HOW PRINCIPALS ENACT INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN K–5 URBAN SCHOOLS

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HOW PRINCIPALS ENACT INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN K–5 URBAN SCHOOLS (198 pp.)

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The purpose of this study was to explore how urban elementary principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 urban elementary public schools at a time when principals are held accountable for students' state test scores. The participants in this bounded case study were three urban elementary principals from the same school district. Data collection was obtained from interviews, documents, and school walks in the participants' schools. The following three themes emerged: (a) instructional leadership was shaped by district focuses, (b) building positive school climate was important to principals as instructional leaders, and (c) principals in urban districts face a variety of challenges. Implications that emerged from this study were: (a) principals knowing that it is possible to navigate the tension of trying to lead with integrity while dealing with the tensions of accountability, (b) principals can lead teachers to think about curriculum through the lens of critical theory, (c) principals have a variety of strategies that are available to be an instructional leader in their building, and (d) principal preparation programs can use the findings from the study to align them with the ISLCC standards. Further research on this topic could be studied using principals from different school districts.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore how urban elementary principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 urban elementary public schools at a time when principals are held accountable for their schools' state test scores. However, test scores do not show all of the other challenges urban schools have to help their students overcome. Johnson, Perez, and Uline (2019) talked about some of the challenges of urban schools including: "poverty, crime, the lack of social services, and big city bureaucracies" (p. xv). Researchers (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010; Marshal & Oliva, 2010; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012) have shown that school leadership has an impact on student achievement. According to Sebastian and Allensworth (2012), "Principal leadership is viewed as a key mechanism for improving schools" (p. 627). Since principals may have a large impact on student achievement it is important that principals enact instructional leadership in their building. This study explores how principals enact instructional leadership in urban elementary schools. Given the current pressure on principals to increase their students' test scores, this study was designed to learn how principals enact instructional leadership in urban elementary schools.

Instructional leadership in public schools came to the forefront during the Effective Schools Movement, which stemmed from a study by Ronald Edmonds in 1979. Edmonds' research explored the characteristics of effective schools. According to Edmonds, effective schools were able to raise student achievement, particularly students

from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In the study, Edmonds found strong instructional leadership to be one of the most important characteristics of effective schools. Edmonds' research led other educational researchers to focus on instructional leadership and its effects on student achievement.

Researchers have continued to focus on instructional leadership as expectations of K–12 school leaders in the United States have undergone tremendous change due to school reform movements (Marks & Printy, 2003) over the last 50 years (Ediger, 2009; Fullan, 2014; Leone, Warnimont, & Zimmerman, 2009). These reforms have included Goals 2000, America 2000, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and Every Student Succeeds Act. At the building level, principals have shifted from taking on a managerial role (Ediger, 2009; Fullan, 2014; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012) to now being expected to know and understand the curriculum, and to be instructional leaders in their building (Hallinger, 2005; Mestry, Moonsammy- Koopasammy, & Schmidt, 2013; Printy & Marks, 2006; Urick & Bowers, 2014). According to A. Levine (2005), "Schools have the job of educating a population that is experiencing dramatic demographic changes, growing increasingly diverse, and becoming more and more segregated by income and race—to meet today's more rigorous state standards" (pp. 10-11). Levine highlights additional pressures principals face and demonstrates why it is so important for principals to be instructional leaders within their schools.

The extant literature on instructional leadership provides a myriad of definitions of instructional leadership (Leithwood, Patten, et al., 2010; Mestry et al., 2013; Printy &

Marks, 2006; Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008; Rigby, 2014; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). The definition of instructional leadership has changed over time. In the 1980s, instructional leadership was defined as the principal being an expert in education whose goal was to improve teaching in his or her building (Marks & Printy, 2003). More recent research has integrated shared leadership into the definition of instructional leadership, where the principal collaborates with teachers as instructional leaders (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012; Printy & Marks, 2006). Instructional leadership can be defined as any leadership tasks that are related to teaching and learning (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Neumerski, 2012). Wanzare and Da Costa (2001) defined instructional leadership as the principal focusing on activities and strategies to improve students' academic achievement.

Numerous studies focused on researching more deeply the types of instructional leadership that principals enact in schools, and the characteristics of instructional leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003; May & Supovitz, 2011; Neumerski, 2012; Reitzug et al., 2008; Rigby, 2014; Ruff & Shoho, 2005). However, missing from this research is attention to how principals are enacting instructional leadership in their own schools at a time when principals are held accountable for their schools' test scores. For the purposes of this study, instructional leadership is defined as anything principals are doing in their building related to teaching and learning that improves student achievement (May & Supovitz, 2011; Reitzug et al., 2008; Wanzare & Da Costa, 2001). This includes the district's educational goals, names of district purchased curriculums, curriculum maps, pacing guides, common assessments, and the building schedule.

