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A Descriptive Study of Four Principals' Experiences in Leading

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A Descriptive Study of Four Principals’ Experiences in Leading
One High-Impact Minority High School

by

Lewis K. Curtwright

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in Educational Leadership
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this portraiture study is to describe four African-American principals’ experiences, in the context of their principal’s role, with the interventions they championed in meeting the needs of their struggling students. This research attempts to answer questions concerning: What role did the four principals play in the targeted school reform? What interventions did each principal introduce and what evidence of effects do they identify for each one? How did each principal’s values and beliefs affect what they chose to do? Framed within Social Justice Theory (SJT), the study provides insight into how these respondents increased student achievement and social behavior through the interventions that they championed. Data collection included school observations, interviews of principal participants, and the collection of principal generated artifacts such as awards, memos, and newspaper articles. Portraiture was the method used in this study. Several themes emerged from the narratives of the two men and two women. First, all four leaders were able to bring students, parents, and school staff members together. Second, there is a clear focus on how dedicated these men and women were to their work. The results and impact of their leadership, however, appear contextually unique, serendipitous, and distinctive.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There is a substantial body of research documenting the importance of the principal to the success of a school (e.g., Bottoms & O’Neil, 2001; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Codding & Marc, 2002; Davis, et.al., 2005, Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Fullan (1991) stated that “all major research on innovation and school effectiveness shows that the principal strongly influences the likelihood of change (p. 76).” In addition, much of the scholarly literature on student achievement attributes student gains to strong leadership by the school’s principal (e.g. Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Codding & Marc, 2002; Cotton, 2003, Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). This effect is magnified in high poverty schools (Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin, 2012).

A daunting body of literature, rich in lore about best practices regarding standards, data and limited resources, also describes the skills and behaviors necessary to be an effective principal (e.g. Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2009; Gronn, 2002; Shen & Sanders-Crawford, 2003). However, the principal’s voice and experience is lacking from the literature (Hoffman, 2008) in general and in the research documenting which skills principals who serve large, minority populations is as important, especially following the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Darling-Hammond, LA Pointe, Myerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). Also missing from the literature is an explicit examination of the role the principal plays in facilitating the success oriented adaptive behaviors of marginalized students (Carter, 2008). Such an examination is important because “the needs of the marginalized and the privileged often clash, causing moral dilemmas that cross a principal’s path on a daily basis.
The affairs and concerns of marginalized students occupy a prominent position in the domain of social justice.

Social justice in education results from a curriculum that is based on principles of democracy, fairness, equality, liberty, and justice when dealing with issues of gender, race/ethnicity, ability, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, multiculturalism, and discrimination (Bogotch and Schoolman, 2008; Glass, 2003; Sheets, 2003; Theoharis, 2007).

Scholarly discourse on principals who lead with a focus on Social Justice Theory (SJT) discusses both the theoretical underpinnings (e.g. Brown 2004; Theoharis, 2007) and practical applications (e.g. Bogotch, 2002; Bogotch and Schoolman, 2008) of a Social Justice Theory (SJT) approach. Bogotch and Schoolman (2008) “see social justice as an educational construct righting wrongs, not a research agenda based on writing about the wrongs” (p. 9). Social Justice requires vigilant leaders to develop new strategies to advert ever emerging threats to democracy and to produce institutional equity. Giroux (1992) writing about the crisis of democratic government defined democracy as “both a discourse and a practice that produces particular narratives and identities informed by the principles of freedom, equality, and social practice" (p. 5).” The field of socially just educational leadership blends the theoretical with the practical. The practical is focused on promoting improvements in teaching and learning environment as demonstrated by student learning gains, particularly for traditionally marginalized students. The theoretical is more concerned with the philosophical precepts behind marginalization. The actors involved do not appear to play the same role in their desire to reduce and possibly eradicate marginalization.

Theoharis (2007, p. 231) describes four components of a school’s operation that must be part of the process in order for school improvement to occur in schools where the principal has a social justice orientation: (a) raising student achievement, (b) improving school structures, (c) re-
centering and enhancing staff capacity, and (d) strengthening school culture and community.

Given the challenges associated with raising the student achievement scores of marginalized students, and the fact that three out of four of the participants were able to raise their marginalized student’s achievement scores, I began the research with the assumption that social justice figured prominently into the participants’ decisions. This assumption was confirmed during the interview process which will become apparent in the portraits of the principals in chapter four. One goal of this research endeavor was to describe some of the skills used by its participants to achieve school improvement.

Rothstein (2004) asserted that in-school factors account for about 25% of the variance in student learning and out-of-school factors account for 67% of the variance in student learning. If this is so, successful school leaders may be finding that in-school factors such as teacher student ratios exert an influence on the out-of-school factors such as family socioeconomics, safe home environment, nutrition, and school readiness. Several scholars have reported one major negative in-school-related factor is deficit thinking by White teachers (e.g. Hale, 2001; Fagan & Holland, 2002; Milner, 2006; Thompson, 2004). According to these researchers, this is one of the most powerful forces working against students of color. Socioeconomic dissimilarities between students and teachers also contribute to the challenges that face educators trying to raise student achievement (Hodgkinson, 2003; Lareau, 1987). This is noteworthy because although all children of low socioeconomic means are considered to be marginalized, African American, Latino, and Native American Indian children are disproportionately represented at the lower end of the academic achievement spectrum, even when adjusting for socioeconomics. These children are found at the bottom of the bottom (Lee, & Burkam, 2002; Lee, 2002). Some researchers have lamented the intractability of this racial test-score gap (e.g. Coleman, 1966; Jensen, 1980;
Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), in effect absolving educators of their responsibilities to students of color.

Principals of schools with large Black student populations have accepted the responsibility for educating some of the most struggling marginalized students, a situation created by a confluence of changing United States (U.S.) public education policies (Nieto, 2003, p. 5). This study’s participants describe, in their own words, some four principals’ perceptions regarding the interventions they used as principals to manage the four goals identified by Theoharis (2007): a) raising student achievement, (b) improving school structures, (c) re-centering and enhancing staff capacity, and (d) strengthening school culture and community.

**Schools and Black Student Achievement**

In order to appreciate some of the challenges educators of marginalized students face, one need take only a cursory glance at some of the relatively recent historical developments in the education of American Black students. In the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, (1954) the NAACP attorney, Thurgood Marshall, argued that racial desegregation would lead to improvement in Black student educational achievement on the premise that racial differences in scholastic performance were environmentally based. Although the plaintiffs prevailed in the nation’s highest court, nine years later the merits of desegregation were still being debated in the case of *Still v. Savannah Board of Education*, (1963). Still’s expert witnesses, Drs. Kenneth B. Garrett and Mamie Clark, testified that segregation was damaging to the self-esteem of Black children (Putnam, 1967). Called in rebuttal, the University of Georgia’s Henry E. Garrett a former president of the American Psychological Association, argued that the integration of schools would result in one group being challenged beyond its ability level and the other group
not being challenged enough (Putnam, 1967). Also testifying for the defendants was New York University’s Dr. Ernest Van den Haag, another influential psychologist of the period who testified against the integrationist idea that segregation was unfair to the superior Negro. He claimed that negative psychological effects would be visited upon the exceptional Negro because of his inability to identify with non-Negros if he or she were to transfer to integrated schools. The logic of segregationist suggest that student performance deficiencies are not linked to in-school factors such as weak schools or poor instruction but rather to poor student genetics, exacerbated by a lack of family and community support for academic endeavors. These deficiencies include high levels of poverty and fewer high-achieving students than the majority schools.

African American students’ placement and over-representation in special education programs for students with severe learning disabilities and/or severe emotional problems are today still persistent realities; such students find themselves occupying “a placement where the curriculum is often described as substandard and incapable of prepping students for any creditable post-secondary opportunity (Fanion, 2010, p. 1).” This reality has not significantly changed from the inception of special education during the height of integration in 1975 when African Americans constituted 38- percent of special education programs but only 15 percent of the student population (Patton, 1998) until today, when, according to data from the 2009-2010 annual special education report compiled by the Georgia Department of Education, African American students accounted for 39 percent of the Georgia’s total special education population. It was also noted in the report that African Americans make up 47 percent of the students labeled as having emotional and behavior disorders and 57 percent of students with intellectual disabilities. As well, although Blacks made make up only about 17 percent of the United States
student population they constitute 33% of children with a mild mental disability (MMD) and 27% of children with a severe emotional disturbance (SED) (Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005).

Statement of Problem

Urban principals play a major role in facilitating academic success in schools fraught with the most significant needs. However, the importance of their unique position is often overlooked or oversimplified even though they are often held more accountable to the reform initiatives of their schools with regard to student achievement than their non-urban counterparts (Orr, 2002). The centerpiece of a reform effort which began in 2009 by the Obama administration is the allocation of 4 billion dollars to transform some of the nation’s worst schools. This effort to overhaul poorly performing schools includes replacing principals (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that schools demonstrate annual learning gains in meeting high standards of student achievement has unduly pressured urban principals to keep up with the demands levied on them in spite of having limited resources. Urban principals face the same challenges as other principals but often have the added pressure of dealing with an unprecedented lack of resources, the overwhelming educational and social problems of students and their families, and a shortage of quality teachers and staff willing to work in urban school settings (Institute of Educational Leadership (IEL), 2000, Portin, 2000). Urban principals have to address these challenges while under threat of a possible removal from their position and the reorganization of their school if they do not make adequate progress over a five year period or sooner (Cracium & Snow-Renner, 2002) Many policies affecting schools are developed and put into practice without reference to what successful principals have done to improve the academic performance of their school (Fullan,
We need to focus more on bottom-up methods versus policy-driven top-down solutions so as to better inform leaders whose job it is to address and improve student achievement (Koch, Cunningham, Schwabesky & Hauknes, 2005).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this portraiture study was to describe selected African-American principals’ experiences with the interventions that they championed in meeting the needs of their struggling students in the context of their leadership roles in one, highly, minority-populated, high school. These principals’ experiences provide valuable insights on student success initiatives for others working in schools with large African-American student populations.

The following Questions guided the study:

1. What role did the four principals play in the target school reform?
2. What interventions did each principal introduce and what evidence of effects do they identify for each one?
3. How did each principal values and beliefs affect what they chose to do?

While much theoretical work in the area of social justice and leadership exists (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Dantley, 2002; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Marshall & Ward, 2004; Rapp, 2002), there is a dearth of studies that specifically address the ways in which leaders enact justice, the resistance they face doing that work, and how they maintain their focus in their pursuit of equity. A notable exception to this void is the work of Theoharis (2006) who studied seven public school leaders whom he defined as having demonstrated success in making their schools more just. Theoharis used a critical, qualitative, positioned-subject approach combined with principles of autoethnography.
Additional research is needed for an appeal to falsifiability i.e., one study does not produce satisfactory results.

**Conceptual Framework**

This study is constructed with two frameworks, starting with Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Social Justice Theory (SJT), it is also braced by the subordinate conception of advocacy leadership proposed by Anderson (2009). This model addresses the concern that so far, “The literature related to educational leadership and social justice has suffered by not connecting to extant lines of related inquiry in the social sciences and other related disciplines such as critical pedagogy, critical theory, and feminist poststructuralism (Jean-Marie et al., 2009, p. 32).” Research suggests that teacher leaders strengthen the organization by helping other teachers embrace goals and understand changes (Harris, 2004; Lambert, 2003). Schools that foster environments that allow broad-based participation in leadership by teachers and embrace a shared vision, inquiry, dialogue, reflection, and focus on learning are considered to have high leadership capacity (Lambert, 2003).

In determining whether educational leadership practices and their consequences count as evidence for establishing whether or not the leadership meets social justice criteria, Bogotch (2002) distinguished between educational problems and socio-educational problems that extend beyond the schoolhouse to the communities. He found that Social Justice Theory leadership required deliberate actions beyond normal school routines and even beyond exemplary educational practices. Bogotch also found that the within-school activities of socially just oriented leaders focused on teaching about social justice, multiculturalism, diversity, tolerance
and ethics were not sufficient for addressing immediate and urgent social justice problems by themselves.

Anderson (2009) conceptualizes the role of leadership in education as needing to move towards advocacy in order to shift both educational policies and practices. His themes of authenticity and advocacy have established vital components of educational leadership in a post-reform agenda. He questions the efficacy of ‘distributed leadership’ and points to the need for a transition towards ‘democratic leadership’ to empower students and society in general to contribute to and influence policy. Anderson’s assessment of socio-economic reforms towards privatization and the free-market impacts on public schools implies a departure from a Social Justice Theory agenda. His “intent is to challenge the underlying assumptions of the reforms and to expose which social sectors ultimately benefit from them” (p. 1), and he argues that the neoliberal ideology in education resulting from such reforms emphasizes competition over collaboration.

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, was ostensibly established to hold schools accountable for the success of all students. The onus of accountability for student outcomes is situated at the school level by virtually every state government. Anderson (2009) considers the stakes too high for educators to ignore the need to engage in advocacy efforts. He believes that educator resistance to such reforms has been insufficient. He then goes on to propose a range of advocacy strategies, including policy appropriation, strategic mediation and a broadening of the range of assessed outcomes of schooling. He concludes that above all other strategies, building and maintaining the teacher-/student relationship and a supportive society is necessary to provide the best outcomes for all students.
Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT), a counter legal scholarship to the positivist and liberal legal discourse of civil rights (Ladson-Billings, 1998), began in the 1970s when scholars, such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic questioned whether the redistributionist change that would be necessary to create a more equal world could emerge from the tenets of the Constitution or legal system. Their critique of the legal system was a rooted in Marxist philosophy. Marxist theorist often herald authors with compassion for the working classes or whose work challenges the economic inequalities of capitalist societies. The critical aspect of Critical Theory originates from the idea that creating a more equal world would require the Constitution and the legal system be endlessly revised or constantly critiqued in order to produce equity, hence the term critical theory. CRT will be used as appropriate to inform my analysis and discuss the relevance of the principal’s and the researcher voice.

Significance of the Study

High schools have not historically been given a large share of the funds allocated for school improvement efforts, as states and districts generally invest the limited available dollars for low-performing schools serving younger children to extend the time through which the dollars act. High schools receive only 5% of federal funds available for low-performing schools (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). This study could provide opportunities to better understand how principals perform cultural work and advocacy as a form of transformative leadership and the value of infusing the notion of cultural work into transformative leadership models.
Scholars have indicated that “There is an implicit assumption in the professional literature that the urban principalship is similar to all principalships in all contexts, albeit with fewer resources, greater demands to attend to students’ personal and social problems, and more complicated political dynamics” (Orr, Byrne-Jimenez, McFarlane & Brown, 2005, p. 24). This disparity should prompt educators to focus more attention on the successful interventions principals use in schools with large Black student populations to help close the achievement gap between Black and White students. Making the case for this focus is the essential point of this study. The importance of educating non-White students was punctuated by a New York Times report posted on May 17, 2012, in which it was revealed that the most recent census data showed that for the first time in our history, non-White births made up over 50 percent of all births in the United States over the previous year.

**Study Design**

I decided that a descriptive qualitative approach would be most appropriate for this study. Narratives may provide as good a source of data as numbers to analyze the oppressive presuppositions of our culture. Kozol (1991, p. 100) noted that “Statistics cannot tell us what it means to a child to leave his often hellish home and go to a school, his hope for a transcendent future, that is literally falling apart.” Qualitative studies are more concerned with direct observation of behavior or transcripts of interviews than statistical inference. This study describes some of the past practices and experiences of the principals of the same high school, all of whom are African American. The narratives of these principals should detail a counter story of what they did to contribute to the achievement of their struggling students. I interviewed four principals, one from the present and three from the past, who could describe and detail their
attempts to improve student achievement during their tenure. Data sources were the principals themselves with data gathered primarily through leadership interviews (two for each principal).

The data is presented as a rich description of the principals’ perception of what occurred and how they believe their contributions made a difference over their tenure. Student performance by sub-groups was charted during the principals’ tenures starting with the first principal in the proposed study and continuing through until the most recent year. One focus of the study is devoted to developing a list of interventions that the principals used and cataloging the documents that describe them.

**Limitations**

This study was limited to one school over the course of the perceived impact four principals have had in their tenure as principals at the school. Time and place are restricted in this study. Also, participant interviews are subjective in nature, because the participants being interviewed may not have felt comfortable revealing everything they knew or believed about their own views. Having insider knowledge and doing insider research also presented limitations. Initially I felt that being a double insider could only be advantageous in this research and by this I mean by being both an administrator in the district and an African American. Insight that included seeing what I perceived to be differential treatment of Blacks and Whites at every level in the district from the student level to the superintendent level. So I expected race to be part of every conversation eventually. Although race came up quite frequently I was quite surprised that it was not as prevalent in the interviews as I had expected it to be. Three of the principals had discussions about why being a Black person means that you would be treated differently but when they saw what was said after it was transcribed during the member checking phase they
wanted me to omit certain parts. One because she thought she sounded too Black and wanted me to clean up the phonetic pronunciations so she wouldn’t sound as ethnic which she perceived as being ignorant. Two of the principals were still employed in the district and were afraid of reprisal. One assured me that since it was necessary for me to get the districts permission to do the study and that since district level administrators knew what school I had been studying they would definitely be able to connect the dots and the principals had me remove what I felt were compelling and enlightening commentary.

As the researcher, I am an instrument in this study, with my own bias and lens on this school community. I realize that during my experience as both a teacher and an administrator in the school system for over 30 years, I have formulated personal beliefs that may affect the outcome of my research. One such belief is that these principals should harbor animosity toward the school district, because they may possess firsthand knowledge of district policies that either inhibits their career trajectories or the success of their students. However, for purposes of this study, I attempted to minimize the impact of such beliefs. The steps I took to minimize my beliefs include member checking and data triangulation among others.

**Definition of Terms**

AFRICAN AMERICAN - African American, Black, colored, and Negro are terms which refer to Americans of African descent. It therefore denotes referents used during different time periods. This study also uses the descriptors Black and African-American interchangeably and refers to individuals of African descent born in the United States as well as those who have migrated from other countries. This designation reflects not only a historical lineage, but also an identity that is rooted in cultural and ethno-geographic origins, rather than skin pigmentation.
MARGINALIZED - to relegate to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group (Webster’s online dictionary 2013).

RACE - any of the different varieties or populations of human beings distinguished by common physical traits such as hair texture, eyes, skin color, body shape, or other characteristics. The three primary racial divisions have historically been Caucasoid (white), Negroid (black), and Mongoloid (yellow) (Webster’s New World Dictionary).”

SOCIAL JUSTICE THEORY - a process, which (1) seeks fair (re)distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities; (2) challenges the roots of oppression and injustice; (3) empowers all people to exercise self-determination and realize their full potential; and (4) builds social solidarity and community capacity for collaborative action. School of Social Welfare, University of California (2013)

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP – School leadership practices shared or distributed in the interaction among school leaders, followers, and their situations (Spillane, 2005).

