to be a certain way. He expects folks to meet those expectations.
About the Author

Daniel J. Evans lives and works in St. Petersburg, Florida. He is the principal at Dixie M. Hollins High School, the school he graduated from in 1986. Previously, he worked for five years as an assistant principal at Osceola High School in Seminole, Florida, and for two years as the Secondary Reading Supervisor for Pinellas County Schools. He continues to serve as a literacy trainer at various schools throughout Florida and his work and commentary can be found on his website/blog: immersionliteracy.com.

He received a Bachelor’s of Science degree in journalism from the University of Florida and a Bachelor’s of Arts degree in English from Florida Atlantic University. He holds a Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of South Florida. He has served as an adjunct faculty member at the University of South Florida on the St. Petersburg campus. He worked for 10 years as a teacher of English and journalism at Martin County High School in Stuart, Florida and at Pinellas Park High School in Pinellas Park, Florida. He is married to his college sweetheart Judy and has a sometimes precocious son named Connor.