Statement of the Problem

A problem K–12 public school leaders face includes meeting the increasing demands of serving diverse children while navigating a myriad of federal, state, and local mandates often aligned with increasing standardized test scores. This problem has increased with each reform that has taken place across the country. Currently, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has been passed into law, which the goal of this act is to try to ensure success for all students in schools. However, with this comes the accountability of national standards and state testing. In Ohio, the accountability system includes six components: achievement, progress, gap closing, graduation rate, K–3 literacy, and prepared for success (Ohio Department of Education, 2017c). Four of these six components are measured through standardized testing. Each school is graded on these areas and the data are published annually on district and building report cards. The report cards are then published for the public to view, and the report cards are used to rate and rank school districts in Ohio. Schools are rated and ranked based on how their students perform on high stakes standardized tests. Then when students do not perform well on the standardized tests it looks like schools are failing. Siegel (2017) found test scores in Ohio correlate with poverty levels. Students in high poverty school districts have lower test scores than students in low-poverty school districts. Politicians believe that our public education system is broken and that the blame should be placed on the educators (Ravitch, 2014). Unfortunately, the schools labeled as failing are schools where the majority of students are from low-income households.

The United States as a country is ranked with other countries' education systems around the world (Drent, 2013). The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) was established in the 1950s and has completed 32 comparative studies of education internationally (Drent, 2013). They have examined Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS; Drent, 2013). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is a group of countries that try to improve economic development and improve growth and social development in their countries (oecd.org). This group launched the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA's goal was to see if students had the skills they needed for adult life. The test started in 2000 and is given every three years to 15-year-old students. PISA assesses reading literacy, math literacy, and scientific literacy (OECD, 2019). However, the problem with comparing the United States with other countries is the schools are porous organizations. This means whatever happens outside of schools makes its way into public schools because "schools and society are intertwined" (Ravitch, 2014, p. 7).

Ravitch (2014) argued that current educational reforms are not working because policies designed to fix schools are not helping society reduce poverty and racial segregation. Neoliberals believe that effective teachers can close the achievement gap and reduce poverty by helping students get an education and go to college (Ravitch, 2014). Poverty impacts every aspect of a child's life from health care, to higher levels of absences at school, and more transiency between schools (Ravitch, 2014). These issues

cannot just be fixed by having an effective teacher (Ravitch, 2014). Public schools are a representation of society; therefore the inequities that exist in society are reflected in the public schools. A corporate solution to fixing the inequities in education has been the privatization of public education. One way that privatization of public institutions happen is through charter schools. Charter schools are private companies, but some are given public funds.

Neoliberals believe in privatizing public institutions and are confident that having charter schools will begin a competition with public schools and give students an alternative if their public school cannot compete with the charter schools (Eastman, Anderson, & Boyles, 2017). Many groups think that the more teachers and schools are held accountable the better they will be (Apple, 2016). However, the problem with schools competing in education, like it is a marketplace, is that schools are no longer providing services, but they are instead trying to get more customers (Apple, 2016). With all of the complexities of the accountability requirements for schools and issues of school funding principals are now more than ever being held responsible for the academic success of their school (Hallinger, 2005; Mestry et al., 2013; Printy & Marks, 2006; Urick & Bowers, 2014). Principals are facing the pressures to be an instructional leader in a way that will ensure their students do well on the state test or their school will face the consequences of getting low grades on the report cards. Low grades on the state report card could result in a loss of money from the state and students using public funds to attend private schools (Ravitch, 2014).

In Ohio, principal and teacher evaluations include student growth measures as a way to determine principal and teacher effectiveness (Ohio Department of Education, 2017c). Evaluating principals on how much their students grow puts more pressure on principals to have their students perform better on state tests. If the students in a principal's building do not make enough academic growth, which is how much a student learns from the start of the school year to the end of the school year, it can negatively influence a principal's evaluation. Principals are evaluated using the Ohio Principals Evaluation System (OPES) and teachers are evaluated using the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES). These systems both evaluate educators using a performance rubric and student achievement. The OPES framework uses 50% performance and 50% student growth to determine a principal's rating of ineffective, developing, skilled, or accomplished.

The OTES framework has two ways that districts can choose to evaluate their teachers: the original or alternative framework. In the original framework districts use 50% teacher performance and 50% student growth measures from either a state test or student learning objective to determine a teacher's rating. In the alternative framework, districts use 50% teacher performance, 35% student growth, and 15% from alternative components such as student surveys and teacher self-evaluations to determine a teacher's rating. Teachers can be rated ineffective, developing, skilled, or accomplished (Ohio Department of Education, 2017c).