Chapter Summary

The research literature often draws connections between factors such as school size and student outcomes and has shown that a relationship exists between school effectiveness, the socioeconomic status of families in the community, and the education level of parents (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002). Anderson (2009, p. 11) notes that any attempt to thoughtfully reform schools will have to address the creation of schools as authentic social spaces in which students, their parents, school professionals, and the surrounding community are deeply understood, respected, and empowered John Dewey (1916, p. 5) who claimed that men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common. What people must have in
common in order to form a community or society are beliefs, aspirations, and aims, or ‘like-mindedness,’ as the sociologists say. This study allows me to capture the context and the nature and impact of interventions that may have changed the quality of schooling for some students and teachers.

NCLB was established to hold schools accountable for closing the achievement gaps that exist between students of differing ability and racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. This legislation has resulted in the imposition of enforced testing and achievement guidelines on school districts that in many cases determines the funding available to schools (Meier & Wood, 2004). Like NCLB, many policies affecting schools are developed without looking at the steps successful principals have taken to improve the academic performance of their school (Fullan, 2002 & 2005). I have undertaken this study with the following goal in mind: “Reform is not just putting into place the latest policy, it means changing the cultures of the schools” (Fullan, 2001, p. 7). The changes in the culture of the school in this study are traced through the tenure of four of its leaders.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The intent of the literature review is to contribute to the research on the experiences of principals who serve large African American student populations and their perceptions of the strategies that have enabled them to realize improved student achievement, and school structures, enhanced staff capacity and strengthened school culture and community. This review of the literature begins with a discussion of the research on social justice leadership for principals. I then review the research on the role of leadership in impacting low achieving students’ academic success, concentrating on the following research categories: 1) Research on Social Justice Leadership for principals. 2.) The State of Black student achievement; 3) National school policy reform and the achievement gap; 4) Effective School Leadership; and 5) Critical Race Theory. I close this chapter with a discussion of how CRT informs my thinking about how race operates as a factor in my respondents’ perceptions and what they consider relevant or irrelevant to their practice and the context and selection of their interventions. A wide-ranging search was undertaken, using electronic databases and search engines such as ERIC, Google Scholar, and a range of websites including research associations and government sites, as well as print and electronic journals on leadership.
The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this portraiture study was to describe selected African-American principals’ experiences with the interventions that they championed in order to meet the needs of their struggling students in the context of their principal roles in one highly minority populated high school.

Research on Social Justice Leadership for Principals

In reviewing the literature on how principals lead for social justice I found the research limited. There are many definitions of social justice (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Dantley and Tillman, 2006; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Gewirtz, 1998; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002). Blackmore (2002) defines social justice leadership as a social practice and not just an intellectual matter. Bogotch (2007, p. 153) asserts that social justice is a social construction and that “there are no fixed or predictable meanings for social justice prior to actually engaging in educational leadership practices.” He asserts that postmodern uncertainties always challenge the predictability of social justice outcomes, and claims that this is why researchers understand social justice as an educational construct through experiences. Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002, p. 162) define social justice as “the exercise of altering institutional and organizational arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions” (p. 162). Gewirtz (1998) described social justice as a response to disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes. Bogotch (2000 & 2002) offered four observations about social justice:
1. There can be no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in social and academic discourses;

2. The center or unity of any educational reform is so dynamic that it cannot hold together for long;

3. The results of our work, just or unjust, are always fragile and fleeting;

4. All social justice/educational reform efforts must be deliberately and continuously reinvented and critiqued.

According to Bogotch and Schoorman (2008), the lack of a consensus on the meaning of Social Justice may contribute to slow progress in any social endeavor, including social justice research. The malleability of the social justice concept has made it possible for researchers to twist its meaning to fit any number of social, economic, political, and educational problems.

Theoharis (2007) studied seven public school leaders whom he defined as conducting their principalships with a social justice orientation, and who had demonstrated success in making their schools more just. In this empirical study he used a critical, qualitative, positioned-subject interview approach (Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 2001), grounded primarily in critical theory, and examined the following questions: (a) in what ways are principals enacting social justice in public schools? (b) What resistance do social justice-driven principals face in their justice work? (c) What strategies do principals develop to sustain their ability to enact social justice in light of the resistance they face in public schools? The positioned-subject approach combined with principles of auto-ethnography guided Theoharis’ research methods. Using the principal as the unit of analysis, his study described how the principals’ enacted social justice, the resistance they faced, and the toll such resistance had on them. Findings identified varied personal experiences that call leaders to leadership as well as three common leadership traits:
arrogant humility, passionate leadership, and a tenacious commitment to social justice. Theoharis also describes the strategies they developed to sustain their social justice work and the results they attained. These leaders were found to have raised student achievement, improved school structures, re-centered and enhanced staff capacity, and strengthened school culture and community.

**National Leadership Standards**

The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) developed the current national standards for the professional practice of school leadership. Established in 1996, the ISLLC has clarified six standards principal should be proficient in to be considered competent and to effect systemic change in American public schools (Hawley, Murphy, & Young, 2005). Scholars have criticized the use of these standards as normative for licensure, suggesting that while they may represent actions that practitioners perceived to be best practices, they are in reality only “current practice, not best practice (English, 2000, p. 160).” Achilles and Price (2001) assert that the research that led to the adoption of these standards was not rigorous enough to establish them as a normative basis. They interpreted the standards as further reinforcement of the status quo, reporting that the standards offered little real guidance to administrators.

A criticism of standard one (communicating vision) includes that, conceptually, it assumes a top-down, bureaucratic, perception of the principal’s role. If principals and teachers truly collaborated or if leadership duties were otherwise distributed, the vision shouldn’t need to be communicated to the teachers they would already know it. In other words, principals do not need to communicate the school vision to a staff who are directly involved in its creation (Pitre
& Smith, 2004). Criticism of Standard 2 revolves around its implication that curriculum matters reside entirely within the purview of the principal. It is obvious that one leader cannot possibly be an expert in all areas (Pitre & Smith, 2004).

**State of Black Student Achievement**

Some of the largest gains in academic achievement made by Black students occurred at the same times and in the same places that desegregation plans exerted their greatest effects. When the practice of desegregation began decreasing after the 1980s the achievement scores of Black students declined (Orfield, 2002). While not proving causation, this correlation suggests that desegregation contributed to academic gains for Blacks (Orfield 2000; Grissmer, Flanagan, & Williamson, 1998). The recent attention to achievement for all students has confirmed that the many disparities in student achievement across subject areas and student academic outcomes between Black and White populations present before court enforced integration still persist today in the United States (Carter, 2005; Diamond, 2006; Horvat & O’Connor, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2002; O’Connor, Ogbu, 2003; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). However, as a result of targeted interventions in schools in the 1980s Black students achieved higher levels of academic success than the prior two decades combined (Chub & Loveless, 2002). Unfortunately, the achievement gains made by Blacks and Hispanics from the enforcement of integration in the 1970s to the late 1980s on national measures dissipated in the 1990s (Chubb & Loveless, 2002). Ironically, these declines occurred during one of the most aggressive eras of school reform in the nation’s history (Chubb & Loveless, 2002). These reforms included a number of comprehensive school curriculum reform models: Success for All, Direct Instruction, Learn 360, the Modern Red
School House models, Constructivist mathematics, Whole language learning, and the Standards-based National Education Goals (Goals 2000) set by the U.S. Congress. Consistently low-achieving schools are eligible for federal grants to support their intervention efforts, but in order to receive funding they must make radical school-based changes, including replacing their principals and/or large portions of their teaching staffs (Tucker 2010).

Though prior research suggests that principals have important effects on school outcomes, Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) write, “Closing the skills gap is the key to real racial equality in American society” (p. 235). The need to address this gap is especially profound given that by 2050, 50% of the school-aged population will be non-White, 26% of all children will live in poverty, and 8% will speak a first language other than English in their home (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990; U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Here are some basic facts considering demographic data addressing the success of school principals (Ferrandino, 2000; Lewis, 2000; Page & Page, 1991).

- There is a growing and tremendous increase in the number of children of color in U.S. public schools.
- Most principals come from the teaching ranks and fewer Blacks are entering the teaching profession.
- Fewer than 2% of the nation's nearly 3 million public school teachers are Black males, according to 1999-2000 survey results from the U.S. Education Department's National Center for Education Statistics.
- Census statistics show that 42% of all Black boys have failed a grade at least once by the time they reach high school and 60% of Black males who enter high school in 9th grade do not graduate, (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010).
While the success of principals in U.S. schools is undeniably influenced by socio-economic issues and demographics, it has proven extremely difficult to determine the nature and extent of the effect of such factors on student achievement because they are very complex, and research in these areas often ends in doubt or dispute (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, McCarton, & McCormick, 1998; Noguera, 2003). According to Leithwood and Fullan (2003, p. 13), “Histories of poor school performance for African American students may result from neglect on behalf of the school and/or district leaders, allocation of the least-able teachers and most limited resources to the most needy schools and students, low expectations, or lack of knowledge of effective strategies for working with particular kinds of students in challenging contexts.” Although Black schools were commonly lacking in funding, research suggests that the environment of the segregated school often had some redeeming qualities that helped Black children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from school boards comprised largely of White board members.

The Federal No Child Left Behind Act and its pressure on all schools to demonstrate “annual yearly progress” in meeting high standards of student performance has required urban principals to accomplish what few have been able to do or face removal (Craciu & Snow-Renner, 2002; Learning First Alliance, 2003). “Consequently and increasingly, as individuals new to their role, the staff, and the building, these principals confront the simultaneous socialization of how to be an urban principal and how to foster rapid and dramatic change to improve student achievement within a complex district context (Orr, Byrne-Jimenez, MacFarlane & Brown, 2005, p 24).” This study helps gain insight into the nature of the urban principalship in the context of current education reform policies.
National School Policy Reform and the Achievement Gap

Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor (2009), in a Duke University study of the academic achievement gap between Black and White students using data for North Carolina public school students in grades 3 to 8, examined achievement gaps between White and non-White students. They found that achievement gaps between Black and White students to be sizable and robust to controls for measures of socioeconomic status, and that no single trend appeared between 3rd and 8th grade. They studied five consecutive cohorts of North Carolina public school students in 11 districts or district groups of successive cohorts of students during their progression from 3rd to 8th grade who remained in the state’s public schools for all six years, using differences both in means and in quantiles. Hispanic and Asian students tended to gain on Whites as they progressed through these grades. The racial gaps between the lower performing students tended to shrink as students advanced through school, while racial gaps between high-performing students widened. Racial gaps were found to differ widely across geographic areas within the state. The researchers also reported that very few of the districts or groups of districts they examined managed to simultaneously close the Black-White gap and raise the relative test scores of Black students, even after controlling for rudimentary student covariates. The research team found that the regression-adjusted mean test scores of minority groups other than Blacks rose relative to Whites as students’ advanced, through the range of grades in the study. Hispanic and American Indian students were also found to lag behind Whites, although less dramatically than Blacks. It was noted that Asian students often score higher than Whites, particularly in later grades. The difference in math scores between disadvantaged minority groups and Whites showed a sharp decrease at the 10th percentile as the student progressed through school, but in most cases actually increased at the 90th percentile. The regression-adjusted Black-White gap in math test
scores declined by about 6% between 3rd and 8th grade but increased by about 10% in reading. Interestingly, the researchers found that the trend towards improved relative minority test scores in math was concentrated at the low end of the distribution. Each of the test score distributions for Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students compressed more relative to the White test score distribution over these grades.

The researchers believe that the possible explanation for this phenomenon is that predominantly minority schools have redistributed resources toward lower-performing students. This redistribution of resources would come from school leadership, either the office of the principals, the legislature, or the district. The researchers also reported finding that where mean Black test scores increased between 3rd and 8th grades, the gap between Black and White students tended to increase. That is, they found no clear relationship between the change in the test scores of Black students and the size of the Black-White gap.

**Effective School Leadership**

This portion of the literature review is divided into two sections. The first reviews principal leadership impact on student achievement generally. The second focuses predominantly on principal leadership and reducing the achievement gap.

**Principal Leadership Impact on Student Achievement**

In 2001, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) began an extensive review of more than 5,000 studies purported to examine the relationship between school leadership and student achievement. Seventy of these studies, involving 2,802 schools, 14,000 teachers and 1.4 million students, met McREL’s criteria for inclusion in their meta-
analysis. McREL findings indicate that the standards for leadership should be based on defined qualities and skills and that these need to be reframed so that they focus on responsibilities rather than on position for school-level leaders (Waters, & Grubb, 2004). The key findings of this meta-analysis were:

- Principal leadership is significantly correlated with student achievement. The average effect size is .25. That is, one standard deviation improvement in principal leadership is associated with 10 percentile difference in student achievement;
- Twenty one specific leadership responsibilities, and 66 associated practices, have statistically significant relationships with student achievement;
- Leaders can have both a positive and negative impact on achievement;
- Changes with varying implications for stakeholders are positively associated with some responsibilities and negatively associated with others (Waters & Grubb, 2004).

Reviews of the literature on the effect of school principal leadership on student achievement have found that principals impact student achievement through their influence on school staff and structures (Leithwood,, Louis, Anderson, &Wahlstrom, 2004; Hallinger, 2005). Villani claims that “There is significant research about the importance of the principal and the impact school leaders have on student achievement and the well-being of the school community” (2006, p. 4). Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) emphasized that both organization and context impact principal effectiveness.

According to New Leaders for New Schools (2009), school districts with highly effective principals:

- Revise system policies to give well-selected, well-prepared turnaround principals the substantial decision-making authority needed to serve in their crucial roles as human
capital managers, including authority over teacher hiring and dismissal, evaluation, development, and the selection of leadership team members

- Build a human capital pipeline to ensure effective turnaround teachers and leaders by creating a multi-faceted career ladder that positions turnaround schools as the best place to work for rapid professional development and advancement opportunities

- Grant turnaround principals autonomy over operational issues relating to budgets, schedules, school support services, curriculum and instruction, and types and uses of data

- Select turnaround principals who have demonstrated the capacity to create whole-school change

- Partner effectively with teachers’ unions to ensure both efficacy and fairness in the revision of system policies relating to human capital in turnaround schools

- Hire and place turnaround principals as early as possible, preferably at least several months prior to the end of the school year preceding their formal adoption of the principalship

- Require and provide funds for the staff of turnaround schools to spend more time in planning and professional development before the start of the school year

- Provide turnaround principals with the funds to compensate an expanded group of principal-selected leadership team members.

- Ensure alignment of school system leaders who directly manage principals, especially with regard to the needs for urgency, student achievement focus, and dramatic school changes needed in turnarounds.
• Manage their school’s human capital to drive teacher effectiveness and to make breakthrough student learning gains.

Highly effective principals recruit, select, and evaluate teachers based on high standards and develop individual teachers’ leadership capacity with genuine responsibility for guiding the core work of the school. They ensure at least weekly observations in every classroom, create individualized professional development plans, and support growth through direct feedback and professional development. The study found that certain leadership actions within the following five categories are critical to achieving transformative results:

1) ensuring rigorous, goal- and data-driven learning and teaching; 2) building and managing a high-quality staff aligned to the school’s vision of success for every student; 3) developing an achievement- and belief-based school-wide culture; 4) instituting operations and systems to support learning; and 5) modeling the personal leadership that sets the tone for all student and adult relationships in the school.

Two main leadership approaches, instructional leadership and transformational leadership, have been identified as effective for impacting student achievement in the school leadership literature. Instructional leadership theory has been related to the schools’ mission, coordinating the school’s academic program and developing a positive learning environment (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1998; Burns, 1978) focuses on collaborating with staff, establishing a common mission and shaping the organizational culture. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) reviewed 22 studies of these two approaches found that the effect of instructional leadership is four times that of transformational leadership. However, many researchers believe that leading schools requires more than the leadership of one formal leader (Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Sheppard, & Dibbon, 2010).
Improvement is accomplished through regular collaboration with teaching practitioners who do not work in isolation. In his book, *Results: the Key to Continuous School Improvement*, Schmoker (2008) asserts that a combination of meaningful teamwork, clear and measurable goals, and the regular collection and analysis of performance data are necessary for positive student achievement results. In order to improve student achievement principals must lead their school through the goal-setting process in which student achievement data is analyzed, improvement areas are identified, and changes are initiated. This process involves collaboratively working with all stakeholders to identify strategies that promote desired outcomes (Schmoker, 2008). Schmoker identified five performance areas as the critical leadership skills a principal must demonstrate to effectively lead a school in improving student achievement.

- Promoting collaborative problem solving and open communication
- Collecting, analyzing, and using data to identify school needs
- And plan for needed changes in the instructional program
- Implementing and monitoring the school improvement plan
- Using systems thinking to establish a clear focus on attaining student achievement goals.

Effective principals emphasize achievement, encourage and support instructional strategies, frequently monitor student progress, and maintain a safe, orderly environment (Edmonds, 1979). Many of the effective schools in the research literature emphasized the practice of setting clear school goals, discipline and order in a supportive environment as characteristics that remove some of the challenges that impede student achievement.

The above research can be summarized in Hill and Crévola (1997), argument that school
improvement efforts, must be centered on a common vision or belief that students can be successful. Sheppard and Dibbon’s (2010) work also serves as a summary of leadership influences on student learning, a correlation emerges between leadership and high academic performance. Leadership is second only to teaching in factors that affect student learning. Principal leadership oriented toward reducing the achievement gap should ultimately reveal increases in student achievement school-wide. Principals should be evaluated by their ability to drive increases in the number of teachers rated as effective or highly effective once a system has been put in place that differentiates the performance of teachers based on rigorous, fair definitions of teacher effectiveness (The Urban Excellence Framework, 2009).

In this study, describing the perspectives of the current and former principals of the interventions they employed for Black student achievement will tap into a wealth of knowledge about achievement interventions for students attending predominantly Black high schools. In the 1954 case Brown v. Board of Education, the US Supreme Court concluded that the Southern standard of “separate but equal” was “inherently unequal,” and did “irreversible harm to Black students” (Orfield, 2009, p. 2). After the 1954 court ruling, most Southern school systems refused to acknowledge the decision and desegregate. This was the case in the Suncoast School District. The legal attack on the Suncoast School District’s dual system began with a class action suit filed in the U.S. District Court in May 7, 1964 by local NAACP leadership and others, challenging the school board’s gradualist strategy.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is appropriate lens for analysis in this study because much of the national dialogue on race relations takes place in the context of education. Darder and Miron
(2006) argue that we must challenge notions of treating everyone the same, “irrespective of context and conditions, [which] categorically ignores the historical and contemporary disparities that exist in material social conditions across populations, as well as the ideological and structural inequalities that shape and reproduce all forms of human oppression (p. 13).” As state government wrests control of schools from local African American communities with the rationality that they are raising standards, education scholars are using CRT to question whether these standards may in fact constitute a form of colonialism.

The use of CRT underscores how ostensibly race-neutral structures in education become in fact ways of forming and policing racial boundaries.

As a theoretical concept, CRT will be utilized in this study to encourage a shift in the paradigm of current thinking about how one’s attitude and beliefs regarding the utility of schooling couples with adaptive behavioral strategies for school success. Howard (2007), a proponent of CRT, espoused how it interrelates with school reform, claiming that “Any approach to school reform that does not address power, privilege, and social dominance is naïve, ungrounded in history, and likely to be unsustainable” (p. 18). CRT should encourage an examination of one's personal experiences within the context of institutional praxis (Bohman, 2002) and should function as an important framework by which to deconstruct the racial inequalities that face children of color in public schools. CRT attempts to construct a different social reality by way of situated knowledge and discourse (Delgado, 1995) and it represents a discourse that addresses issues of social inequity. In the Critical Race Theory paradigm, narrative becomes a valuable tool that details a history of contradictions that have led to injustices (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005).