Along with all of the complexities of principals responding to the accountability, they are expected to enact instructional leadership with integrity. The Interstate School

Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standard 5 states, "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner." In a study completed by Monga (2016), she found that integrity in leadership meant that leaders have a commitment to morals, they adhere to their ethics and beliefs, they are transparent, and they are consistent in their decision making. Henderson and Gornik (2007) explained the importance of morals in education and how educators can make curriculum decisions based on democratic morality. They also express how most educators believe that high test scores are not the end goal for students, but instead to "create 'good' people living a 'good' life" (p. 39). According to Henderson and Gornik (2007), "In this country, the aspiration is normative and based on the democratic values of personal responsibility, respect, hard work, and justice, to name a few" (p. 39). Principals can face the tensions of having teachers teach to produce high test scores or teach in a way that focuses on the democratic values of our country. Principals need to make decisions that address the accountability, but also need to act with integrity in a way that promotes equity for all of the students in the building.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how elementary principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 urban elementary public schools during a time when principals are held accountable for students' test scores. According to Powell, Higgins, Aram, and Freed (2009),

> Because elementary school principals are responsible for carrying out state and federal laws, evaluating teachers' instruction, and providing leadership in

> curriculum in their school, their decisions about curriculum and instruction have the potential to wield great influence over the success or failure of No Child Left Behind. (p. 20)

This quote demonstrates how principals were responsible for the success or failure of No Child Left Behind, but this could be generalized for any policies that are put into place by the government. Principals choose how they want to be instructional leaders in their buildings. What principals value in instruction, and what they do as instructional leaders may not align with how they execute instructional leadership as school leaders. For example, principals may not agree with tracking students based on ability. However, because they feel the pressure to have higher test scores and meet the requirements of the state report card, they track students in classes based on whether they are gifted, are on an Individualized Education Plan, or how they score on district testing. It also may not align with macro level politics, because of dealing with all of the demands. Research has found that principal leadership has an indirect impact on student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Supovitz et al., 2010). This means how principals enact instructional leadership has an impact on student achievement. This study seeks to provide the field of leadership with a deeper understanding regarding how principals navigate the intersection of their lived experiences and beliefs to make decisions regarding how they will enact instructional leadership.

In my study, I focused on participants in an urban school district. I chose to study an urban district because I speculated that urban elementary principals would have a calling to lead through a critical lens that focuses on equity of students. Rodriguez,

Murakami-Ramalho, and Ruff (2009) explored how urban principals advocated for students and navigated the accountability requirements from No Child Left Behind. They found 16 urban elementary principals were more concerned with caring for the children in their schools and doing what is best for them than worrying about how students did on standardized tests. I also wanted to understand how urban elementary principals enacted instructional leadership while navigating the tensions of being held accountable for their students' test scores and trying to lead with integrity.

Since urban schools typically have higher percentages of minority students and students living in poverty than their surrounding suburban or rural districts, the setting of this study was a deliberate choice. The study explored how principals navigate the tensions of dealing with the accountability from the state while being an instructional leader in a way that aligns with their beliefs and values. Danridge, Edwards, and Pleasants (2000) found in a study that what principals perceive as student behaviors are actually mental health issues. Urban schools also face social issues around socioeconomic status, race, and ethnic backgrounds that are not discussed (Danridge et al., 2000). These are just some of the challenges that urban principals face when they are trying to be instructional leaders in their building. According to Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (as cited in Harris, 2012), "Urban schools, in particular, confront an uphill battle to prepare its students for the demands of accountability policy given the academic, professional, financial, and instructional disparities they have consistently encountered over time" (p. 204). The challenges

foregrounded by Harris are precisely the terrain principals navigate as instructional leaders.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study focuses on three areas: school culture, leadership, and critical theory. School culture and leadership are important when looking at how instructional leadership is enacted in schools because these two concepts influence how principals enact instructional leadership. The leadership that principals enact shapes the culture of their school (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Therefore, how principals enact instructional leadership in their school depends on the beliefs of the principal and the culture he or she has created. Finally, I chose to look at this study through a critical theory lens in which critical pedagogy can challenge school politics and how principals may interpret and enact instructional leadership in their schools. I speculated that urban elementary principals may have a calling to lead through a critical lens that focuses on equity of students. The critical theory lens had the potential to reveal those leadership dynamics.

School Culture

Principals need to understand the culture of their school as leaders because the culture represents the unwritten mission of the school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). The school's culture has a bigger influence on what students learn than state or district standards (Barth, 2001). According to Barth, "the school culture is the complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization" (p. 198). School culture differs

from school climate (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). The culture is the values and beliefs, where the climate is the values and beliefs in action. Muhammad (2018) referred to school culture as how people behave and the climate as how people feel. The culture of a school evolves slowly and the climate can change quickly (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Every school has a different culture (Barth, 2001). According to Kruse and Seashore Louis (2009) the school culture is "the influence of peers, parents, colleagues, and community that creates a fidgeting, rebellious student or a burned-out and cynical teacher" (p. 1). The school culture does not depend on the authority of the leader, but the "influence over behaviors, beliefs, relationships and other complex dynamics present in the school that are often unpredictable" (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009, p. 2).