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) paradigm should foster critical inquiry because "The
majority of African American leaders are employed in large, urban school districts that are underfunded, have scarce resources, significant numbers of uncertified teachers, and student underachievement" (Brown 2005, p. 587). U.S. schools are now 41 percent non-White and the majority of these non-White students attend schools that show substantial segregation (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Therefore, any discussion about African American educational issues should include race as part of the dialogue. I will use CRT as a means of helping me determine what ways race played a role in principal’s belief systems and affected their choices.

**Chapter Summary**

A focus on the origins of the achievement gap of minority students suggests that the injustices and power relations prevalent in society permeate into the walls of schools. By using Critical Race Theory (CRT) to examine principals’ responses related to these questions, race and racism become central to deconstructing Black principals' unique experiences in a predominantly Black learning environment. Hochschild and Scovronick (2003), reported finding in a survey-based study that 90 percent of Americans believe that "equal opportunity for people regardless of their race, religion, or sex" is an "absolutely essential" part of the American dream, and that "our society should do what is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed (p. 10).” In other words, though it is reasonable to expect that the demographics of a nation, acutely visible in student populations, would reflect similar representation at graduation time, this is not the case in America. Biafora and Ansalone (2008) write:

Scientific literature is replete with empirical evidence to support the view that educational philosophies, practices and structures that have been operating in the American school system limit learning opportunities, harm self-concept, and diminish the career trajectory of some students, most notably persons from lower
socioeconomic backgrounds and racial/ethnic minorities. (p. 588)
Social construction and the reality of race are always evident. The present study is unique in that it helps to provide a rich description of principals’ views on what leadership characteristics and interventions helped their school achieve success in one urban high school in the Southeast region of the United States.

After studying the evolution of the principalship throughout most of the 20th century, Beck and Murphy (1993) determined that the role of principals had oscillated between various incarnations, depending on the conceptions of society. One such oscillation was the shift in societal impression of a principal’s integrity from the early to the later part of the 20th century, wherein the school principal went from representing the law to being held accountable to it (Williams, 1980). Such data suggests that conceptual roles of the principal predominately originate outside the discipline of education. These roles are influenced by social, political, and economic conditions in society. Here, I seek find out how four principals led their school through one of the most turbulent periods of educational reform while trying to interrupt the status quo discourse on stratification and influence the social mobility of African-American students.

During the latter part of the twentieth century, as schools began to accrue the burden of increased accountability for the performance of their students on national and state assessments, the duties and responsibilities of principals changed. Principals became more responsible for teaching and learning in their schools. In some states, the principal's duty to improve the school instructional program was mandated by legislation. Such legislation often requires the removal of principals when schools are classified as low performing (students do not meet achievement expectations) for a specified period of time.
In his essay “Experience and Education” (1938), John Dewey noted that his “progressive ideas had not successfully overcome the habits, thinking, and practices of traditional educators” and that “There is much more to educational reform than people realize (p. 7).” In Michael Fullan’s (2001) book, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, he states that “Reform is not just putting into place the latest policy. It means changing the cultures of the schools (p.5).” Fullan asserts that throughout the history of school reform there have been no real success stories, primarily because “change often is not conceived of as being multidimensional (p. 38).” According to Fullan, when change occurs on the surface of an organization, it most often does so without our understanding of the underlying theoretical principles behind the change or the original problem. In addition, adopting an alternative leadership paradigm can be difficult because people generally tend do what they have done in the past, (Walker and Quong 2000). “Principals mainly stick with what they know, straining to juggle the multiplying demands of running a school in an era of rising expectations, complex student needs, enhanced accountability, expanding diversity, record enrollments and staff shortfalls” (Fry et al., 2007, p.7). Consequently, more often than not the status quo continues.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of Chapter Three was to describe the methods of data collection and analysis of four school-based leaders’ roles in one school in accelerating learning gains in their struggling student populations. As I offer my choice of method; selection of participants; the study’s design, data collection, storage, and analysis. This explication includes an exploration of the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of this narrative study research paradigm as a means of capturing the untapped resource of school based leader perceptions of interventions that are essential elements for reducing the achievement gap between struggling and non-struggling student populations. Finally, this chapter addresses framing topics arising from the methodological context of the study, including research aspects related to validity, reliability, trustworthiness and ethics.

Problems and Purposes of the Study

The purpose of this portraiture study was to describe selected African-American principals’ experiences with the interventions that they championed in meeting the needs of their struggling students in the context of their leadership roles in one, highly, minority-populated, high school. This study intends to add to the literature by increasing the research on interventions that can be used by school-based leaders to ameliorate the achievement of African American
students. This study adds knowledge from public school principals regarding what they came to know about factors that advanced the achievement of their struggling African American students.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What role did the four principals play in the target school reform?
2. What interventions did each principal introduce and what evidence of effects do they identify for each one?
3. How did each principal values and beliefs affect what they chose to do?

Population and Sample

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative researchers select participants that best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question. For this reason, the population for this study was four principals of one urban school who experienced various levels of success in advancing the achievement of their students. I measure success as an increase in civility and participation among stakeholders, raised student achievement scores as measured by the state achievement test and by faculty stability as measured by teacher turnover rate among other markers. In choosing to focus my research on only four principals I elected to emphasize depth of understanding over breadth in sampling. I used the methodology of portraiture for this study, relying primarily on Lawrence Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) approach. The criteria for selection of the participants in this study were; (1) willingness of a principal to participate in the study, (2) the principal served as a principal at the same urban high school during a time of school reform, (3) the student achievement changed during the principal’s tenure. I had access to four principals meeting the criteria for this study. The use of four participants is based on the recommended
guidelines for a good narrative study in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* Creswell (2007). I choose four participants in case one of them dropped out of the study.

**Research Design**

I decided that a qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because it is my intent to gain a detailed understanding of four principal leader’s perceptions and beliefs regarding their role in school improvement. I used the methodology of portraiture for this qualitative study, relying primarily on Lawrence Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) approach. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), the portraiture approach is comprised of five features: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) the research portrait should be written in such a way as to be evocative for the reader, portraiture allows the researcher to “reach beyond the walls of the academy” (p. 9) and take on a role in creating social change. Thus the research may affect others besides the typical social science audience and become a change catalyst.

I chose to juxtapose Portraiture and CRT because I believe that these constructs share a number of features that make the two a viable coupling for conducting research in urban schools. Pairing, portraiture with CRT allows researchers to evoke the personal, and the professional, to illuminate issues of race, class, and gender in education research. Portraitist researchers seek to accurately represent the life experiences and voices of research participants. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) likened the process of creating a portrait to patchwork quilting: the context functions represent the underlying cloth on which the design is sewn, and the themes that emerge revealed are the shapes that will be joined together, “voice is seen as selecting the pattern into which they will fit and joining the seams that hold them, and the relationship is viewed as
imbuing the aesthetic whole of the finished quilt with symbolic meaning” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 268). In addition, portraiture incorporates the knowledge and experience of the researcher. A key component in the effective use of portraiture is the relationship between the researcher and participants.

Critical race epistemologies question the current popular range of research paradigms (i.e., Perennialism, Essentialism, constructivism, and positivism) that draw from the historical, social, and cultural experiences of Whites (Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado-Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001). CRT can be used to analyze the stories from urban school principals as a means to illuminate social justice actions and to define how an urban principal becomes an instructional leader.

Portraiture was designed specifically to be applied to education by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot and is rooted in the tradition of ethnography but tries to blend the rigor of traditional ethnographic inquiry with the artistic expression of a good novelist. Its depictions allow the researcher to merge artistic expression and scientific rigor to render a complete picture also called a portrait of its subject(s). The portraitist records and interprets the perspectives and experiences of the people they study, documenting their voices, their vision, authority, knowledge and wisdom (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. vx). Portraiture differs from other ethnographic research because it does not silence the voice of the researcher. Although the researcher’s depictions must capture what was experienced and how it was experienced (Moustakas, 1999) the portraitist listens for the story and actively engages in its creation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Traditional qualitative methods require the researcher to listen passively to the story and absorb the information and not help it to take shape and form as suggested by Lawrence-Lightfoot. When using portraiture, the researcher acknowledges his or
her experiences and biases; the researcher’s presence forms the lens of inquiry through which the data is collected and analyzed (Dixon, Chapman, Hill, 2005). The methodology of portraiture bridges the realms of aesthetics and empiricism. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) describes the portraitist as “an instrument of inquiry, an eye on perspective-taking, an ear that discerns nuances and a voice that speaks and offers insights” (p. 13). Portraiture seeks to engage the reader with the power of storytelling that enhances familiarity, understanding and empathy while connecting the reader to the subject. Traditional educational research methods seem inadequate when compared to portraiture because written and spoken words alone cannot adequately compete for public attention with popular media genres such as CNN’s photo-essays, Time Magazine’s articles, or high-profile documentaries.

The qualitative narrative approach (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002) was designed in such a way that it allows me to capture the main features, strategies, experiences and lessons learned by the four participating principals during their fifteen-plus years of implementing of a set of interventions that improved the achievement of their struggling students at one Urban High School. Patton (1991) writes,

In this case, what is sought is an understanding of social phenomena from the perspective of the persons whose behavior is under study. The qualitative methodologies seek direct access to the lived experience of the human actor as he or she understands and deals with ongoing events. The goal is to describe and analyze the activities and reasoning persons use as they engage in organized social interaction … A central objective of the qualitative approach is, therefore, to describe and understand the procedures by which persons create their own behavior and understand and deal with the behavior of others. (p. 391)

Creswell (1998) defines paradigm as a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide inquiries (p. 74) and that these assumptions should address:

- The nature of reality (the ontological)
- The relationship of the researcher to the subject (the epistemological)
• The role of values in a study (the axiological)

• The process of the research (the methodological) (p. 74)

An ontological underpinning of this study’s analysis was informed by the tenets of a critical discourse which required the presence of elements of Critical Race Theory.

**Theoretical Propositions**

To explore these questions and to gather relevant information, I studied the participating principals using theoretical propositions (Yin, 2003). Linking data to propositions can be accomplished through a technique called pattern matching, whereby many pieces of the same study may be related to the same theoretical proposition (Yin, 2003). The Professional Learning Community (PLC) elements, identified by Eaker, Dufour and Eaker (2002) as essential for school improvement, will function in the proposed research as propositions by which to define the roles, responsibilities, experiences, and understandings of four principals’ influence on classroom teachers’ impact on students. THE PLC model is based on the idea that educators need to work collaboratively to foster an atmosphere; of common understanding and identity, collective responsibility, emotional support, high levels of involvement, strong sense of belonging and one that is sustainable (DuFour & Eaker, 2008).

**Analytical Frame**

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) Model propositions that were considered in this study as a means to represent significant elements that emerged from the principal interviews are listed below. These elements are robust enough and are clearly compatible with the literature on leadership to offer the researcher a starting point to organize the interviews and conduct initial
thematic analysis

- Shared Values
- Goal Setting-Establishing Priorities
- Student Focus and focus on results
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Action Research (Did the principals actively perform or support action research as part of needs assessment or connecting teaching and learning in the classrooms?)
- Teacher Capacity Building & Changes In Professional Practice
- Sustainability

The Setting: Garland High School

In a portrait created by a graphic artist, every space that exists has a function. An area that looks empty because it does not appear to have line, color, or mass, would be called a negative space. It may only function to frame the areas that contain line, color, or mass, but without this negative space the portrait would not make sense. In the qualitative arena, I see this space as the context or setting. Garland High School is named after a prominent Black educator who lived over a century and half ago. “Prior to the opening of Garland High School in 1927, there was no high school in the county for Black students, although a very modern high school for White students had existed as early as 1910” (School website).

Because some southern whites decided it was in their best interest to support a curriculum that would serve the needs of middle to upper class white families, Garland’s original curriculum was primarily industrially-based. Some blacks saw this as an attempt by white
southerners to keep blacks in low wage jobs. Today (2012) at Garland there are 2,144 students according to the (State Department of Education web site). Garland students by ethnicity are as follows: American Indian - 6 (0%), Asian - 108 (5%), Black - 922 (40%), Hispanic - 168 (7%) and White - 1111 (48%). 558 students receive a free lunch and 186 receive a reduced priced government subsidized lunch (D.O.E.).

The current Garland campus, which opened to the students in 2005, has state-of-the-art facilities. Garland is located in a racially unsettled urban enclave with a long-standing history of inequity in a school district that was ranked last in the nation with regard to male African-American student achievement (Schott Report, 2010). According to the district website, Garland is currently the largest high school with over 2500 students. Garland High School has a magnet school attractor (a school within the school) for students who want to study the performing arts. It is considered to be a center of excellence in the visual and performing arts. It provides a comprehensive educational program of artistic training, academic and creative development, and preparation to compete for scholarships toward advanced study in institutions of higher learning. The performing arts school has a population of approximately 500 students who take courses in the areas of dance, music, art and performance and technical theatre. The performing arts faculty consists of approximately 17 full time and 14 part time teachers, who have extensive training in their individual fields and participate in a multitude of community and professional events.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Typical qualitative research primarily uses three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents, to produce three kinds of data: quotations, descriptions, and documents, resulting in one product: narrative description. The interview data is presented as
portraits of the principals, and portraiture documents the voice, the vision, authority, knowledge and wisdom of each principal as it pertains to navigating his or her course across principalship (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Data collection for this study occurred in the summer of 2012 and each interview lasted approximately two hours, with a member check-in occurring between and after the final interview. Data collection included approximately eight semi-structured individual interviews, site documents (minutes of PLC’s, school faculty meetings, intervention proposals and reports, local newspaper reports, and public records), researcher reflective journal, and field notes. In accordance with qualitative research tradition, I collected multiple data sources as a tool to verify or refute other data. All data gathered from participant resources was collected with explicit permission from the participants and in full compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. I also consulted other documentary data sources, such as the student newspaper, school improvement plans and strategic plans, print advertisements, and the school website. I conducted the interviews utilizing a “conversational partnership (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 79); this approach is suitable for my research because it builds trust, encourages ethical behavior and encourages participation from the respondents. When I designed my interview questions, I attempted to “combine or at least consider the necessity of the confluence of theory - - elaboration, and concept-clarification-- to an interview model that truly communicates what it is that a practitioner really does (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 6).” I posed general questions that I hoped would be relatively easy for the interviewee to answer and at the same time allow me to identify the themes in the experiences during data analysis.
Sources of Data

I used a semi-structured interview model because the topics were clear and some questions could be predetermined; such a model leaves space for probing beyond given answers (Berg, 2004). I transcribed the recordings.

I collected information from a variety of sources, including:

- focused interviews with principals
- archival data, including copies of presentations, handouts, memos, minutes of meetings
- teacher in-service agendas and student academic performance and participation in extra-curricular activities

Data were collected over the course of the implementation of the project, from June 2012 through October 2012. I used the information gleaned to discuss the effects of the principal role and intervention initiated and sustained on teacher capacity and student achievement. Archival and board document data were also gathered, reviewed, and coded using theoretical propositions as an organizing framework (Yin, 2003).

Interviewing

Focused interview and student data were coded, displayed and organized according to themes and trends, and also charted under the headings system implementation Barriers and Enablers (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Patton (2002) wrote, “The purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective (p. 341).” I based my decision to use interviewing as my primary mode of data collection on the kind of information that I need and the fact that interviewing is the best way to get it. Interviewing, along with field observations
and document analysis, constitutes one of the major ways qualitative researchers generate and collect data for their research studies (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In each of my interviews I tried to get my research participants to candidly reflect on what motivated their career decisions, how their commitments to their students developed, and what sustained them in their pursuit of their careers. My overall interview strategy was to ask questions, listen to the response, and probe where I thought further clarification was needed.

**Pilot Study**

My research committee and I agreed to a pilot study to test both the interview protocol and to review portraiture of a single respondent first. The pilot study took place with a principal of Garland High School whose tenure occurred between 2007 and 2010 (he was also one of the four respondents selected for the study). After the interview and a member check, I prepared a portrait of my first respondent and made some of the recommended changes that my research chair and committee required of the portraits, the data analysis, and the write-up. The pilot study involved a single principal sampled by convenience, as only one factor was considered essential: that the principal be a current principal or former principal at Garland, a historically and predominately Black school. Although the principal selected is, like all former principals of Garland, African American, this was not a criterion for selection. The principal selected was Keith (pseudonym). I chose this particular school because it is a predominantly Black school and it is my belief that it represents a canary in the coal mine for American public education. By this I mean if Garland is needed improvement then public education as a whole needed improvement.
Limitations

Participants’ biases inherently appear in the observations that they share with the researcher, and so will subsequently influence the data. The short length of time planned for the study compromises the finding of a theoretical answer exhaustion point where answer repetition would start occurring and no new insights would develop. However, this study will be limited because of the time constraints involved in interviewing and subsequent data analysis involved in determining what was learned. Finally, because the study covers at least a twenty-year period, the data can only be as accurate and complete as available records and the memories of participants.

The quality of interviews, writing the researcher reflective journal, and securing appropriate documents also represent a limitation. Research settings and researcher participant relationships can constrain and shape the way a particular story develops. Bias inevitably emerges in both the researcher and participants. The integrity, training, data collection, and analysis skills of the researcher can act as a limitation. Also the limitations of the method of study can lead to oversimplifying or exaggerating data, which would lead to challenges in analysis because of the volume of data generated by the interviews, observations, field notes, journal entries and artifacts collected by the researcher (Creswell, 2007).

Portraiture

The individual portraiture profiles are presented in narrative form, and classified with pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of the participants in this study. The portraiture were developed from the data collected at the interview, principals’ reflections and the face to face meetings with the principals. Berg (2004) suggests that there are three primary interview
approaches: standardized, semi-standardized, and un-standardized. Each refers to uniform interview questions across all participants. The standardized interview adheres strictly to pre-planned questions for consistency across all respondents, whereas the un-standardized interview utilizes unstructured questions and relies on spontaneous responses and data emergence. For the purposes of this study, the researcher used standardized questions with a semi-standardized interview format. I consistently applied the same questions but varied their order and my use of prompts depending on how the interview proceeded. The type of interview is important in that it can simplify data collection and the subsequent data analysis. I used this method instead of conducting open-ended interviews where the participants would engage in a free flowing discussion of their thoughts and perspectives. The following data was used in the construction of the principal portraits.