Muhammad (2018) shared three predeterminations people have that shape school culture: perceptual, intrinsic, and institutional. Perceptual predetermination refers to how an educator's experiences and socialization impacts his or her practices in the classroom. The educator's perceptions influence the positive and negative expectations he or she has for students. Intrinsic predetermination is how the students perceive whether they will be successful in school. Students learn these messages from their home, community, and school. Students need to feel like they can be successful in order to have the motivation to learn. The third predetermination is institutional. Institutional predetermination refers to a system of sorting and tracking students by ability. Muhammad (2018) argued, "students spend grades K–8 auditioning for their place within the bell curve" (p. 37). When students get to high school their cognitive levels have been predetermined and students have been grouped to match these levels. The challenges of the

predeterminations that happen within the inside and outside of the school form a complex school culture (Muhammad, 2018).

Kruse and Seashore Louis (2009) posited how leaders cannot control a school culture; instead they have to influence the culture. School culture can be very complex because our society is a porous society and our schools and society are intertwined (Ravitch, 2014). Kruse and Seashore Louis (2009) suggested, "resilient school improvement is more likely to occur if the principal focuses not just inside the school but also on redefining the relationship between school professionals and their communities" (p. 7). Kruse and Seashore Louis shared six subcultures that exist in schools to make up the culture: students, teachers, school administrators, district, community, and parents. The best cultures are then influenced by the principal towards a greater consensus (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009). How principals improve their school culture impacts their instructional leadership and how they work to increase student achievement (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009).

According to Deal and Peterson (1999), "it is not only the formal leadership of the principal that sustains and continuously reshapes culture but the leadership of everyone. Deep, shared leadership builds strong and cohesive cultures" (p. 276). According to Deal and Peterson, school leaders take on eight symbolic roles to understand and shape the culture of a school. School leaders can be historians, anthropological sleuths, visionaries, symbol, potter, poet, actor, and healer. The school leader as a historian means he or she understands the events that have happened and the key leaders who have been there in the past to shape the school's culture. The school leader as anthropological sleuth means he

or she looks at daily rituals and values that happen as teachers interact with each other. The school leader as a visionary communicates the shared vision and mission of the school, as well as listens to what the teachers' values and hopes are. The school leader as a symbol means the school leader is the model for others in the building. Everyone is watching their actions and seeing what they value.

The school leader as a potter shapes the culture of the school by creating rituals that help bring people in the school together (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The school leader is a poet who communicates his or her words through memos, stories, and mottoes. The school leader is an actor when he or she has to carry out important events in the school building, such as ceremonies or dealing with critical incidents. The school leader is a healer, which means he or she reaffirms the culture of the school during transitions of new and retiring staff, as well as deals with challenging events of loss. These eight leadership roles need to be taken on by everyone in the building. However, it starts with the principal to model these roles for everyone else (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

One important part of a school culture is for the principal to create a culture of trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). When teachers work in a school that has a culture of trust, teachers are more likely to try new instructional strategies they feel will help their students (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) found a culture of collaboration to be one of the biggest factors in high performing schools. Principals need to create a culture where teachers feel empowered and can work together to improve the organization. This takes time and work from the principal to set this up

and the expectation that teachers will collaborate with each other (Leithwood, Harris, et al., 2010).

Leadership

Leadership is another lens through which this study was viewed because research has found that strong leadership increases student achievement (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012; Day, Gu, & Simmons, 2016; Melmer, Burmaster, & James, 2008). According to Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012), "leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning" (p. 3). This quote shows the importance of leadership and the importance of understanding a definition of leadership. Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) defined leadership as "*providing direction* and *exercising influence*" (emphasis in original, p. 4). Leaders use their direction and influence to help improve an organization (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012). The influence goes in both directions where the leaders and constituents are interacting back and forth (Gardner, 1990).

An important aspect of leadership is for principals to build trust with teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). According to Tschannen-Moran, "trust leaders are at the heart of successful schools" (p. 49). Sergiovanni (1992) talked about leadership being based on the leader's heart, head, and hand. The heart of leadership is what the leader values and believes in, the head of leadership is the theories and practice of leadership, and the hand of leadership is the decisions and actions of the leader. All three of these components of leadership work together. In this study, I explore how principals enact a specific type of leadership, instructional leadership. The expectations for school

principals are provided in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) 2008 standards. ISLLC stands for Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (Melmer et al.,, 2008 p. 6). These standards were created by policy makers to help "strengthen selection, preparation, licensure, and professional development for education leaders" (Melmer et al., 2008, p. 77). The following standards are part of the ISSLC standards:

Standard 1—"An educational leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders."

Standard 2—"An educational leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth."

Standard 3—"An educational leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment."

Standard 4—"An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources."

Standard 5—"An educational leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner."

Standard 6—"An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context."

According to The Council of Chief State School Officers (Melmer et al., 2008) given the broad nature of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, "they influence and drive many system supports and changes that will ultimately lead to effective instructional leadership that positively impacts student achievement" (p. 84). The ISLCC 2008 standards are similar to the Ohio Standards for Principals. These standards are the guidelines for what Ohio principals are evaluated on using the Ohio Principal Evaluation System (Ohio Department of Education, 2017c). It is important to understand what the leadership standards are because these standards give a broad idea of how principals should be leading in their building.

Critical Theory

This study examines instructional leadership through a critical theory lens and more specifically critical pedagogy. I explored how politics and the accountability demands at this point in time effect the manner in which principals lead instruction. According to Lynn, Beningo, Williams, Park, and Mitchell (2006), "critical theorists attempt to discover why oppressive structures exist and offer criticisms of their effects; they also explore the ways in which we can transform our society" (p. 18). Critical theory encourages questioning of traditions and how things have always been, along with investigating the hidden assumptions behind practices in place (Bronner, 2017). In critical theory what is considered reality has been created by what people in power have

thought is important (Lather, 2006). Critical theory contains many truths and is based on social justice and what we can do to change the world (Lather, 2006). Power and politics are embedded in every aspect of the educational system in the United States, which is why it is important to take a critical stance to better understand what the issues of power are and who is benefitting from the systems that are in place. I speculated that urban elementary principals may have a calling to lead through a critical lens that focuses on equity of students. The critical theory lens had the potential to reveal those leadership dynamics.

Critical theory in education. Critical theory in education derives from the same ideas of critical theory. Critical educators teach in a way that help students understand there are multiple sides to problems and these problems are "linked to certain class, race, and gender interests" (McLaren, 2017, p. 57). Critical educators must understand and teach using a dialectical theory (McLaren, 2017). According to McLaren, dialectical refers to "theories which recognize the problems of society as more than simply isolated events of individuals or deficiencies in the social structure" (p. 56). This means teachers empower students and help them transform themselves with issues of social justice (McLaren, 2017). According to McLaren, critical educators need to understand that school "must be fundamentally tied to a struggle for a qualitatively better life for all through the construction of a society based on non-exploitative relations and social justice" (p. 57). Teachers need to question what they are teaching and ask why it is being taught with both instruction and classroom management procedures (McLaren, 2017). School leaders need to address issues of equity and racism as it relates to what

students are learning in the curriculum (Malewski, 2009, as cited in Boske & Osanloo, 2015). Critical educators understand that knowledge is socially constructed and never neutral (McLaren, 2017).

Critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy was derived from critical theory (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2017). According to McLaren (2017), "Critical pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not" (p. 58). Darder et al. (2017) include seven influences of critical pedagogy: cultural politics, political economy, historicity of knowledge, dialectical theory, ideology and critique, hegemony, and resistance and counter-hegemony. Cultural politics in critical pedagogy calls for educators to understand and question what legitimate knowledge is and understand that knowledge is not neutral. According to Darder et al., critical pedagogy "supports the empowerment of culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students" (p. 10). This means that educators can teach their students to think critically about the ideas they are learning in the classroom. Students are then learning to look at these ideas and what happens in society from a social justice perspective (Darder et al., 2017). This aligns with Apple's (2017) thinking about textbooks in schools. Apple stated, "it is naive to think of the school curriculum as neutral knowledge. Rather what counts as knowledge is the result of complex power relations and struggles among identifiable class, race, gender, and religious groups" (p. 81).

Apple (2017) argued that textbooks are created to "serve the interests of particular classes and social groups" (p. 87). Textbooks do not contain stories and perspectives of historically marginalized populations. As much as what is in textbooks is controlled by society, it is important to realize that society cannot control what is actually taught or learned (Apple, 2017). Educators who use critical pedagogy in their teaching help students to think about the text critically and about whose perspective the text is written. Educators need to understand that curriculum in education is political and what their role is in helping students learn more than just what the textbooks want students to learn (Apple, 2017). Political economy in critical pedagogy means that educators understand that education does not give all students equal opportunities, but instead contributes to the values and privileges of the dominant class (Darder et al., 2017). This supports how Apple (2017) and McLaren (2017) think similarly about knowledge as a social construct in schools.

McLaren (2017) explained the relationship between knowledge and power. Critical pedagogy challenges the subjectivity of knowledge and how it was socially constructed. This includes the importance of understanding class and culture in the construction of knowledge. McLaren highlighted critical pedagogy and the power/knowledge relationships. This means that most of what is taught in schools originates from the idea that the knowledge of what schools want students to learn is based on the dominant group of who is already in power. However, critical pedagogy empowers students to look for the truth in what they are learning and look at who the knowledge oppresses. Critical pedagogy looks at the curriculum and understands it is a

form of politics. It challenges the hidden curriculum, which are ideas that educators may not even realize they are teaching.

According to McLaren (2017), "no curriculum, policy, or program is ideologically or politically innocent, and that the concept of the curriculum is inextricably related to issues of social class, culture, gender, and power" (p. 71). McLaren's thinking about curriculum is similar to Henderson and Gornik's (2007) thinking about the implicit curriculum, which is the hidden and null curriculum. The hidden curriculum includes the social aspects learned in schools, such as the rules and how school works. The null curriculum includes certain topics that are avoided or not taught at all (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). An example of this would be if a teacher avoids talking about race in the classroom. The teacher avoiding the topic of race could be doing this consciously or unconsciously, but by not talking about race with students it becomes the null curriculum.