**Table 3.1. Sources of Data that Inform the Principals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Views</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student data</td>
<td>Statewide assessment</td>
<td>State and School Websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minutes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative team meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>School report card</td>
<td>State and School Websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td>State and School Websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability of Faculty</td>
<td>School improvement plan</td>
<td>State and School Websites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recruitment and Selection**

I contacted potential participants via email at least twice, either in their work or home setting. All participants were former principals of Garland High School. Since two of the participants have retired, I asked them to meet me at Garland, but they preferred to have me meet
them at their homes. I did three of the second interviews in a conference room at Garland and one at the home of the first participant. She asked that I interview her in her home because of time constraints, so I met with her in her home. Each interview lasted about 90 minutes. I also conducted individual follow-up interviews with participants. During the interviews, the participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions about their roles and activities as principals. Participants were also asked to describe the factors that influenced their leadership activities. Qualitative interviewing guides conversations so that the researcher can systematically evaluate and “hear the meaning” of what is being conveyed (Kavale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). After each interview, I transcribed and then analyzed the taped conversation. As I listened and transcribed, I began the process of reporting the narratives of the participant principals.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

After conducting the two interviews with each participant, I transcribed them, adding my own notes and observations. I then examined the transcriptions, looking for recurring key words, phrases or concepts as a way of structuring the material and presenting the experiences of the participant. “Development of emergent themes reflects the portraitist’s first efforts to bring interpretive insight, analytic scrutiny, and aesthetic order, to the collection of data (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p 185).” I utilized multiple data sources for triangulation beyond the interviews and the observations. I collected memos from the district, newspaper articles, and other artifacts. While I looked for common themes that seemed to be emerging from the interview texts, it was also important, in the spirit of narrative inquiry, to listen for the individual voice ‘within the narrative (Chase, 2005, p. 663).’ In all of the interviews I noticed themes of hard work and
shared values, goal setting, establishing priorities, student focus, and focus on results contributing to community. I also noticed themes of teacher capacity building, changes in professional practice, and sustainability. I proceeded to write the narrative, constructing the ‘lived story’ of the participant. Following qualitative research traditions and CRT, I re-presented several events that described the individual and collective behaviors of the principal, the students, and the district. The resulting narrative demonstrated how the principal’s interventions impacted the learning of students and was shaped by the context of the school, the curriculum being employed, and the policies that put that curriculum in place.

Data analysis was conducted via an iterative process that seeks common themes and entertains both alternative conclusions and triangulated data. Data analysis in qualitative research can be defined as consisting of three concurrent flows of action: data reduction, data display, and conclusions. Kavale (1996) describes five main approaches to analyze interviews: meaning condensation, meaning categorization, meaning structuring through narratives, meaning interpretation, and ad hoc meaning generation. As a qualitative researcher, I am interested in insight and data interpretation. Through the process of summarizing and comparing, I reduced my data. Data analysis is an ongoing process that takes place in stages. It is the process of making coherent meaning out of the raw data collected.

Data are gathered so the researcher can learn as much as possible about the contextual variables that might have a bearing on the case. Thematic Analysis is an approach to organizing data that involves the creation and application of ‘codes’ of data. Themes are sets of patterns, and codes are categories of data. Coding refers to grouping the same categories together (Patton, 2002). I accomplished coding by creating and organizing files for data and then reading text, making margin notes and forming initial codes. After this, I conducted pattern matching.
Meaning fields (Carpecken, 1996) were established through first and second level coding and themes. These meaning fields can be analyzed in terms of subjective, objective (triangulation), normative-educative- and identity statements. Patterns of statement become the robust themes that will inform my portraits of each successive principal at Garland. I have listed the Carspecken’s Ontological categories below (1996, p.20).

**Table 3.2. Ontological Categories Defined by Carspecken (1996, p. 20).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Ontological Category</strong></th>
<th><strong>Descriptions</strong></th>
</tr>
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| Subjective claims                        | Low level inference statements made about the “existing states of mind, feelings to which only the action (each interviewee) would have access”  
Subjective claim statements began with “I feel; I think; You are.”                                                                                          |
| Objective claims                         | Low level inference statements made about the “existing objects and events to which all people had direct access” (Carspecken & Cordeiro, 1995; Carspecken, 1996, p. 20).  
Objective claim statements were obvious facts that could be verifiable by multiple access (Carspecken, 1996, p. 20). |
| Normative-evaluation claims              | Low level inference statements made about the “existing agreements on the rightness, goodness, and appropriateness of types of activities” (Carspecken & Cordeiro, 1995; Carspecken, 1996, p. 20).  
Normative-evaluative claim statements were claims about which others should agree to the rightness, goodness, and appropriateness of certain activities; a “shared world” claim (Carspecken, 1996, p. 20). |
Table 3.2 (Continued)

| Identity claims | High level inference statements made by synthesizing the subjective and normative-evaluative categories about the interviewee’s self. Identity claim statements had to do with teasing out the pragmatic and semantic texts implicated in the identity claim and involved “references to other social groups, to implicit configurations of time, to diverse audiences, and to implicit theories of society” (Carspecken & Cordeiro, 1995, p. 108). |

Coding of Interviews

Some systems of coding to organize and manage data needs to be established early on in one’s research (Merriam, 1998; Taylor and Gibbs, 2010). Merriam (1998) suggests that coding is both mechanical and conceptual occurring at two major levels: the first is identifying information about the data and the second would be to make interpretive constructs related to the analysis. In addition, to these levels Carspecken (1996) suggests a possible third level which he calls low-level codes can be developed to identify “regular occurring patterns of action” (p. 91).”). He claims that these codes should be readily apparent to most people who might read the data. The low-level codes that I identified in this research represented the range of claims, from subjective to objective to normative-educative to identity claims (Carspecken, 1996). The second level of analysis, or the conceptual level which Carspecken (1996) refers to as meaning codes surface when researchers apply the emerging themes in a constant comparative method to the participants used in this study. The codes and claims that emerged in this study allowed me to
construct narratives about the participants’ implementations of the interventions that they championed.

**Voice**

Lawrence-Lightfoot describes six different components of voice. The first component of voice is that of witness. When acting as a witness, the researcher must take care to meticulously record that which he sees and hears. The next component of voice has the researcher acting as interpreter, adding his view of “why” something happened to the account of what happened. Lawrence-Lightfoot cautions that “in making an interpretation, the portraitist must be vigilant about providing enough descriptive evidence in the text so that the reader might be able to offer a different interpretation of the data” (p. 91). Following voice as interpretation is “voice as preoccupation.” At this level, the researcher describes in detail the theoretical framework underlying his work. Lawrence-Lightfoot calls the next layer of voice “voice as autobiography.” In this step, Lawrence-Lightfoot recommends sharing those aspects of the researcher’s story that have direct relevance to the research project. “Listening for voice” and “voice in conversation” constitute the final layers. The researcher pays attention not only to what the research subject (the “actor”) intonates, but also to what the actor communicates with body language and with silences. Body language, silences, and hesitations in speech alert the researcher in to what Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) calls “mixed feelings” (p. 122) and are vital to developing a fully nuanced portrait. The participant’s voices emerge in each portrait. My voice appears in my rendering of my participants’ stories and in the dialogue and narrations presented.
Role of the Researcher

As a qualitative researcher it is my responsibility to collect and analyze data through the examination of observations, interviews, and documents. This positions me as both research instrument and analytical processor. According to Patton (1990), it is important to understand the qualifications, experiences, and viewpoint the researcher brings to the study in order to improve credibility and trustworthiness. My interest in the role of principals in reducing the achievement gap stems from my personal journey as a student, a teacher, and an administrator. I attended segregated schools until high school and then attended a historically Black college. When I started teaching advanced science courses in the Suncoast School District I noticed that there had been almost no African-Americans in any of my classes over the course of the nine years that I had taught them, who had been a part of the Suncoast District for their entire education. I thought this unusual because the district had an almost thirty percent Black student population at times during this period. I did have some Black students they had immigrated from West Africa or the Caribbean.

This research study was designed to allow me to gain an understanding of factors that act as barriers to the achievement of Black students and an understanding of how and if those barriers could be overcome by visiting principals of schools with large Black student populations and discussing their experiences as they sought to overcome institutional barriers to the achievement of their students.

I attempted to control personal bias by using a reflective journal which included my thoughts about what the participants were describing during the interview process. I entered my thoughts in my reflective journal after each interview and tried to reconcile areas of cognitive dissonance between what I thought the participants should be feeling after each experience that
was described and what they said they actually felt. After this I modified some questions for the
next interviews and member checked with each participant.

Triangulation of Data

Participants must have the leeway to tell their stories; qualitative interviews must
therefore contain both structured and unstructured questions in order to tell an entire story, and
they must be painted on a canvas of interviews, observations, and documents. In this study, I
collected data from different data sources in accordance with the concept of triangulation, or "the
use of multiple and different data sources, methods, investigators and theories to provide
corroborating evidence (Creswell, 1998, p. 202).” Thus, triangulation may use any or several
combinations of different methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and
observers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 8). In this study, I collected interview data from five
different sources and used them to triangulate the different data sources, including: school
improvement data, interviews, researcher reflective journal, and selected artifacts/and
documents. Triangulation combines multiple methods and perspectives as does qualitative
methodology call for the collection of data from multiple sources to investigate a social
phenomenon (Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2003). By expanding the study of one school to include
multiple school-based leaders from varied experiences, I hope to make the scope of the
information richer and create opportunities to identify patterns of similarity in school-based
leader perceptions, motivations, deterrents, and supports. I must not assume that their
perspectives represent the whole truth, but rather acknowledge that their truths may only
represent one particular aspect of a whole truth. Crystallization (Richardson, 2000) of data
included observations of the school site and other events that occurred during the period,
informal interviews with the principal, and a review of documentation, including local newspapers, school newsletters, and website material.

**Member-check**

I used participants to corroborate data, a procedure called member-check validation in most qualitative formats. Kavale and Brinkman, (2009 state that the purpose of member-check evaluation “is to ensure that collected information and ideas are accurately represented” (p. 325). I shared tapes, transcripts, field notes, drafts, and final reports with the participants for discussion of their trustworthiness. I personally transcribed the transcripts in order to add insight to my data analysis. Data collection and analysis occurs simultaneously in qualitative research, starting with the first observation, the initial interview, or the first artifact analyzed. In this process, follow-up questions can proceed from initial inquiries, with probes designed to clarify the initial response and shed light on its meaning and significance: e.g., why is that important? I gathered data during the interviews using a digital voice recorder. After I coded transcripts, I sat down with respondents to discuss the meaning their statements had for me and to seek clarification and/or verification of my interpretations; this process informed my write-up of each person.

**Documents and Artifacts**

I collected documents, including letters from stakeholders, e-mail messages, mission statements, and school forms, to present a holistic view of the values and behaviors of the principals in this study. The review of the documents served two purposes; it provided historical and contextual data and it became an additional data source of triangulation for data analysis. I approached the narrative as written text to be analyzed in various ways to ensure that I had
accurately represented the lived experiences of the participants in the study.

Researcher Field Notes and Reflective Journal

I recorded field notes before, during, and after each interview, and then entered my observations into a reflective journal. Keeping a field note journal allowed me to document my insights about the research process. I continued journaling after each of the interviews to provide transparency for myself-as-researcher (Janesick, 2004; Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 2002; Piantanida & Garman & Garman, 1999) and as a way of monitoring researcher biases. One of the goals of the qualitative researcher is to develop their own style of interviewing. Reflective journaling contributes to accomplishing that goal. Rubin and Rubin (2005) believe that “rather than just asking and listening, sometimes researchers may need to answer some of the same questions about themselves that they have posed to the conversational partner (p. 83).” The reflective research journal can act as a valuable tool to the qualitative researcher.

Ethical Considerations

I am well versed in the protocols of ensuring that participants in research are protected. Once my proposal was accepted, I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Only after receiving approval from the IRB did I begin my research project. A few strategies I put in place to ensure the protection of human subjects included using pseudonyms for all participants and keeping the name of their school confidential. Consent forms were collected before any data was collected. Human research subject policies for USF and for the institutions in which the research were conducted were followed. Patton (2002, p. 408) recommends the following ethical issues checklist for a qualitative researcher:
1. Explaining the purpose: How will you explain the purpose of the inquiry and methods to be used in ways that are accurate and understandable?

2. Promises and reciprocity: What is in it for the interviewee?

3. Risk assessment: In what ways will conducting the interview put people at risk?

4. Confidentiality

5. Informed consent

6. Data access and ownership: Who will have access to the data? For what purpose?

7. Interviewer mental health: How are you and other interviewers likely be affected by conducting the interviews?

8. Advice: Who will be the researcher’s confidant and counselor on matters of ethics during a study?

9. Data collection boundaries: How hard will you push for data?

10. Ethical versus legal: What ethical framework and philosophy informs your work and ensures respect and sensitivity for those you study, beyond whatever may be required by law?

**Chapter Summary**

In view of the implementation of standards-based reform initiatives and accountability policies within the last two decades, the role of the principal warrants examination. “Principals exert more influence, both directly and indirectly, on student achievement scores than any other school factor besides teachers yet existing knowledge on the best ways to prepare, and develop highly qualified principal candidates is sparse (Darling-Hammond, et. al, 2007, p. 2).” This warrants a critical examination of the perceptions of principals about their roles in promoting
elevated achievement and outcomes for their graduates.

The purpose of Chapter Three was to provide a detailed description of the design and procedures that were used to conduct this study. To that effect, this study employed a qualitative research approach, involving the use of a descriptive examination of the perceptions and experiences of individuals as the primary method of inquiry. More specifically, this study attempted to use portraiture to describe how a set of high school leaders have caused a significant and sustained shift in the performance of their struggling students and delineate how the roles of these school leaders accelerate learning for struggling students. This study employed a qualitative approach, involving the use of a descriptive examination of the experiences of individuals as the primary method of inquiry. This chapter described the overall rationale and research design for the study. Portraiture as a methodology was explained, followed by a statement of what I saw as the limits and strengths of the portraiture method. I outlined the data collection procedures and how the data were analyzed.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Overview and Introduction

This chapter presents the portraits of four principals and their practices in introducing and sustaining reform in one predominantly Black high school over a twenty-year period. The goal of this study was to contribute to the research on the experiences of principals with large African American student populations that have enabled them to realize student achievement gains among these students. In presenting these portraits, my intent is to allow the authentic voice of each principal to come alive. The principals’ own words, rendered in italics so that they can be distinguished from mine, are presented verbatim as they were actually spoken by the participants. This is to illustrate their perspectives more clearly. Participants and the school district have been given pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of their identities. The data are presented as portraits and supported with scenes. A scene might encompass as little as a phrase or as much as the description of a whole culture.

Theoharis (2007) asserts that Social Justice Theory oriented school leaders must make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other marginalizing conditions central to their leadership practice, and vision. This requires that SJT leaders champion inclusive schooling practices not only racial minorities but also for students with disabilities, English language learners (ELLs), and other students traditionally segregated in schools (p. 223). This type of leader prioritizes addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools. I conducted all
the interviews, site visits, observations, and data collection. I also functioned as an insider, that is, one who understands the realities of the experience being examined from an insider’s perspective. Because of this building a collaborative and interpersonal relationship with the participants was easier. Chapman (2007) explains that “the decisions made, the relationships formed, and the narratives that represent people’s lives are deeply connected to the past and present experiences of the researchers and their epistemologies concerning the research topic and the participants (p. 258).” The participants and I discussed the social, cultural, and political practices and policies within the administrative world using a Social Justice perspective (Bogotch and Schoorman, 2008; Glass, 2003; Sheets, 2003; Theoharis, 2007). The length of and detail included in the portraits were influenced by a number of factors, including the amount of time I was able to spend with each individual, how busy their schedules were, and the limitations presented by various unexpected life events. In addition, some participants were reserved, while others were more comfortable sharing a great deal of information. Personalities also played a role in the amount and quality of the data gathered. Participants who were more direct and to the point gave me enough input to warrant no more than a brief description. In contrast, other participants were more deeply descriptive and reflective in what they shared, resulting in lengthier portraits. Each participant’s portrait begins with a brief introduction, which includes an account of the context under which they assumed the principalship. Following this introduction, I present a brief description of each principal’s personal history, an overview of their tenure at Garland and a description of the challenges and successes each encountered, and I close each portrait by filling in additional information in an epilogue about the participant’s progress since leaving the principalship at Garland.
Contexts/Setting of the Study

The racialized historical context of the school district is exemplified in the following events or scenes. A survey, conducted of 40 realtors in the district in 1972, indicated that buyers with young children sought homes in non-busing areas. Some salesman carried official school zone maps advertising homes in non-busing areas by saying children could “walk to school” instead of near schools as was the custom before busing for desegregation (Kluger, 1976, pps. 767-768). These zones had to be rotated on a biennial basis to avoid White flight (Schnur, 1991).

In 1981 the then-superintendent Pete Rose (pseudonym) initiated two programs at south county schools designed to attract families from outside the predominantly Black surrounding neighborhoods including: The Artistically Talented Program at Garland (ATP) and the Program for the Academically Talented (PAT) at Georgia High School (pseudonym for another magnet program in the same district).

The ATP at Garland has since its inception never had a student enrolment that was over ten percent Black. At the time of this writing it has less than a five percent Black student enrolment. Thus the ATP is doing what it was designed to do which is attract people from outside of the surrounding Black community. I attended two of the parent meetings for the community members who had children who were zoned to go to Garland, neither the ATP or GTP were mentioned in the parent meetings that I attended which was for the purpose of explaining that a new state of the art facility was going to replace the dilapidated structure that was Garland. In the year 2006 a second magnet was instituted in the new facility. The new magnet program which is designed to give students a background in business is called the Business Education and Technology Academy or B.E.T.A. program. This program has done
more recruiting of traditional students from the community than the ATP and hovers around having a ten percent Black student enrolment. All of these magnet programs as well as other magnet programs in the district have measures which keep the magnet and traditional students separated. The traditional students were housed in one part of the facility and the magnet students in another. When the new facility first opened its doors the magnet students had their own separate school entrance. The magnet students have also been on a different schedule than the traditional students. They were on a block schedule while the traditional students were on a regular schedule. This prevents the two groups from being able to take classes together and they even have different passing times for classes since one group passed at the ninety minute mark and the other on the hour mark. The only real opportunity for students to mix was at lunch which rarely happened.

In 2006, the regional newspaper interviewed the then-superintendent of the schools in the Suncoast district, WC Williams. Dr. Williams, addressing a question posed by the reporter about alleged racial tensions between teachers and students said "On one hand I really understand the frustration, having been (at Garland) and having asked a kid myself to take the headphones off and got that ‘Whatever’ kind of look,”. “If you get it all day every day, you're frustrated I'm sure.” Some of the problems have involved racial issues. The teachers’ letter to Williams complained of Black students calling White teachers racists when the teachers asked them to follow the rules. By 2008, only 29 percent of the sophomores at Garland (one of the study’s groups tested for reading proficiency) were reading at grade level. Among Black sophomores, the number was only 13 percent (Regional newspaper, December 22, 2006). For Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), context involves not just the physical setting in which action takes place, but
also the historical, cultural and ideological setting. With that in mind, I started with the historical context of Garland.