McLaren (2017) expressed how critical pedagogy questions how curriculum enhances social reproduction. Typically in schools, students with dominant cultural capital are rewarded. The dominant culture of a society shapes what the cultural capital of schools look like (Fruchter, 2007). According to Perry (2003, as cited in Fruchter, 2007), "cultural capital is a set of family-inherited and inculcated knowledge and practices that equip advantaged children to succeed in school" (p. 29). Fruchter argued that advantaged students do better in schools because schools are set up to reward students who demonstrate cultural capital. Black students come to school with a different culture than most White students and teachers. According to Perry (2003, as cited in Fruchter, 2007), "black students' intellectual and academic capabilities are too often

conflated with their lack of school-valued culture capital" (p. 30). Educators need to make sure to reward and value students who do not demonstrate the dominant cultural capital and recognize Black students intellectual abilities (Fruchter, 2007).

Historicity of knowledge in critical pedagogy means educators help students to understand the history of injustice and realize that every human has an experience they bring with them. Dialectical theory in critical theory includes uncovering "the connections between objective knowledge and the cultural norms, values, and standards of the society at large" (Darder et al., 2017, p. 11). According to Giroux (2017), "dialectical thought argues that there is a link between knowledge, power, and domination. Thus it is acknowledged that some knowledge is false, and that ultimate purpose of critique should be critical thinking in the interests of social change" (p. 38). Ideology in critical pedagogy can be used for principals and teachers to question and understand the lived experiences of the students and the culture of their school and how the two contradict. This type of thinking helps principals and teachers understand the hidden curriculum, or the curriculum and practices that reproduce the dominant culture.

Darder (2017) investigated how Freire (1970) created a human vision of pedagogy, which "nurtures critical consciousness and social agency, in ways that move students away from instrumentalized forms of learning and replaces these with pedagogical activities that ignite both their passion for learning and their creative engagement with the world around them" (p. 103). Critical pedagogy also supports the understanding of hegemony, which is the social control of the dominant group. According to Darder et al. (2017), "this critical principle acknowledges the powerful

connection that exists between politics, economics, culture, and pedagogy" (p. 12). Critical pedagogy also includes a theory of resistance. This means that educators can teach their students to think critically about things they are learning and look at things from a social justice perspective (Darder et al., 2017). I speculated that urban elementary principals may have a calling to lead through a critical lens that focuses on equity of students. The critical theory lens had the potential to reveal those leadership dynamics.

Significance of the Study

This study intended to gain a deeper understanding of how elementary principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 elementary public schools during a time when principals are held accountable for students' test scores. This study is important because limited research describes how principals enact instructional leadership, especially within this particular historical moment in time. As Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) explained, "Much has been written about the importance of the principal as instructional leader. Often, however, this scholarship fails to reflect the messiness of what principals do on a day-to-day basis" (p. 69). This study explores ways principals enact instructional leadership. This exploration describes the enactment of instructional leadership, and examines said leadership through the lens of critical theory, school culture, and leadership. There is a gap in the literature that examines instructional leadership through these three lenses. The research posits that elementary principals in urban settings are under significant pressure to succumb to the dominant testing and accountability culture, and may default on their core beliefs about teaching and learning in diverse settings in the process. By examining the lived experiences of these school leaders through the lens of

critical theory, school culture, and leadership at this particular moment in time, new knowledge may emerge expanding what is known about educational leadership in diverse educational settings.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 schools?
2. To what extent do principals' beliefs, attitudes, values, and/or lived experiences influence how they understand instructional leadership?
3. To what extent do principals' beliefs, attitudes, values, and/or lived experiences influence how they engage in instructional leadership?
4. How do principals understand integrity and accountability as a school leader?

Context for the Study

This study was conducted in a large urban district with three principals at different elementary buildings. Since urban school districts typically have higher percentages of minority students and students living in poverty than their surrounding suburban or rural districts, the setting of this study was a deliberate choice.

The district has roughly 4,380 employees and about 21,400 students in the entire district. There are 107 principals and assistant principals in the district and 79 other administrators. There are 98 other employees who have been hired for instructional support. The demographics for the district are 46% Black, 34% White, 8% Multiracial, 4% Latinxs, 7.5% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 0.01% American Indian. There are 28 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, and 9 high schools. The elementary schools in the

Bridges School District have been converted to Community Learning Centers (CLCs). When the district builds new elementary schools they become CLCs because they receive funding from the community. The CLCs hold community events before and after school hours. The community has an office in the schools so school principals do not have to be at the school for every community event to supervise in case there was an emergency. Instead an employee from the city can be there to supervise the event. Each principal in the study completed three interviews, took the researcher for a school walk, and provided documents related to being an instructional leader in their building.

Definition of Terms

A Nation at Risk (A Nation at Risk)—In 1983 this report claimed that the United States public school system was failing compared to other countries around the world (Guthrie & Springer, 2004).

Achievement—This component of the Ohio state report card represents the number of students who passed the state tests and how well they performed on them (Ohio Department of Education, 2017c).

Attitudes—"An emotional position or mental statement that a person holds about a fact or statement" (interQ Research, 2012a).

Beliefs—A person's ideas that are "somewhat rooted in facts, but are subjective and based on their experiences" (interQ Research, 2012b).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—Passed in 1965 by Lyndon Johnson, the ESEA is the largest source of federal funding to K–12 public schools

(Mathison, 2009). This law was a civil rights act and started with giving grants to school districts that had low-income families (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—This was put into place in December of 2015 by President Obama. It took the place of No Child Left Behind. This act kept the same accountability measures as No Child Left Behind, which was standards and standardized testing. All students being proficient in math and reading was the goal that changed (Sleeter & Flores-Carmona, 2017).

Gap closing—This component of the Ohio state report card shows how well schools are meeting the performance expectations for vulnerable populations of students in English language arts, math, and graduation (Ohio Department of Education, 2017c).

Graduation rate—This component of the Ohio state report card shows how many students are graduating high school in four or five years (Ohio Department of Education, 2017c).

Instructional leadership—Leadership tasks related to students and learning (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Neumerski, 2012) and has a positive impact on student learning (Wanzare & Da Costa, 2001).

K–3 Literacy—This component of the Ohio state report card shows how well schools are helping struggling readers in Kindergarten through third grade get on track to proficiency in reading (Ohio Department of Education, 2017b).

Leadership—The process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers (Gardner, 1990).

Lived experiences—"Is a representation and understanding of a researcher or research subject's human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one's perception of knowledge" (The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods, 2008).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—Put into place in 2002, a federal government mandate that measures school's adequate yearly progress in mathematics and reading using standardized tests (Powell et al., 2009; Taylor, 2006).

Prepared for Success—This component looks at how well students are prepared for future work or college opportunities (Ohio Department of Education, 2017c).

Progress—This component of the Ohio state report card looks at the growth of all students based on how they performed in past years (Ohio Department of Education, 2017c).

School vouchers—When schools pay for children to go to private and religious schools using tax dollars (Eastman et al., 2017; Rogers, Mosley, & Folkes, 2009).

Summary

Currently our system of education is focused on standardization and accountability (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). Accountability systems are in place that measure students based on their scores on standardized tests (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). The problem with this, according to Sleeter and Flores-Carmona (2017), is, "while student populations have diversified rapidly across the country, use of standards-based reform as a way of eliminating inequality has resulted in homogenizing the curriculum, even while classrooms in the United States have become more diverse"

(p. 9). This means our classrooms are more diverse, but our curriculum has become more standardized. My study used critical theory, culture of schools, and leadership as a lens through which to explore how urban elementary principals are enacting instructional leadership, during a time when the focus is on how well students do on standardized tests. Using these three theoretical lenses will help to understand to what extent urban principals' beliefs, attitudes and lived experiences influence how they enact instructional leadership.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore how urban elementary principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 urban elementary public schools at a time where principals are held accountable for their schools' state test scores. In order to understand how accountability influences the work of principals as instructional leaders, it is important to review the history of both the achievement gap and the history of the accountability movement. After presenting brief histories of both, I provide an overview of the current challenges of education focusing on the neoliberal influence on educational policy. After setting the context, I explore what student achievement means and the principal's impact on student achievement. Then I explore the principal as an instructional leader and curriculum leader, and the principal's role in creating a culture of learning. After that I investigate the influence that politics in curriculum has on the extent of a principal to be an instructional leader in his or her building today. Finally, the literature on the aims of education is explored and connections are made to socially-just instructional leadership.

History of the Achievement Gap

School districts began to publish test scores after *Brown v. Board of Education*, when schools were desegregated (Ipka, 2003). According to Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011), "Equality of Educational Opportunity (1966) by Coleman and his colleagues was the first major post-Brown v. Board of Education study to establish that the achievement of Black children was lower than that of White children" (p. 66). This report examined

how racial and ethnic groups were segregated in schools, the educational opportunities that students had, how well students performed on a standardized test, and the correlation between student achievement and the schools they attended (Coleman, 1966). According to Hanushek (2016), "it fundamentally altered the lens through which analysts, policymakers, and the public at large view and assess schools" (p. 19).