History

When the state’s economy faltered in the 1920s and the movement of White settlers into the Suncoast district diminished, the school board converted an unopened White elementary school that was no longer needed in central downtown into Garland Junior-Senior High for Black students (Schnur, 1991). It became the county's first public secondary school for Blacks, occupying an eight-classroom building that cost $49,490 to build (Schnur, 1991). In 1926, African-American teachers and pupils conducted a march from Davis Academy two, 2 miles away, to take possession of the eight-classroom school. Before this time, Blacks attended school for only six months annually and could not progress beyond the eighth grade, although the Suncoast School district provided nine-month terms and offered instruction through the high school level to White pupils (Schnur, 1991). The initial coursework for Blacks at Garland focused on labor studies and emphasized industrial skills such as broom-making, sewing, laundering, and domestic science rather than academic disciplines.

Court Decisions that Frame the History

In 1964, the NAACP’s attorney argued in Braden v. Board of Public Instruction of Suncoast Schools (nearly a decade after Brown) that less than two percent of the district’s Black pupils still attended desegregated schools. At that time, the district permitted Whites to transfer to any all-White schools, Blacks however could only enroll in the nearest all-White facility. On June 2, 1971, Judge Brad Crenshaw of the 5th district court executed the Now Order for the
Suncoast County Schools, which carried a stipulation that no school could exceed a thirty-percent Black enrollment limit. It called for the immediate transfer of students to bring the district into compliance and required Suncoast School officials to comply with one of the most comprehensive desegregation plans in the US, ordering the district to abandon paired and clustered schools, modify existing zone lines, and implement satellite zones for White elementary students (Schnur, 1991). Federal district Judge William Terrell Hodges amended the agreement between the district and the NAACP during the 1983-84 school year, allowing the school board a grace period to redraw school attendance zones instead of requiring the immediate transfer of pupils to comply with the order. This amendment allowed district relief from the thirty-percent limit and kept Garland’s enrolment predominantly Black.

The Participants

This study included four participants, all African American, two women and two men, who had been principals in the same urban school setting, Garland High School. They are: Brenda Sharpier (12 years), (2) Doc Holiday (4 years), Uma Good (1 year), and Keith Garmin (3 years) (all pseudonyms). These participants are described below in their order of succession from first to last. Their leadership covers a 20 year period from 1991 to 2011. Each of the four participants was supportive and open to spending the time necessary to participate. One of the participants even allowed me to interview him twice after I accidentally erased his first interview.

The participant’s ages ranged from thirty four years of age to fifty nine years of age at the time of their principalships. All had attended segregated public schools in the South except for the thirty four year old woman. Only the thirty four year old was unable to increase or maintain...
student achievement from the previous level. One of the principals had actually attended Garland as a student.

**Portrait of Brenda Sharper, the Protector: 1991-2003**

When I arrived at Brenda Sharper’s home for the interview I noticed that it was located in a Black neighborhood. It is the same neighborhood in which Dr. Garmin, another principal who I will describe later, lives. It is the most manicured Black neighborhood I have ever seen, and her house is probably one of the best-kept in the neighborhood.

**Prologue/Context**

The state plan in 2000 was to set the direction for public school reform in the state for most of decade comprising Ms. Sharper’s tenure. The legislation at that time courted a relationship between the state and local schools through deregulation and fiscal flexibility, permitting individual schools to chart their own path of reform and improvement. The metric that was used to determine if a school was or was not being successful was under the purview of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. They had visited the school the year before Brenda Sharper took the helm, and they found that Garland was not up to Southern Association standards. Her task was to improve the school in all those standards in which it had failed, so it wouldn’t lose its accreditation. Ms. Sharper explained, “If they were not accredited your kids could not even be accepted into a state college. The library didn’t have enough books; the teachers were not certified or at least certified in the subjects they were teaching.” This was in 1991.

When asked how she would describe the context of Garland when she arrived, Ms. Sharper responded,
When I went there the school was in chaos. There were teachers signing in for other teachers and the teachers that they had signed in for never even came to work that day. There were people who were non-students who would come on campus, and I would hear horror stories like the one day a teacher was walking from her classroom to the cafeteria; somebody came up and snatched her purse. And one of the students said that someone walked up to him and snatched his gold chain, and there was talk about drunks that would walk into the classroom and those kinds of things. One teacher even went to the union because she was required to go to work on time. Many things happened but learning was not one of them. It was really chaotic.

What did the students do when they had no teacher?

Some classes were watched by other teachers in effect having two classes being monitored by one teacher. Sometimes the students just left campus.

**Early Life**

Brenda Sharper came from a large family and was the daughter of a Baptist minister. As one of 14 children “I was right in the middle.” When she was growing up they had two elementary schools for Black students; Jordan on the south side of town and Davis on the north side. She grew up on the south side. So she went to Jordan elementary school, which has since been torn down. At that time, Garland was seventh through 12th grade.

I played teacher all the time growing up; my father was the pastor of a church and it was one of the biggest Black churches in town at that time.” When she was nine or ten years old she taught Sunday school. “I used to write plays and stories for the church for Easter and Christmas and I felt like I had a knack for it. When I went to (attended) Garland in the early 50s they could only play about 5 schools in the whole state and they played basketball on an outdoor basketball court because Garland didn’t have a Gym. They didn’t have a gym until the late 50s maybe early 60s so we played outdoors until that time. They would only have about six games a year and they would have to travel forever to get to them.

She was born in this town and grew up here; in fact she was a Garland graduate, the first Garland graduate to become its principal.

**Professional Journey**

How did the path that led to her being the first Black principal begin?
I really didn’t get (hired) into the school system until 1969; that was the second year they hired Black teachers to work in the White system. The year before in 1968 they hired two Black teachers at (another South County school) and then they hired me in the North County. And we were the only three Black teachers in high school in the Suncoast district other than at Garland or Suncoast High.

Suncoast High was the other Black High School and has since closed.

“I went to North in 1969 and I was the first and only Black thing they saw there...There were no Black custodians, no Black cafeteria workers, just me. And the principal just took an interest in me.”

She recalls her car being surrounded by some of the White community members on her first day at work and then being rescued by some of her White students. When she graduated from high school she had planned on going into the business field, so she studied the business track because she thought that she was going to become a secretary. “I really wanted to go to a school for prospective Black secretaries in Washington DC, because there was nothing like that around here but my father said “no you can’t go that far away.” So she worked on the campus of a historically Black college in state as a secretary to one of the deans there and loved it.

She was the first principal chronologically of the Garland principals that I interviewed and the first Black female principal in all of the Suncoast District, where she was principal for 12 years. She retired as a principal after 35 years in education, earning her first degree in Business Education. She only taught for three years in a mainstream school and was assigned as an assistant principal in several small high schools, remaining in that position for nine years. She was named principal of Garland High School, where she remained until she retired. Under her leadership, Garland High School became a State Golden School Award winner for outstanding community-involvement programs for ten consecutive years. During her tenure the school also won the 1996 “State Successful School” award, four subject area Teacher of the Year awards,
and full accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Prior to 1991, no Black female had ever become a high school principal, not even during segregation; this was long before NCLB. “I was at Garland for 12 years and nobody else has ever served 10 years.” She started the principalship before No Child Left Behind and continued it into the current accountability period. She was the longest tenured principal by far of any of the four principals with whom I talked for this study. Although she didn’t seem to be overtly religious, for her, Garland seemed to be more of a spiritual calling than a springboard for her career.

Views on Leadership

Ms. Sharp’s perspective on her leadership practice is described in the following passage:

*I had a very strong set of teachers who wanted to follow the rules and did work with me, at least setting up how we could get teachers there to do what they had been hired to do. Sort of like a school advisory council. I set up a teacher advisory council right away, not necessarily a SAC, but a teacher advisory council. I also set up a student advisory council, so that they could come up with some of the rules; ‘because I do feel that if people help make the policies and the rules, they’ll follow them right. And actually, we weren’t actually making new rules, but we were trying to find out how we can enforce the policies and rules that the school board has already set.*

Interventions

When I asked Ms. Sharp what interventions she changed or introduced during her tenure at Garland she stated:

*The first thing I did was I got a new secretary. It stopped the previous secretary from running the school. The primary goal of the district that first year was to bring it up to academic standards so I developed a plan that I had used at another school to make kids proud of coming there, an academic club for the kids; I encouraged them to do better academically. At first, the kids were very very hard to motivate but we created the 3.0 club If a student had a 3.0 or higher there was a celebration every Friday in the cafeteria where they could get school t-shirts and pizzas and things like that if they had a 3.0 GPA or higher. At first we had had to round up their GPAs from 2.5 but then it took off.*

This, she believes, was a major turning point for her students.
Implementation Barriers and Enablers

When Ms. Sharp returned to Garland in 1991 she found that “The teachers were off doing their own thing, and they weren’t used to administration taking a strong stance. We had to change some of the teachers’ practices. We said you will be to school on time, or if you’re out absent you need to call us.

She also found that people from the community were coming on campus and disrupting classroom settings, in part because the school was located in an impoverished area. Ms. Sharper describes the setting, “during the day non-students were walking into classrooms and taking money and just about everything else.” When teachers at Garland reported that they did not feel safe, Ms. Sharper put a fence around the campus to block it off from outside traffic. Surprisingly she had to get buy-in from the students in order to make this happen.

“Students and teachers did not feel safe,” she says. “It caused a major problem; the custodians were having a problem keeping it clean because people would walk through and drop stuff so the immediate solution was to put a fence up.” She had teachers who volunteered once they put the fence up, because somebody had to be on gate duty, and while some of the teachers resisted, they required teachers to be on gate duty until the county wouldn’t fund it because there wasn’t any money in the budget for a gatekeeper. In that same year where I was working at another school in another part of the district every teacher received about 350 dollars of software for our brand new computers of which there were at least four computers in every room. “I told you the campus was unattractive so I wrote letters to companies and asked them for sod and trees and we got all kind of donations.” Ms. Sharp wanted to change the appearance of the campus so that kids, teachers, and parents would feel safe and proud to be there. One intervention that she implemented which she does not list directly was the creation of an
improved relationship and communication between the administration and the teachers:

*I really believe you do unto others as you would have them do unto you and any success I’ve had ... I feel that I can get along with anybody I have good friends who never finished high school and I’ve got some friends who’ve gone beyond Ph.D’s. because I treat people like they’re human and I feel like that’s why I have been successful. I might have refined it by working hard but if I didn’t have that innate skill or ability then I couldn’t have done it that way.*

In the time between the year she graduated from high school (1953) and 1991—almost 40 years later,—Ms. Sharp feels that the relationship between teachers and students had pretty much changed.

*I think kids were much more resourceful back in the fifties than they are now. And I think that comes about from parenting. I also think teachers at that time were probably stricter disciplinarians; they had the freedom then to be... I think teachers did a lot less administrative tasks, so they had a lot more time to teach and of course you had smaller classes then so they could give a lot more individual attention; there was a marked difference between then and now.*

Sharper, who retired in 2003, said she had reservations about the demolition of the old building.

*“I was going to stand in the door and not let them tear it down.”*

**Emergent Themes**

An emergent theme was that Brenda Sharper was a transformational leader (Bass, 1998; Burns, 1978) who focused on collaboration with staff and shaping her school’s organizational culture. She is most proud of role in creating a safe school environment which helped her to retain quality teachers who came to work daily. The community and the students and teachers generally did not have a system that supported each other, nor did the school community feel safe on campus. Teachers and recent Garland students are culturally dissimilar. Another emergent theme was that teachers were not adequately prepared and did not strictly follow the school district policies; classroom management was a significant problem for many of them. Students did not feel safe in the classroom and teachers were afraid of the students and the
surrounding community. There was also a lack of district support although “the district did put on some workshops on things like ‘writing lesson plans’ because the teachers weren’t skilled or they weren’t doing what they needed to do.” In addition, basic needs like personal safety and order were neither observable nor in place at Garland, and a stable teaching staff was not a given.

The school district didn’t monitor the progress of the students until there was a problem. Under Brenda Sharp’s watch there were only three grades. Principals were forced to invent strategies in near isolation to overcome challenges for disadvantaged or marginalized students.

Table 4.1. Eight Cell Chart – Participant One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Grade</th>
<th>Percent Tested</th>
<th>% In Lowest Reading Level(s)</th>
<th>% Level 2 and Above FCAT Reading</th>
<th>% Level 3 and Above FCAT Reading</th>
<th>% Level 2 and Above FCAT Math</th>
<th>% Level 3 and Above FCAT Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>57+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>51+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statistics used to assign the first grade given were not available from the DOE website although the grade was posted. The current grading system was developed nine years after Ms. Sharp became a principal, so there are no grades available for her first nine years.

**Portrait of Doc Holiday, Facilitator: 2003-2006**

**Prologue**

When Doc arrived at Garland he described it as being in chaos and the administration as having no relationship with the faculty:
According to the survey that was given there was no real relationship with administration and faculty. The union rep was very adamant about there being no relationship; in fact the administration had not been very visible when the faculty had problems they didn’t get resolved. Also I believe in systems (perspective) there was no system in place.

The system Dr. Holiday describes is a process of creating and distributing responsibilities and communicating a common vision. The system is created by the stake holders. In Spillane’s (2004) account of distributed leadership, a distributed perspective positions leadership in the interaction between leaders and, followers, and their situations. Distributed leadership dwells in the leadership practice and not the leaders themselves. Leadership practice is viewed as the interactive web between these individuals.

For the first interview, I arrived at a strip mall and entered a door under a large marquee that proclaimed “Henry and Mary Holiday’s United Christian Center Church (a)” (A pseudonym). The structure lay in a neighborhood that has as many mobile homes as small houses, most of which are cement block homes. As I parked, I could see the area behind Holiday’s church, streets with row upon row of such houses. In the front yards of about five houses or so, men were standing in the front yard. They all appeared to be either Mexican or Black, and some of them were shirtless and tattooed. They were all checking me out but I ignore them and went into the building. I saw the pastor’s office to my right.

Dr. Holiday weighs about 230 pounds, has a very dark complexion, and stands well over six feet tall. He saw me and welcomed me to his Church which (he explained) also doubles as a divinity school. He told me that I could interview him after the service. I attended the service during which he gave an outline of a rubric to members of the congregation. I was included. It was an assignment on how to write a sermon. Apparently this service was primarily for divinity students. I looked around the congregation and noticed that the congregation numbered only
about 20 people, half of whom were Black. During the sermon Dr. Holiday mentioned constructivism and made reference to a professor from the nearby university who was in the congregation and somehow connected to the new school. After the service and the goodbyes I waited outside of the pastor’s study.

**Early Life**

“Doc,” as he is commonly called, was a nickname before it was a designation. He got the nickname in elementary school from a teacher who thought he asked too many questions. Originally from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, one of 14 children, Doc Holiday’s early life experiences were informed by his childhood as an avid churchgoer. “I was called to the ministry when I was 12 and I was always being tutored in elementary and high school, not to catch up, but to excel.” His whole experience now, he refers to as a reflection of his spiritual training: “It overflows into everything I say, think and do.” Doc divided his time between Alabama and Illinois. Although he spent more time in Illinois as a student, he moved back and forth between Alabama and Illinois, receiving most of his education in the Chicago area. Doc earned a bachelor's degree in English from Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and a master's degree in English and ethnic studies from Governor's State University in University Park, Illinois. He began teaching in 1967 at a junior high school in Cleveland and moved to the Suncoast District in 1978. Born in Alabama, but receiving “a lot of public school education in Illinois,” he spent more time in the Chicago area and considers Chicago just as segregated as any southern state, and perhaps more so.

*In Alabama the buildings reflected each other whatever was done for the White school was done for the Black school….the same exact construction, same exact material…it had to be separate and equal. In Illinois it was just separate not equal. That was done in an effort to make sure you stayed in your Black schools.*
Doc’s role models growing up were Ms. Broward, a Chicago English reading teacher, and a math teacher named Mims, who always made sure that he was healthy and playing basketball. He also names a nontraditional educator in Chicago, a beautician named Hattie who had a school of cosmetology and taught beauty culture, as a great disciplinarian and one of his first role models.

Empirical studies suggest a significant link between one’s private life experiences and their praxis as school leaders (Fraynd & Capper, 2003). It is obvious to me that Doc’s faith has impact on his praxis. And as noted by Beteille, Kalogrides and Loeb (2011), principals typically transfer to less challenging schools as they gain experience. As Doc gained experience, he moved to a school with less than 30 Black students and a lower free and reduced lunch rate from which he eventually retired.

**Professional Journey**

Doc taught at Ocean Comprehensive Middle School (pseudonym) for two years, and then became a curriculum writer and later a teacher coordinator in community education at Lakeside Adult Education Center (pseudonym), where after being made an associate, he managed the behavior process, although he began applying for principal jobs and says that he was consistently rated as the top applicant for those positions.

_I got the middle school and in six months’ time we had that place turned around. There had been people leaving without signing out people were getting paid without showing up. It was just a mess over there over there. Then one day someone from the central office saw me on the floor with a chart working on the system in that school. So I would know how to run that school. They were so impressed with me. I had been there six or seven months when I got the call to pack my bag I got the job at Garland after only one year in the middle school and didn’t even have to interview for it. I never had to interview for any of those jobs I didn’t have to interview for the middle school._

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Views on Leadership

The distributed leadership perspective focuses on organizing schools similarly to businesses. In this model, the assistant principals, department heads, and teacher leaders all take responsibility for specific functions. Doc focused on school-wide improvement by placing these people in positions of responsibility. School improvement in this model becomes a collective rather than an individual concern. Doc explains how this perspective worked at Garland:

I never had to fire a single teacher; our system or way of work which had been put together over a long period of time, several years, would identify those people and it would help them catch up with whatever their deficiencies were through assessments and communications and—I take it back, we only had to remove one person an assistant principal, partly because the rubric evaluated him and he wasn’t performing successfully. All of the things I mentioned were carried out by the systems leaders; many were teacher leaders. Every aspect of what they needed was placed in the summer institute so when people did not take the opportunity to improve their skills or whatever they were lacking in based on the instruments we used, we began the appropriate paperwork and we only had to do that one time and that was with an administrator.

Doc feels that life itself is a system, and the more one understands how the system and leadership works the more successful one will be in life:

I think that, if you have a system approach to life, if one is disjointed in the living of life, disjointed in their leadership ability, you can tell almost precisely how a person is living both, in and out of the classroom because it’s all a reflection. And life is cause and effect, Jesus came to tell us that life is cause and effect, that life is system; if you work it, it works. He was not here to try to talk anything about religion, and he was here to talk system love; so if you understand what life is, how it works, and you in it, can orchestrate it perfectly. You have an understanding that helps you to move through every situation. That’s what we do. I have a systems approach here.

Relationships

Doc Holiday stated that his goal was to create a system within which all teachers would know how to work. So for every issue or concern that came up, a staff member could independently address that issue or concern. He didn’t have any union issues in his five years there, “because most of my teacher leaders were union members and two of them were union
reps. that’s how we worked.” According to Doc Holiday, his school didn’t have a single union issue in his five years there. “Everything we needed just came to us, and based on that we resolved everything we needed to resolve.” Doc Holiday’s system was a demonstration of shared leadership. Here is what the state reported under his tenure.

**Table 4.2. Eight Cell Chart – Participant Two**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School grade</th>
<th>% at Level 3 or Higher in Reading</th>
<th>% at Level 3 or Higher in Math</th>
<th>% Meeting the Writing Standard</th>
<th>% at Level 3 or Higher in Science</th>
<th>% Making Learning Gains in Reading</th>
<th>% Making Learning Gains in Math</th>
<th>% of Lowest 25% Making Learning Gains in Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source DOE website 2012*

**Interventions**

Bogotch (2002) wrote that the educational leader of a school needs to create an environment that permits a variety of programs based on the diverse needs and beliefs of others and adjust practices to changing conditions (p. 142). During the first year of Holiday’s tenure, he personally implemented a workshop every Thursday with the teachers on their planning period in the amelioration center. He did this in order to give them the opportunity to build a relationship with administration and him in particular. He trained them personally that first year and followed up with the summer institute. The following summer they were able to put together a system manual for all of the issues they faced, whatever the issues were. Their goal was to create a model so that teachers would know how to address every issue or concern. In 2004, Garland High School was included in the federal grant received by the Suncoast District Schools for the establishment of small learning communities (SLCs). In the model Holiday created he moved
people around to create small learning communities, or schools within schools. One example of this concept is shown by a model wherein, instead of counselors working together in close proximity, they were moved so that the counselor was next to his or her administrator.

**Implementation Barriers and Enablers**

The district paid the teachers to come in to work on the system. The Garland teaching community did all the research to determine the method by which they would work. They moved from a bell schedule to a block schedule. Holiday implemented a network of directives detailing what to do under any circumstances. He even created a policy on how to proceed if no policy was in place. He also identified individuals who were responsible for implementing the directives. These educational leaders shaped the structures and policies of Garland High School. Holiday created these directives with the help of teachers and other personnel.

**Life after Garland**

After leaving Garland, Holiday spent the next five years at a school that was consistently ranked by Time magazine in the top one hundred high schools every year he was there. The students who received a free or low-cost lunch went from 68% at Garland to 22% at his new school. From there, he retired from the Suncoast School District. Holiday’s experience supports research which indicates that “Transferring principals tend to move to schools with a more higher achieving and advantaged student bodies relative to where they start, suggesting that principals may use their initial school assignments as stepping stones to more desirable future positions in other schools” (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2011, p. 2).” In this study two principals moved to predominantly White schools one was demoted and one retired.
Emergent Themes

Data from the interviews were coded for themes related to, but not exclusive to, issues of race, gender, class, and institutional barriers to social justice that affected student learning.

Holiday was concerned with managing the school and prides himself as an instructional leader, but he seems preoccupied with administrative duties. Although he worked with teachers and faculty to set goals, allocate resources to instruction, manage the curriculum, and monitor lesson plans, he delegated many instructional tasks to others to promote student learning.

Portrait of Uma Good, Student-Teacher Advocate: 2006-2008

Prologue/Context of Garland

Garland High School was considered to be structurally intact and students were doing as well as they had ever done on the state’s relatively new achievement test when Dr. Good came in as principal. But in the first month of school, the master schedule had still not been completed because Doc Holiday had taken his APC with him to the new school. So Good had to do the job of an APC as well as the job of principal. At that time, at least 30% of her staff had been teaching three years or less.

The union was always an issue, always an issue. It just seemed to be the symptom of things, but the director of the office of professional standards and I were almost on a first name basis because I was calling her almost every day with issues that had been there that had not been addressed from since before I got there.

There were about 300 staff members when Good began her tenure at Garland, so one of her other goals was trying to build a relationship with the staff and have an understanding of the programs there and then working with the community to build some resources for students within the school. In addition, due to changes in the school grading formula it would be difficult
to compare students using just the school grade. The school grade had been a “C” previously, but due to upcoming changes in the school grading formulas Good had to look deeper at the students reading level and math levels to understand where the students had to improve.

One of the things we did was to focus on school wide reading. I wanted the teachers to really know it was important to me so we did I think it was competency two so we would meet school wide on Saturday and I actually did it with a group of teachers to get that first competency done.

There are six competencies articulated in the state’s reading endorsement.

Early Life

Dr. Good was not from a traditional family, nor a wealthy one; they struggled, but she still had good values and good morals and she always did well in and liked school. Her office is adorned with wooden carved elephants and she has pictures of herself standing next to President Obama. Dr. Good was born and raised in the area, living with her grandmother right down the street from Garland, and so was very familiar with the neighborhood and the community from which her students came.

I actually didn’t start out in education. I actually started out as an accounting major, but then I always enjoyed teaching so I kind of just decided midstream, all right, I think I’m going to just go for education, so I got a degree in special education.

Good’s first teaching job was in an ESE (Exceptional Education and Student Services) class and she only taught for less than four years.

I really kind of just wanted to work with kids to show them that there are options for them and to really not focus too much on their disability or their handicaps but to focus on what do you need to do to get through or to make it through, and I would say that my grandparents kind of taught me that, because one of them completed like 5th grade and the other one surely compensated for their shortcomings.

Dr. Good thought that the biggest struggle or the thing that stopped students from achieving was a lack of a cohesive web of relationships (between students and staff, staff and
administration, and among students, staff, and administration). “I had an administrative team that was at each other’s throats sometimes. I started professional development among my administrative team including my secretary and our SRO and I used the book Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way.”

**Professional Journey**

After only four years as a teacher, Good became an assistant principal, working at a high school in the district, then another, then a middle school. Each time, her tenure was only two years. Then, in 2006, the superintendent selected Good for one of the toughest jobs in the district, the principalship at Garland.

**Implementation Barriers and Enablers**

Dr. Good thought that the biggest struggle or the thing that stopped students from achieving was there was no relationship (between students and staff, staff and administration, and among students, staff, and administration). I had an administrative team that was at each other’s throats sometimes I started professional development among my administrative team including my secretary and our SRO and I used the book lead follow or get out of the way.

**Views on Distributed Leadership**

Dr. Good makes it clear that no leader is an island.

When I came, there were 40 plus teacher’s openings, and in addition to that the previous principal had taken the APC with him, so there was no one there who had any curriculum experience besides myself, and 20 teachers still needed to be hired on opening day. The demographics became more African American and I don’t think that contributed to the behavior, I think it was just the zoning, it was more neighborhood, and where you once had this group going to a mid-county school and that group going to that school, now they were all coming to Garland together. Because of the changing of the zoning and the neighborhoods as opposed to when I first got there, student behavior got worse. You have a vision, a focus, and you need individuals to help you implement that vision or focus. I believe teamwork accomplishes what you want to accomplish, and just my experiences at Garland was that the team concept kind of fell apart. I really
didn’t feel like we had a team. And I think that contributed to the troubles I had as a principal there, and I think working together as a team you can accomplish whatever things that you can’t do alone. How can your school be effective, how can your school run effectively, when at the top there is so much discord, when there’s no collaboration?

**Interventions**

When asked which school-based leader interventions are essential elements for reducing the achievement gap between struggling and non-struggling student populations, Dr. Good listed extrinsic and intrinsic incentives as paramount. “I brought back the three-point-0 club.” She believes that motivation comes at least in part from reward and recognition, and so she instituted an initiative that offered students incentives for reading. When I asked Good what interventions she changed or introduced during her tenure at Garland to that end, she said, “Students who read the most would get a Barnes and Noble gift card for example, and the staff, every meeting I recognized teachers for things that they had done like perfect attendance or anything exceptional to try to build morale.”

One grant program at Garland ran under the aegis of Human Resources, provided four mentors on site that would assist beginning teachers. They worked with struggling teachers who lacked sound classroom management skills. Other interventions included moving the counselors back to their side of the building so that counselors were located together in the counseling area; Dr. Good believed that the student services needed to be in one area, because prior to this move, they were getting sucked into behavioral issues and unable to perform the counseling tasks they needed to do.

Dr. Good continued establishing the Small Learning Communities and kept moving forward. She believed that these communities gave kids a sense of identity, especially among the more traditional students who weren’t in Business Education and Technology Academy or
who weren’t in the County Center for the Arts. She continued a reading initiative that started before she got there and expanded it to include a school wide focus:

_I think the reading imitative which was in collaboration with the community where we were tied up with a business partner who was able to come in and help our business partner was all children’s hospital. So really getting mentors into the school made a big difference and then understanding the school aspect and us understanding the business aspect. There was money tied to increase student achievement._

Good continued the extended learning program (after hour school for tutoring and credit recovery) and expanded Garland’s Avid program (Advancement Via Individual Determination) so that tutoring was available to the kids in Avid. They expanded Avid to three or four teachers and three or four classes, one at every grade level. Good also established a service project and Garland became a certified AVID school after her second year. Dr. Good also introduced Character Education. “I think that the character piece was a big success maybe not for the whole school but certainly some facets of the students we worked with contributed to student success.” It is of this intervention that she is proudest.

_Life after Garland_

According to the local newspaper, Dr. Good’s three-year principalship at Garland High was terminated after a number of complaints from teachers. The district then placed her as a principal at a local middle school. After only a year there and more complaints, from parents this time, the district transferred Good to an assistant principalship at another High school. The school board chair did not support this move and was quoted in the local newspaper as saying, “When as (a district do) we say this person isn't cut out for a leadership position?” The then superintendent was quoted in the same article as saying Good showed talent as an assistant principal and may have been promoted too quickly in the past. According to Good she wasn't given the resources necessary to handle a rising tide of at-risk kids at Garland, brought in by the
district's return to zoned schools. But her detractors mostly teachers accused Good of being a poor leader, and in her last evaluation at Garland it said she needed to improve in key areas, including promoting a safe school environment.

In Dr. Good’s next assignment, FCAT scores dropped. Suspension rates went up and complaints mounted. Parents told the superintendent and the School Board on March 8, according to e-mails obtained through a records request, that “In just 6 months, a formerly great school is now the dangerous wild west . . . Don't blame the kids, it's the leader . . . It amazes many that the school board would have the audacity to place such a proven failure in our schools and with our kids,” People are saying, ‘Why do we have to put up with these failing principals?’”

**Relationships**

Dr. Good states that, at Garland, student-teacher relationships were also preventing students from learning; she was constantly battling trying to overcome the thought pattern that these kids really can’t learn. “You have to say these kids really can learn you’re just going to have to do things a little bit differently.” Other relationships that changed during her tenure at Garland involved the district’s release from bussing when they were declared to have a unitary status. Because they moved to neighborhood schools, what happened in the community came on campus:

*That was a huge problem when I was there. Of course they made some modifications to move kids around and do some things differently when I left, but the changing into neighborhood schools made a big impact on student achievement. So I don’t think we had a lot of racial issues at Garland; there were neighborhood issues. It was never the Blacks against the Whites or the Hispanics against the Blacks or Whites. It was always neighborhood stuff. It was always this neighborhood against that neighborhood.*

Good also claims that some administrators did not want to be at Garland, and she states that they made their dissatisfaction well known:
They wanted to go to a north county school; they did not want to be at a Garland or at any south county school. So that presented a huge challenge because just like some of the teachers didn’t want to be there, that presented a huge challenge. They were in the frame of mind that these kids can’t learn no matter what we do.

When asked if she thought that the district perceived that problems existed with the faculty staff and administrations relationship, Good responded:

Most definitely. I was told that by the district before I even came into the job. One of the administrators that I had on my team had been a student at Garland and had known or had had some of the same teachers and was an acting administrator, and Doc hired her as an assistant principal, and her relationship with some of the staff was constantly a controversial issue. Some of the teachers felt that she didn’t support them with discipline and she always believed the kid, so it was a constant back and forth, and that was a great challenge because I constantly had to address and deal with those issues. The relationship was terrible and it most definitely affected student achievement.

**Additional Resources Needed**

When I asked Ms. Good what outside interventions she needed most that she did not have during her tenure at Garland she stated:

I could have used another administrator or more visibility from the district, definitely smaller numbers, and I know that occurred after I left because I started with 2,500 kids. After I left it went down to 1500. It was as small as a neighboring high school, so I think it really would have helped to look at who was zoned for Garland. I mean it was a fight to keep certain kids out of Garland because I knew what was going to happen once those kids came in and the dynamics especially from the community they were from, so certainly the Title One money would have been helpful after the SLC money ran out. Hey I forgot about this Camp Anytown. I did one for the staff. We all went through it. We went down to Ellington for a week. I want to say we had about 15 teachers; I wanted to take 50. It was powerful the effect that had on those teachers and the effect they had on their kids once they got back.
Table 4.3. Eight Cell Chart – Participant Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Grade</th>
<th>% at Level 3 or Higher in Reading</th>
<th>% Meeting the Writing Standard</th>
<th>% at Level 3 or Higher in Math</th>
<th>% Making Learning Gains in Reading</th>
<th>% Making Learning Gains in Science</th>
<th>% Making Learning Gains in Math</th>
<th>% of Lowest 25% Making Learning Gains in Reading</th>
<th>% of Lowest 25% Making Learning Gains in Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data starts at the top with her last year and proceeds in reverse chronological order.

Dr. Good introduced character education and built it as a school wide focus. Character education looks at themes such as respect, responsibility, and encouraging students to become contributing members of society. Dr. Good reports that:

*There had been a lot of fighting and stuff before I got there, so to kind of just to dissipate some of that, which was occurring, and teaching them that this is the way to act responsibly. So those were all aspects of character education, getting them into some leadership workshops, getting them out into the community to do some things and teach them how to work with their peers, and that was a big part.*

In summary, Dr. Good clearly built on the work of her two predecessors and extended it. She introduced only one significant intervention, character education, and wisely used district and community initiatives to raise student achievement and create a community of adult and student learning.

**Portrait of Keith Garmin, Resource Marshal and Community Organizer: 2009-2011**

**Prologue/Context**

The charge was clear: Garland needed to work to remove the F. In order for this to happen they would need to receive a lot of support. There was, overall, a lot of support from the
superintendent in order to be able to move teachers in mid-stream. Dr. Garmin believes that some things really had to happen in order to straighten out the school “because there were some really bad teachers there that needed to go.” So he got some strong support in being able to have the backing to do what needed to be done. Garmin’s primary goal was to have an immediate impact, to go in and to change what could be improved immediately. “There were a multitude of challenges (when I arrived at Garland) the most fundamental, just overall school discipline.” The first thing he did right away was to change the appearance of the campus, making sure it was neat, clean, and contained. Previously, there were weeds growing all over the place, stuff stored in public visibility that shouldn’t have been. Those things were addressed immediately. The other thing he immediately addressed was discipline, because that was the resounding message from the faculty: discipline was the number one issue.

From my padded office chair, I began looking for symbols. Directly in front of me, on the wall behind Dr. Garmin’s high tech office desk was an oversized State University Flag. I glanced to my right through a panoramic pane of glass that comprised one wall of the office and that was covered by blinds that were open enough for me to see that they shielded only an inner hallway. In the inner hallway was a huge poster of President Obama, and antique memorabilia was depicted in posters in the outer hallway. There were early 1960’s advertisements from Maas brothers’ department store. I soon realized that this was probably because the building I was in was once a Maas Brothers department store before it became a college building. The Maas Brothers posters looked very new. One could almost smell the polyester of the clothing and wigs of the mannequins in the posters. At the top of the hall windows framed a spattering of downtown buildings. in the distance. At this moment, Dr. Garmin walked in to his office, a 48-year-old African American man whose skin was brown. He was wearing a highly starched
powder blue linen shirt and khaki pants with militarily-sharp creases that jutted out over shiny brown leather shoes. He was tall, about 6 feet or so, and thin but athletic. He had a small mustache and his tightly cropped hair was slightly balding. The timber and cadence of his manner were as than his military appearance, and the kindness of his speech failed to reveal the depth of his battles in the leadership arena.

**Early Life**

Before talking about his early experiences, Dr. Garmin pauses and looks out somberly into space as if thinking, he begins wringing his hands. After what seemed like an inordinately long period of time during which he appeared to be searching for words, he pensively began.

*I started attending school as the state began to desegregate public schools. I think I spent one year at Jordan Elementary, which was all Black, then the rest of my experience was an integrated experience. For me that really shaped how I pursued things . . . I really pursued things with the belief, the true belief that if I put my mind to it, that there wasn’t anything that I couldn’t accomplish.*

Garmin was always one of the few African Americans in his classes because the students were grouped by academic ability. This enhanced his self-esteem. He explains that, “*because I would always be in the group where there were not a whole lot of African Americans the people that I associated with and the people that I would check with to see if they had done their homework since middle school were mostly White.*” Keith was almost always the only Black kid in his classes. His best friend was Jewish. Dr. Garmin was supposed to go to Lakeview (another district school) because it was his zoned school and the one that his family members had attended, but he ended up at Garland because at the time the district was in the midst of desegregation; there couldn’t be more than a 30% Black student population at any school, so his zoned school changed right before he entered it.
Garmin’s role models growing up included one of his cousins, who spent a lot of time with him and was always a positive person. After high school, this cousin, who is about four years older than Garmin, went to a technical school. Garmin says that he always wanted to be like his cousin because he was a great athlete. Because he played basketball and ran track, Garmin played basketball and ran track. And because his cousin played for Lakeside (another school in the district), when Garmin was in middle school, he told everybody he was going to go to Lakeside to play basketball and run track. Although that didn’t happen, in terms of the things Garmin wanted to do, his cousin had a huge impact. When he ended up in Garland, he still ran track and played basketball. Another big role model for Garmin was Coach Dials who was not only his basketball coach but also played a huge role in mentoring him at Garland. Garmin describes Coach Dials as always having a positive influence.

**Professional Journey**

Another of Keith’s middle school coaches was Rudy Bradley, who was also big in state politics at the time. Bradley was also a huge influence, as a positive role model and as a Black male. “He told me, Keith, you are faster than anybody out here, you’re faster than all these guy’s you can run this or you can run that, and I could. He saw that in him and track, and track is was what led him to a free education in college.”

**Garland and the New Principal**

The first thing he said when introduced to the faculty of Garland was he knew how to make “A’s.” At Zenith elementary, the school where he came from before going to Garland made A’s 3 out of the 4 years that he was there. One of the first things he did was institute the 200 point challenge (the number of points Garland needed to get a “B” from the state) and the “One Band, One Sound” theme was everyone getting on the same page.
His most influential leadership role model was the only principal he ever worked for and who hired him for his first assistant principalship. This shaped how Garmin conducts the business of leadership. Because, because he stressed doing things the right way. The area superintendent at the time told him that he wanted him to stay where he was, to learn things the right way, a lesson which turned out to be prophetic. “I learned things the right way and I stayed there until I got a principalship,” Garmin says.

When asked about how his values and beliefs influenced his leadership, Garmin replies, “Hard work, I learned early on there is no substitute for hard work.” He adds that if you want anything in life you must work hard, that it is the only way to succeed. He also believes in a hands-on approach to leadership; hands on, but not micromanaging instead. Instead, he empowers people, challenging the norm.

Garmin believed in not limiting himself in terms of what he could aspire to be and what it took to get there. “I really pursued things with the belief, the true belief that if I put my mind to it, that there wasn’t anything that I couldn’t accomplish.”

Dr. Garmin believed that he knew how to make “A’s.” Zenith Elementary, the school where he came from before going to Garland, made A’s 3 out of the 4 years that he was there. One of the first things he did at Garland was to institute the 200-point challenge (200 was the number of points Garland needed to get a B from the state) and the “One Band, One Sound” theme, which called everyone to get on the same page.

Views on Leadership

In Dr. Garmin’s first year at Garland High School they turned over fifty teachers, a figure he views as positive, because going into the second year he believed that he had a group of teachers who really wanted to be there, teachers who had no misconceptions about the population of students that they were working with or the challenge that they would facing.
Garmin believes that this set of circumstances is what gave the Garland community a huge momentum that second year, that and hard work.

There was just not a structure to address discipline it was just based on teacher discretion... just utter mayhem that went on every day in the school. There was not real teaching and or learning going on and so basically what you had was a complete system that was broken and so our challenge was to go in and try to assess all this and then to begin to build infrastructure probably starting from scratch. I didn’t use anything from the previous principal.

**Interventions Implementation Barriers and Enablers**

Dr. Garmin’s commitment to such academic goals as reducing the achievement gap and leaving no child behind included a focus on addressing barriers to student learning and ensuring all students had an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Such a focus requires a high-level policy commitment to establishing an “enabling component” As a former student and insider; he wanted to create the same opportunities for success that had propelled him through his career.

*What I did was driven by the fact Garland was my Alma Mater and you know that by hook or by crook I was going to do everything in my power to turn it around. The fact that I graduated from there I think played a huge part in my motivation to want to do well at Garland.*

The enablers Garmin established were focused either on the classroom, support, or home involvement in schooling. The barriers to their success included lack of student motivation, lack of prerequisite knowledge, and student disabilities.

**Relationships**

Keith’s role models growing up included one of his cousins who spent a lot of time with him and was always a positive person who after high school went to a technical school. He is about four years older than Keith who says that he always wanted to be like him because he was a great athlete who played sports and was very good. Because he played basketball and ran track Keith played basketball and ran track. Because he did these things for Lakeside (another school in the district) when Keith was in middle school he told everybody he was going to go to
Lakeside to play basketball and run track. Although that didn’t happen In terms of the things Keith wanted to do he had a huge impact. For example, although he went to Garland, Keith still ran track and played basketball. Another big role model for Keith was Coach Dials who he played basketball for and was huge in mentoring him at Garland. He describes him as one of his coaches who were always a positive influence. “He was one of those guys that really instilled the importance of hard work and discipline. And that is something that I’ve just carried with me all my life, hard work and being disciplined about your craft whatever it is practice it and perfect it.” One of Keith’s middle school coaches Rudy Bradley who was big in state politics at the time was also a huge influence as another positive role model and as a Black male. “He told me, Keith, you are faster than anybody out here, you’re faster than all these guys you can run this or you can run that and I could. He saw that in him and track and track is was what led him to a free education in college.”

Emergent Themes: Race

Dr. Garmin feels that he was really never challenged with any overt racial barriers, but he states:

*You know that there is always an issue of race, and if anyone says to you that there isn’t an issue of race they’re wrong; and with Garland being predominantly Black there’s always the issue of race. So for me it was helping to build a sense of pride for the kids that were there so they could feel good about themselves, feel good about the school, and feel good about coming there.*

When Keith got a principalship at Garland the state reported the school grade was an F table 4.4 shows the school grade in his first year. In his second year the school grade went from an “F” to a “C”.
Data from the interviews were coded for themes related to, but not exclusive to, issues of race, gender, class, and institutional barriers to social justice that affected student learning. The development of emergent themes (areas of central importance) was organized by the researcher’s interpretation and understanding of the research, and I have also constructed the presentation of the written research portrait as a cohesive aesthetic whole. “The cohesive aesthetic whole reflects one’s first efforts to bring interpretive insight, analytic scrutiny, and aesthetic order to the collection of data (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 185).” An emergent theme (areas of central importance) in Garmin’s account was that he did not have to contend with racial barriers to reach his level of success. However, my analysis of the in-depth interviews showed that he still dealt with racial issues in trying to advance, but he did not allow those complications to interfere with his goals. Emergent themes are used to organize the researcher’s interpretation and understanding of the research grounding the presentation of the written research portrait as a cohesive aesthetic whole.

Another emergent theme was that ineffective principals were the ones most likely to cause teacher turnover, so leadership turnover could have benefited Garland. Also, although principals do not generally receive pay increases when they change schools within the district,
they receive other non-monetary benefits by transferring to another school within the district. Research suggests that many job characteristics affect teacher and principal preferences other than salaries, such as student attributes, school culture, facilities, and safety (Horng, 2009). Changing schools may not increase a principal’s salary, but it can still help by improving their job satisfaction and making their job easier. Consequently, new principals in lower-performing schools tend to have less experience and are more likely to have less education than principals in other schools (Loeb, Kalogrides, and Horng, 2010). Interestingly, all the principals of Garland except one had a doctorate, but none were able to move beyond the principalship in the district.

Chapter Summary

Improving public education is one of the foremost concerns in America. The school district in this study evaluated a school’s success and the success of its principals partially by reference to the success of their students on the state’s standardized test, the sole criterion for school grades. This evaluation system does not take into account a number of factors that exist beyond the principal’s control. One such factor is the variability in the state’s criteria for grades reflective of student success. Political factors such as support for private school vouchers, among other agendas, come into play. In 2007, Uma Good’s first year as a principal, the state's school population declined by 8000 students (Florida Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research, 2007). The declining numbers reduce funding to school districts because their budgets are based on student head counts. The Legislature had passed a school budget in the spring of 2007 that was built on a projected student population that was nearly 12,000 students higher than the actual count. This reality changed Garland’s access to resources. The state’s average school grades dropped that year. Also at that time, the state had a voucher system
for low-income families from failing school districts, a program that began in 1999 and lasted until 2006. In the final year of the voucher system, 750 students out of 190,000 who were eligible left their schools; put another way 189,250 students returned to their failing schools in her first year. This created an unanticipated financial shortfall for the district, so as a cost cutting measure the district stopped busing and returned to neighborhood schools. In 2002, the last year of Barbara Sharper’s tenure, Garland was ranked 243 out of 667 high schools (DOE website 2012). In 2010, the state’s annual school grades showed a 24 percent drop in the number of A-rated elementary, middle, and combination schools (FDOE, 2010).

Doc Holiday addressed learning barriers with small, separate programs that were created in an ad hoc, piecemeal, and fragmented manner, and that were marginalized in school policy and practice (i.e., carried out on the margins of the school district). In this way, Doc Holiday was able to develop the ability to cultivate synergistic creativity through learning networks. In Dr. Garmin’s last year, the state had 1,481 schools receive A grades. The next year, that number dropped to 1,124 schools (DOE website 2013). Since 2014 is an election year and each election year has historically brought changes to the state’s grading system, the state’s average school grades should drop in this year even if individual school statistics do not vary. One such change is the elimination of the safety valve put in place in 2002 when the State Board of Education voted not to let any school drop more than one letter grade.

The purpose of chapter four was to provide a detailed description of the lived experiences of the principals and provide an account of the interventions they used to improve learning for their struggling students. This chapter described the lived experience of four principals at one historically Black high school. Included in that description are their perceptions of the relationship between the level of their student success and the level of shared decision making
practiced at Garland. The results of the study add to the body of knowledge of educational leadership and have implications for both practicing principals and principal preparation programs, by communicating the best possible leadership practices for principals in schools which have large African American student populations on practices that facilitate implementing shared decision making.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE STUDY

Overview

Chapter V presents interpretations, conclusions and researcher’s recommendations. The first section discusses the researcher’s interpretation of the resultant findings from the study’s data analysis and conclusions regarding their relationships to the literature. And the second section concludes with the researcher’ recommendations for possible future research.

Interpretations

When I started this research it was my intention to identify and catalogue the innovations used by the principals in this study to subvert structures that reinforced school level, district level or societal level inequities. What I pictured as structures were things like scripted or separate curriculum, separate facilities or schedules for Black students. Separate and unequal structures that I felt relegate Black students to a second class student status. I learned from what was known as district data chats which amounted to informational meetings presented by the school district that although our African American students were the lowest in the nation that they didn’t start out that way. In fact they started out in kindergarten at about the same achievement level as their non-Black counter parts.

Working in the district I had seen firsthand the disproportionate vulnerability of Black youth to negative educational outcomes. Outcomes which included an abysmal graduation rate,
involuntary placement in a non-academic curriculum, and low academic achievement. I wanted to see what programs or interventions both in-school, and out-of-school, that the principals in my study had instituted that benefited African American students in the district. I also wanted to see how the principals got these things funded and what resistance they got in trying to implement the programs. I wanted to see if they perceived any programs that the district or state mandated that were supposed to have a positive impact for this population but that really didn’t. And I wanted to know if in their estimation there really existed structures that actually worked really well for African American students particularly males. Once I began interviewing the principals about their experiences, surprisingly, it became clear to me that two of the principals who still worked in the district didn’t want to be recorded saying anything that denigrated the Suncoast District even though these principals were intimately familiar with the stagnation in the Black White achievement Gap as our African American students progressed through our system. They seemed to take personal responsibility for the success and failures of their charges. In addition the principals didn’t see themselves as having the autonomy to bring in academic structural programs and credited that to state and district level administrators primarily. They wanted to talk about the teacher management aspects of their jobs or the challenges that they had personally faced as they ascended to the principalship but when asked about the instructional leadership aspects that they brought to the table they didn’t really describe the structures that I felt were under the purview of instructional leadership. They reverted to management issues.

One major omission about the differential treatment for Blacks in the district that two of the principals overtly agreed was firmly in place and that they freely agreed to discuss when not being taped was the district administrator staffing model which calls for no school to have a majority of Blacks as teachers or administrators. This came about because the district was found
to be out of compliance with the Green factors in the late 1970’s. The Green factors mandated that there be one school system and that it must be racially integrated. I knew firsthand that the district had put some measures in place over the last thirty years to comply with the Green factors as identified by the Green v. School Board of New Kent County. I had personally experienced a blocked promotion because the school I had been recommended for already had two Black administrators. Because the Green factors call for the system to be integrated at every level I could not go to such a school. At least that’s what I was told by the principal who had recommended me for an assistant principal position at her school. When I was relating this story to the principals they each had a similar story. One of the principals who had wanted to transfer from one school to another school when that principal had been a teacher had a relevant story about how they could not leave one school where they were teaching because they were the only Black teacher in the school and that would have caused a racial shift in the demographics of that school and that would put the district farther out of compliance with the Green factors. Because I work in the district I know that the district is racially charged and had heard about similar things happening to other administrators and we had a great discussion about why there were no such restrictions placed on White administrators. Predominantly White schools could always have all-White administrative leadership teams. This topic actually came up after I had turned the tape recorder off after one of the interviews and after I was being walked out to my car. So I turned the recorder back on and the participant said that she did not want me to include this discussion in their portrait because of a fear of what I was going to do with the recording. Another administrator who had raised Garlands school grade from an F to a B, said because he was African American he was not promoted to associate superintendent. When I asked him how he knew that being African American prevented his promotion he told me that he was told that by a
Black associate superintendent. He said that the Black associate superintendent told him that because there were already two associate Black superintendents that placing a third one in the position would shift the number of Black associate superintendents from a minority at 2 of 5 to a majority at 3 of 5. So he felt that even though he had more education and a better record of student achievement he was passed over for one sole reason because he was Black.

As I started interviewing the principals I realized a reticence to criticize the district at least from my point of view. This reticence to criticize the district sometimes stemmed from a fear of reprisal from the superintendent and sometimes it was out of concern that their criticism of the district might lead to negative consequences for other aspiring Black administrators. My knowledge of the school/district as an insider made constructing a complete portrait of each and compiling enough data to show all of the challenges that I believe that the principals really faced, almost impossible. The only principal who I felt was completely candid was one of the ones that left the district. The other administrator that had left the district because of retirement seemed to accept that racially differential treatment was just a fact of life and did not really hold the district accountable for separating students by race. Situate the time frame in the district-what is the role of being at risk?

This research attempted to answer questions concerning the role the four principals played in school reforms, as well as the interventions each principal introduced and the evidence of the effects they identified for each one. Framed within Social Justice (SJ), the study provides insight into how these respondents increased student achievement through interventions that they championed. Reform efforts by the principals were characterized by two features: a focus on student performance outcomes and systemic reorganization.
Major Conclusion #1

Members of the school community worked best when they worked collaboratively in order to educate all students. This study supports the idea that improved organizational teamwork and results are fostered by all members of the learning community assuming decision making roles. Successful interventions were situated in the principal’s behaviors, which nurtured increased teacher and community participation.

Although principals historically have had reservations about teacher involvement in decision making (Hallinger, Murphy, & Hausman, 1992), the principals in this study who were the most successful agents of change simultaneously created cultures which embraced collaboration and shared governance and advanced learning centers through the exchange of ideas. Teacher involvement in decision making in this study was not apparent through the tenure of every principal. Each principal held the perception that when they went to Garland, the school was in disarray, and that the evidence of this was found in the teacher turnover rate. The district was remiss in not mandating that each leader build upon the success of the previous leader which is a way of building leadership capacity.

The Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2008) suggests that successful shared decision making processes require teachers to be trained in leadership skills in order to facilitate effective work groups. Doc Holiday was the most effective of the four principals in this regard, partly because the district funded his trainings for teachers and partly because of teacher buy in. This study supports the idea that the traditional roles of teachers and principals who serve in schools with large Black populations are changing, so that decisions made by principals and teacher leaders are becoming more interdependent.

The importance of the role of the principal as change agent and instructional leader
consistently appears in the research on change and effective schools (Sheppard, Hurley, & Dibbon, 2010). Sergiovanni (1994) proposed that the traditional view of schools as formal organizations represents a constraint on school improvement. In his school improvement model, schools are perceived as communities where meaningful personal relationships and mutual goals drive school reform. The leadership of the school community does not rely on “power over” others but on “power through” others to accomplish shared visions and goals (p. xix). This trend is consistent with the second wave of educational reforms and restructuring, which calls for teacher empowerment through a participatory style of leadership (Blase & Blase, 2001).

Although each principal believed that they were going into a school that needed to be fixed and that there were some bad teachers there the principals in the study who were able to create collaborative learning organizations were the most successful at raising student achievement. Three out of four of the principals thought that they had improved student achievement even though each one’s successor believed that the school still needed to be fixed and that some of the teachers needed to be removed. This removal of teachers was accelerated when the principals began to occupy shorter tenures. Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, and Byrk (2001) point out that the stability of leadership as well as the stability of the teaching staff is critical to school improvement particular in urban schools. It is little wonder to see this school over the course of twenty years and especially the last eight go through four principals, turnover 30 to 50 teacher per year and still get no school grade above a C. These results suggest district leadership commitments to capacity building as questionable. The top district leadership revolving door at the superintendent level did not help in supporting stability across school leadership.
Major Conclusion #2

We are now facing a crisis of educational democracy. A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Educational Excellence, 1983), which specifically recommended strong leadership as a means for school improvement, warned that failure to do so would be a threat to democracy. Although the apparent role of each principal was to improve student achievement, because of the marginalized status of their students, each principal had to create a social change in order to accomplish their goal. The avenues the four principals traveled to reach the target school reform differed depending on the principal. Ms. Sharper’s role was that of protector; by this I mean that her main concern was to maintain a safe learning environment. Docs Holiday’s main role was that of facilitator. He created a system that addressed the needs of stakeholders as they occurred. Uma Good’s role seemed to be that of student-teacher advocate, with most of her interventions centered on improving student-to-teacher and teacher-to-teacher relationships. Dr. Garmin’s main role was that of resource marshal and community organizer because he was the most entrenched in the community. Each principal demonstrated strong communication and interpersonal skills. The most successful principals’ strengths included strong listening skills and deep empathy for staff. This skill set resulted in a collaborative approach to engaging all stakeholders in the decision making process.

Major Conclusion #3

Ms. Sharper introduced a safer learning environment. She realized a decrease in campus crime and an increase in stakeholder satisfaction. Docs Holiday and Garmin introduced a distributed leadership approach, and the evidence was an increased performance on the state’s student achievement test. Dr. Garmin used a school bus to take the teachers on a ride through the
student attendance feeder zones in order to create empathy for their challenges. He also reached out and got community involvement. This included parent volunteers who made wake up calls to the homes of chronically late students which impacted both their in-school and out of school factors. Dr. Garmin believes in transformational leadership as evidenced by the following passage:

*No leader can accomplish anything without support but with that being said the buck stops with the leader, at the end of the day no one is going to say anything is went wrong or right because of the administrative team or the teachers. All results are attributed to the actions of the leader. The principal obviously cannot effect change without good teachers or other staff members but it is the principal who is responsible for their actions.*

His beliefs blend distributed and transformational leadership.

Dr. Good challenged teacher’s low expectations for students and introduced character education. According to Dr. Good her concern centered on how students were often perceived by teachers.

*There were some students who were very capable of being successful but because of the mind frame that many of these teachers had, that these kids can’t learn, it doesn’t matter what I try; they’re not going to learn it anyway. They would even literally tell them that ‘You’re not going to learn anything anyway, why do you even come?’*

So Dr. Good introduced the Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education as described by Lickona, T., Schaps, E., & Lewis, C. (1995). This model of education uses a comprehensive, intentional, proactive, and effective approach to character development designed to help students know, care about, and act on core ethical values such as fairness, honesty, compassion, responsibility, and respect for self and others (the Character Education Partnership (CEP), 2003). CEP promotes core ethical values and provides students with opportunities for moral action. CEP defines "character" comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior to create a caring school community.
In the literature review I mentioned Waxman, Lee, & Macneil’s (2008), study of strategies principals used to close their schools’ achievement gaps. The interventions used by the participants in this study could also be classified into Waxman, Lee, & Macneil’s seven domains: (a) tutoring, (b) remedial, pullout programs or interventions, (c) effective teaching strategies, (d) analyzing achievement data, (e) teachers’ professional development, (f) mentoring, and (g) parental involvement. As in the 2008 study by Waxman, Lee, and MacNeil, the most prevalent strategies used by principals in this study were: tutoring, remedial and pullout programs, and the use of effective teaching strategies. To that I would add a program of recognition for student success. In this study, tutoring was used during and after school hours with some principals offering tutoring on Saturdays and in remote off-campus locations. All the study’s participants had to use a state-mandated, remedial program for math and reading instruction for lower performing students and provide supplementary support services. Teaching strategies that were reported included individualized instruction, differentiated instruction, and small group instruction. The results of the study indicated that tutoring was the most common intervention used to address the achievement gap.

**Major Conclusion #4**

Theoharis’ four components of a school’s operation central to the advocacy of a principal with a social justice orientation: (a) raising student achievement (b) improving school structures, (c) re-centering and enhancing staff capacity and (d) strengthening school culture and community (p. 231). Only Doc Holiday belief system surfaced through his intervention to enhance staff capacity by creating levels of leadership that re-centered leadership in teacher leaders. His focus was on improving school structures and re-centering and enhancing staff
capacities. Dr. Garmin’s belief system incorporated the idea that hard work can overcome great barriers. He established enabling components by putting in support systems both in the school and in the community which included student wake up calls, satellite learning and overcoming student and parent transportation issues. His main focus was on strengthening the school culture and community. Although all of the principals were primarily concerned with raising student achievement each demonstrated in varying degrees all of the components necessary for a socially just oriented leadership.

The school effectiveness movement first initiated by Coleman in 1966 identified poverty and home environment as critical barriers to student learning and concluded that effective leadership is a critical component of effective schools. Effective principals, according to Hallinger and Heck’s (1996) research, influence student achievement through goal setting, direction, organizational structure, and networking, and by guiding their schools’ policies, practices and procedures. A more recent complication of the research on school principals and their impact on student achievement by the Wallace Foundation (2012) offers that;

- shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based upon high standards for all
- creating a climate conducive of education so that other foundations of “fruitful interactions prevail”;
- cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and all others participating making the vision a reality;
- Improving instruction
- Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement

Real hope for marginalized students will emanate from studying Social Justice Leaders,
but this hope will be intertwined with the formidable struggle that social justice leaders face and the pain this struggle causes.

**Implications of the Study**

The results of this study add to the body of knowledge of educational leadership and have implications for both practicing principals and principal preparation programs. It will better equip present and future principals with the tools to create a school culture emphasizing shared decision making. In various degrees (Theoharis, 2007), the traits necessary to improve Black student achievement were displayed by each participant. Dr. Garmin exemplifies the arrogant humility, personifies the passionate leadership, and tenacious commitment to social justice that Theoharis described. But more important was his ability to marshal the combined resources and forces necessary to improve student achievement. He began his first faculty meeting with a focus on results and ended with sustainable changes in the professional practice of educators and administrators in the school.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) defines instructional leadership as "leading learning communities." In learning communities, staff members operate in networks of shared and complementary expertise rather than in hierarchies or in isolation, and meet on a regular basis to discuss their work, work together to problem solve, reflect on their jobs, and take responsibility for what students learn. Each principal believed that they were going into a school that needed to be fixed, and three out of four thought that they had succeeded; even though each one’s successor believed that it still needed to be fixed.

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, a study done by Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb (2011), of a major urban school district in this state examined variation in the relationship between
principal turnover and student achievement. They examined the interactions between school characteristics and whether the school had a new principal. The results indicated that the odds that a teacher will leave his or her current school are about 17 percent higher in years in which schools have a new principal. They examined whether the effect of turnover is different for high poverty schools relative to lower poverty schools and whether the effect is different for failing schools (i.e., schools that receive an “F” grade from the state accountability system) relative to higher-performing schools. One problem all of the principals except Brenda Sharper had to deal with was an extremely high turnover rate. This undoubtedly affected student achievement, but the degree of this effect is difficult to determine because the criteria for what is considered success has historically been a moving target. The state assessment formula has changed five times during the tenure of these four principals. The political climate shifted from one in which schools were considered as being self-policed to one where public schools were scrutinized from the outside with the threat of sanctions, if certain criteria weren’t met.

During her interview, Dr. Good noted who has to be on school’s team for a school to be successful:

*You need a strong administrative team, but you also need teachers, counselors, everybody. I think in working with the teachers you need to follow those same guidelines. From the community, same thing: you need their support in making sure things run as a team.*

This study informs Tate's second principle of CRT by utilizing epistemological philosophies and principles from various disciplines. Constructivism, for example, is a view in philosophy which claims that all “knowledge is a compilation of human-made constructions influenced by the inter-subjectivity formed by cultural and historical factors of the community (Gredler, 1997; Prawat & Floden, 1994).” Critical Race Theory, like other more mainstream ideologies, is by definition a constructivist proposition. Also in keeping with the constructivist
paradigm, the real difference between public school integration and desegregation exists in the minds of the students, teachers and administrators. The findings of this study have implications for the leadership of school principals as they implement shared decision making in their schools. Today’s principals must create a culture which embraces collaboration and shared governance. Most importantly, 21st century school leaders must apply practices that embrace the strategies necessary to nurture learning organizations. The successful communities in a school can be defined as a collection of individuals who are bonded together by a desire to accomplish the same ideals. As Sergiovanni (1994) noted, “The bonding and binding must be tight enough to transform them from a collection of ‘I’s’ into a collection of ‘we’ (p. vi).” To enact social justice in urban schools, educators must not only work to heal old sores but also attempt to build bridges between communities of color and public schools. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Leithwood and Fullan (2003) noted that, “Histories of poor school performance for African American students may result from neglect on behalf of the school and/or district leaders, allocation of the least-able teachers and most limited resources to the most needy schools and students, low expectations, or lack of knowledge of effective strategies for working with particular kinds of students in challenging contexts (p. 13).” Many of Garland’s teachers could not understand the students’ irreverence for them as teachers. Without the explication of outside contexts, past and present, the events occurring at school cannot be fully understood. Contexts of deep histories of conflict and animus among racial groups cannot be wiped away with top-down reforms. Researchers and education reformers must take into consideration the historical contexts that brought us to this point. This was evident in the teacher student relationships. At Garland this is manifested in the relationship between White teachers and some African American students, Dr. Good suggested that the tenor of student-teacher relationships prevented students from learning
because she was constantly battling trying to overcome the teachers’ preconceived notions that told them these kids really can’t learn.

Spillane (2005) wrote, that “A distributed perspective frames leadership practice in a particular way; leadership practice is viewed as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation” (p. 144).” It is noteworthy that the only one principal who did not identify race as a contributing factor to some of the challenges in the relationships between stakeholders experienced by Garland or initiate a dialogue about race was the only principal of the four interviewed who was later demoted to assistant principal. It becomes apparent from the interviews that no principal can enact a cultural change alone.

Those who desire to create sanctuaries for learning must consider the outside forces that affect the school but remain beyond the control of the principal. But overcoming such forces is not beyond the influence or ability of a dedicated staff. One thing I found compelling during the interviews with the principals was the perception that when they had initially arrived at Garland, the school was in disarray and that the greatest evidence of this was the teacher turnover rate. Administrators must strive to make the whole school a sanctuary for their students (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2003). In this way, student achievement becomes a school-wide goal that alters the ethos of the school, embraces difference, deals openly with racial and class conflict, and sets a standard for behavior that allows for students to feel valued and to value their learning experiences (Carspecken 1996; Gay 2004; Nieto 2000).

Doc Holiday was a highly effective principal who managed Garland’s human capital to drive teacher effectiveness and to make breakthrough student learning gains. By using a systems approach that empowered teachers, he created individualized professional development plans and supported growth through direct feedback and professional development, demonstrating the
principle that “The successful leader, then, is one who builds-up the leadership of others and who strives to become a leader of leaders,” says Sergiovanni, (1990, p. 27). Solorzano and Yosso (2001) wrote that critical race theory “challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (p. 2).” This study informs Tate's third principle of CRT, which "reinterprets civil rights law in light of its limitation, illustrating that laws to remedy racial inequality are often undermined before they can be fully implemented (1997, p. 234).” One law obviously undermined by the school district many times throughout the history of the school before it could be fully enacted was court-ordered student desegregation.

The Fifth Circuit modified the Braden decision on July 29, 1970. The judges determined that the Suncoast School District retained a dual system in violation of the Supreme Court’s decisions. The judges found that the district operated a unitary system with respect to majority-to-minority transfer rights, extracurricular activities, facilities, and the assignment of faculty and staff and that single-school neighborhood zones because of neighborhood’s racial make ups preserved student segregation. At the same time, the school board kept Garland High School open with a predominantly Black student body. Although district officials instituted the clustering and pairing of five schools through common attendance zones during the fall of 1970, White residents in the district petitioned the Circuit Court to invalidate the court order because they viewed it as an illegal desegregation plan. On September 14, 1970, the justices conceded that the plan violated state statutes requiring all elementary schools to include the first six grades.

This study informs Tate's (1997) fifth tenet of critical race studies in education: the challenge to historicism and insistence on a contextual-historical examination of the law and
society. Although the school at its inception was racialized and oppressive, it was created to instruct African Americans using a predominantly African American faculty and staff. Sometime after the demographics of the teachers changed from predominantly African American to non-African American, many of the teachers and administrators became more concerned with management than instruction. Students were accused of being disengaged from classroom activities, which may have stemmed more from an extensive history of mistrust of schools in general and ineffective teachers and practices rather than a disregard for academic success. The perceptions that students and teachers had/have about each other may form as they do because of the racial and cultural misperceptions each has about the other. As Dr. Garmin pointed out in his first interview, “you know that there is always an issue of race and if anyone says to you that there isn’t an issue of race they’re wrong.” The goal of social justice is to promote equity and equality through constructive classroom activities that build on the experiences of all students.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, Theoharis describes four components of a school’s operation that must occupy a central position in the advocacy of a principal with a social justice orientation: (a) raising student achievement (b) improving school structures, (c) re-centering and enhancing staff capacity, and (d) strengthening school culture and community (p. 231).

This study informs Tate's second principle of CRT, by utilizing epistemological philosophies and principles from various disciplines. Constructivism, for example, is a view in philosophy that all "knowledge is a compilation of human-made constructions influenced by the intersubjectivity formed by cultural and historical factors of the community (Raskin, J. D. 2002). Critical Race Theory is by definition a constructivist proposition. In order to enact social justice in urban districts, education reformers must take into consideration the historical contexts that
created the need for such radical measures as the law-enforced desegregation of the Suncoast School system.

Table 5.1. Ontological Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontological Category</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective claims</td>
<td>“There had been people leaving without signing out; people were getting paid without showing up. It was just a mess over there.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I knew that many people thought I was going to get beat up at Garland but we turned it around.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Normative-evaluation claims</td>
<td>“You see I never did anything the board told me to do. That’s one thing; I’d fill out forms and what have you, I complied to things but I only did what I thought was right and good. That’s why we were successful. Also, I knew how to give the board what they needed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity claims</td>
<td>“Does (discrimination) exist? Yes. How you deal with it is another issue because I had applied for several jobs and didn’t get them and the people that did were white...I didn’t internalize any of that stuff. I remember when they talked to my principal and they said he’s applied for three jobs how’s he acting over there.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“When I asked the superintendent why I never got those jobs he said, I don’t know, maybe I just have a prejudiced group.”</td>
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Although research has thoroughly documented the negative effects of high-poverty schools as well as the advantages of racially/ethnically diverse learning environments, most minority children in the United States continue to attend high-poverty, high-minority schools (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005). The school in this study was one such school.
As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Bogotch (2002) offered four observations about social justice:

1. There can be no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in social and academic discourses;
2. The center or unity of any educational reform is so dynamic that it cannot hold together for long;
3. The results of our work, just or unjust, are always fragile and fleeting;
4. All social justice/educational reform efforts must be deliberately and continuously reinvented and critiqued.

**Discussion of the Conclusions**

The principals in the study struggled with many of the same challenges, but the first two had a different center or unity of educational reform than the second two, and because of their belief system interpreted their role in the school system differently. None of the principals had fixed perceptions of what comprised a socially just leadership. During Brenda Sharp’s tenure and that of Doc Holiday, who followed her, the political ideology that existed was embodied in Blue Print 2000 legislation, created by the state legislature in the mid-1990s. It had seven goals, including:

1. Communities and schools collaborate to prepare children and families for children's success in school,
2. Students graduate and are prepared to enter the workforce and postsecondary education.
3. Students successfully compete at the highest levels nationally and internationally and...
are prepared to make well-reasoned, thoughtful, and healthy lifelong decisions.

4. School boards provide a learning environment conducive to teaching and learning,
5. Communities provide an environment that is drug-free and protects students' health, safety, and civil rights,
6. The schools, districts, and state ensure professional teachers and staff, and
7. Graduates are literate and have the knowledge and skills needed to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

During Dr. Sharp’s and Holiday’s tenure the state legislation did not have as harsh accountability measures as existed for the next two principals (Good and Garmin), who operated under legislation that was intended to be aligned to the No Child Left Behind initiative. Rapp (2002) proposes that principals require the skills to rebel, resist, and challenge injustice. All the principals in my study support the assertion that deficit thinking by White teachers works against students of color. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) wrote that critical race theory “challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 2). Many of the teachers and administrators are concerned more with management than instruction. Students who are accused of being disengaged from classroom activities may have gleaned that attitude from an extensive history of mistrust of the schools, ineffective teachers and practices rather than a disregard for academic success.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Leithwood and Fullan (2003), wrote that “Histories of poor school performance for African American students may result from neglect on behalf of the school and/or district leaders, allocation of the least-able teachers and most limited resources to the most needy schools and students, low expectations, or lack of knowledge of effective
strategies for working with particular kinds of students in challenging contexts” (p. 13). Without the explication of outside contexts, past and present, the events occurring at school cannot be fully understood. When Doc Holiday and Keith Garmin established an apparently effective system that utilized and engaged school leaders, the disengaged students found success. Dr. Garmin was an insider, a member of the community, and was able to enlist community members to achieve his goals. He had community members making wake-up calls to students on test days. Doc Holiday, although an outsider, put leaders from the school in positions of power and thus harnessed their potential to help students. Many elements of Blue Print 2000 can be seen advancing and receding during the various tenures of the participants. The goal of social justice is to promote equity and equality through constructive classroom activities that build on the experiences of all students. Doc Holiday used a system that included collaboration with community members to prepare children and families for student success in school. Although he placed subordinates in collaborating roles, he himself did not resonate with many of the community members, as evidenced by the fact that he banned the Alumni association from coming on campus.

Fullan’s (1993) research indicated that educators needed to “redesign schools so that innovation and improvement are built into the daily activities of teachers…and institutional renewal with new forms of leadership, collegiality, commitment to, and mechanisms for continuous improvement” (p. 353). Life histories introduce valuable perspectives into the praxis of social justice leadership in schools. This study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the praxis of four social justice-oriented leaders. In addition, the portraits depicted here could be useful in providing some insight into effective practices for all principals.
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Understanding the burden of acting White and other dilemmas of High Achievement.


Appendix A: Member Check Form*

Dear ___________________________,

Thank you for an enjoyable and insightful interview. Attached please find a draft copy of chapters four and five with quotations from the transcript. Please review for accuracy and completeness of responses. Please feel free to contact me at (727-597-0772) or via email at (Curtwrightl@pcsb.org) should you have any questions. If I do not hear from you by ________, ____2012, I will assume that you agree with the attached draft of the transcription.

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

Lewis Curtwright
Appendix B. Peer Reviewer/Outside Reviewer Form

I, __________________________, have served as a peer reviewer/outside reviewer for Through their own eyes: Four principal’s perceptions of leading one high impact minority high school. In this role, I have worked with the researcher throughout the study in capacities such as reviewing transcripts and assisting in identifying emerging issues.

Signed: _______________________________________________________

Date: _________________________________________________________
Appendix C. Interview

Thank you again for agreeing to meet with me today to share your insights on being a principal in your school district.

The purpose of the study is to describe selected principals’ perceptions of their experiences as principals.

I will be conducting the interviews in summer 2011. Participating in the study will take approximately 180 minutes of your time. The interviews, with your permission, will be digitally recorded and transcribed. To uphold privacy, your comments will not be identified by name. I and/or a professional transcriber will be transcribing the recordings; however, to maintain confidentiality, an ascribed letter, such as participant A, B, C, and so forth will be used to identify each transcript. At any time during the interview, you may turn off the digital recorder.
Appendix D: Email or Requesting Call for Participation

Dear______________________: You are being invited to participate in a qualitative study entitled “Through their own eyes: Four principal’s perceptions of leading one high impact minority high school” as part of my doctoral dissertation in educational leadership under the supervision of Dr. Leonard Burrello in the USF College of Education. My other committee members are Dr. Herb Exum, Zorka Karanxha, and Dr. Anthony Rolle.

The purpose of the study is to describe African-American principals’ perceptions of their roles as principals. I will be conducting the interviews in summer 2011. Participating in the study will take approximately 180 minutes of your time. The interviews, with your permission, will be digitally recorded and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, your comments will not be identified by name on the recording. I and/or a professional transcriber will be transcribing the recordings; however, to assure confidentiality, an ascribed letter, such as participant A, B, C, and so forth will be used only to identify each transcript. At any time during the interview you may turn off the digital recorder.

At no time will your name, school, or school district be revealed in the study. All responses will be secured in a locked setting. No one other than the researcher and the supervising professors noted above will view the responses. I will answer any questions you have about the study.

I would appreciate hearing from you. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact at 727-597-0772 look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of my request.

Sincerely, Lewis K Curtwright Jr.
Appendix E. Questions that Supported This Study

Questions that supported this study included the following:

1st Interview Administrators

1. Tell me about your early life experiences that formed your belief system and values (prompt).
2. Who were your role models as a child and young person growing up? And why?
3. Who were your leadership role models? Parents – Uncles – Aunts – other principals?
4. How do your values and beliefs influence the way you think about leadership? (Onion prompts)
5. When facing issues of race and health, what do you use as a coping mechanism: humor, nature, laughter?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

2nd Interview Administrators

1. How might you describe the context of Garland when you arrived there? What challenges did you encounter? Prompt the state assessments in reading and/or math?
2. What is or was your primary purpose or goals for your first year at Garland? Is your purpose aligned with the organization’s?
3. What was your charge and direction from the central office? What support did the CO provide you with?
4. What interventions did you continue (from the preceding principal), change, or introduce during your tenure at Garland? What made the most difference? How do you know?
5. How would you characterize the relationship between teachers and administrators at
Garland and how did this impact student? the students?

(Question for the administrators who attended and or taught at Garland) How has Garland progressed from when you were a student teacher or administrator?
6. What challenges did the school face when you left here that were unique to Garland?
7. What incentives did you try to increase student achievement? What incentives were offered? Did they make a difference (TIME – Support for collaboration amongst peers – Specific training – Technology use and support.)?
8. What conflicts arose during your tenure and needed particular attention (Example: union work rules providing unconventional incentives to teachers – taking resource away from the magnet programs program.)?
9. Can you describe specific interventions, and who carried them out, that created the conditions to increased student engagement and learning? What structural changes did you implement (e.g. Credit recovery, freshman academy etc.)? Did you create Professional Learning Communities? Teacher or counselor assignment role changes? How are or were decisions made about teacher/class/student assignments?
10. How are or were decisions made about hiring, reassigning and removing teachers?
   a) How are teachers evaluated? Did you dismiss any teachers during your tenure?
   b) Are there policies and processes in place at the school level to aid new teachers or struggling teachers?
11. What are some things that traditional school cultures assume work for increasing Black student achievement but in actuality do not? What challenges did the school face when you left here that were unique to Garland?
12. Did Garland have a district reform strategy?
13. What was the plan that you shared with your successor to meet those challenges?
14. What additional resources were needed? Did the district support your efforts, and if so, in what ways?

15. How would you characterize student behavior; did it change during your tenure?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add?
November 29, 2011

Lewis Curtwright Jr.
Educational Leadership
7628 Abbott Court
New Port Richey, FL 34654

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00005292
Title: A Descriptive Study of Four Principal’s Experiences in Leading One High Impact Minority High School

Dear Mr. Curtwright:

On 11/29/2011 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 11/29/2012.

Approved Items:
Protocol Document(s):
A descriptive study of four principals

Consent/Assent Document(s):
informed consent form.pdf

Please use only the official, IRB-stamped consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachment Tab" in the recruitment of participants. Please note that these documents are only valid during the approval period indicated on the stamped document.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).
(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John A. Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board