Valant and Newark (2016) defined the achievement gap as the gap in test scores between historically advantaged and disadvantaged populations. Kotok (2017) said, "the achievement gap refers to the difference in academic performance between two subgroups when one group outperforms another group" (p. 183). Ladson-Billings (2013) did not like the term achievement gap because she felt it puts blame on students and families. According to Ladson-Billings, "When we describe what has transpired in our communities as an achievement gap we slip into a discourse of individual or personal responsibility for a situation that has been centuries in the making" (p. 105). According to Valant and Newark (2016):

> Test score gaps between poor and wealthy, Black and White, and Hispanics and White children can all be seen as symptomatic of policies and practices that have long been providing unequal educational opportunities to members of different social classes, races, and ethnic groups. (p. 332)

The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) indicated that the achievement gap has improved since 1992, but has not changed since 2013 (p. 158). The reading and math results showed that across the 4th and 8th grades, White and Asian/Pacific Islander students continued to score higher, on average, than Black,

Latinxs, and American Indian/Alaska Native students (p. 158). The academic achievement gap started to narrow between the 1960s and the 1980s, and then the progress of closing the achievement gap stalled and started to reverse (Books, 2007; Jencks & Phillips, as cited in Taylor, 2006) after test-based reform and accountability was introduced (Sleeter & Flores-Carmona, 2017).

Many reforms have aimed at narrowing the achievement gap. One of the fears from the public that Ladson-Billings expressed is that if the achievement gap is closed then it removes inequity in education (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Zhao, 2016). However, saying there is a gap in achievement means that one group is meeting the standard and the other group that is below them has to work to catch up (Ladson-Billings, 2013). It is a deficit mindset that can actually make the achievement gap wider (Gay, 2010; Zhao, 2016). The achievement gap brings about the idea that poor and minority children need to be fixed in order to catch up with their more wealthy peers (Zhao, 2016).

According to Bower (2013), four different reform strategies and policies have been implemented to close the achievement gap. The first one focused on equalizing resources. There have been numerous lawsuits aimed at equalizing funding in public schools. These lawsuits were based on the belief that if schools receive equal resources, then the achievement gap would be eliminated. The second strategy focused on integrating schools with the *Brown v. Board* decision. The third strategy focused on improving and enhancing high-poverty schools. This strategy focused on funding reform with the overall goal to give high-poverty schools more resources to help students overcome disadvantages. The fourth strategy focused on creating choice and competition

through the accountability movement. This strategy relied on the government giving vouchers so people could choose what school their child could attend. It is designed to ensure schools are putting the maximum effort into helping students succeed. According to Bunje Bower (2013), "All of these strategies focus on what happens *inside* of schools, but it is clear that the achievement gap both begins and widens *outside* of schools" (emphasis in original, p. 5).

Ladson-Billings (2006) reported the education debt that is in the United States and how this has contributed to the achievement gap. According to Ladson-Billings, "the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society have created an education debt" (p. 5). This education debt that Ladson-Billings described is why there have been no long-term solutions to fixing the underlying problem of the achievement gap. If we as a country do not fix the underlying issues, than there are only short-term solutions for fixing the achievement gap. The historical component of the education debt began when historically marginalized populations were not given access to a formal education. For example, African-Americans were not allowed to be educated during slavery. In spite of the fact that African-Americans played a significant role in helping the Southern state's economy by picking cotton, they were legally denied an education.

The economic component of the economic debt has to do with the funding disparities between and among schools. The schools that received more money from the government were schools that served the majority of White students. The sociopolitical component of the education debt reflected marginalized populations having less access to

the civic process. Many families of color have had less opportunity to be included in the decision making process in the school's parent groups and other democratic organizations. The moral component of the education debt has to do with doing what we know is right as a society. According to Ladson-Billings (2006), "morally right" includes:

> We want people to take *personal* responsibility for their behavior, *personal* responsibility for their health care, personal responsibility for their welfare, and *personal* responsibility for their education. However, in democratic nations, that personal responsibility must be coupled with social responsibility. (emphasis in original, p. 8)

According to Zhao (2016), instead of focusing on the achievement gap, "we need effective policies and actions to counter racism, improve communities, upgrade schools facilities, enhance the quality of teachers, and provide early learning programs for disadvantaged children" (p. 721). However, these tasks are difficult and take time, unlike immediate changes that can happen in schools (Zhao, 2016).

It is impossible to close the achievement gap when poor and minority children come to school having had less resources that will allow them to do well on the measures that define successful educational achievement (Zhao, 2016). Zhao (2016) and Gay (2010) suggested that educators must shift their thinking about students from a deficit point of view to enhancing students' strengths. This type of thinking alone can change students' opportunities and allow them to be successful in areas that are their strengths (Zhao, 2016). One of the ways the federal government sought to help close the

achievement gap was by passing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Standerfer, 2006).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965 by Lyndon Johnson (Mathison, 2009). The ESEA is the largest source of federal funding to K–12 public schools (Mathison, 2009). According to Nelson (2016), "it pledged a billion dollars a year to aid disadvantaged students in K–12 public schools" (p. 359). According to Kantor (1991), ESEA "focused attention on the educational needs of poor children and established federal standards to push school districts toward more equitable treatment of disadvantaged students" (p. 49). The difficult part of implementing ESEA was getting school districts to put disadvantaged students as a top priority (Kantor, 1991). However, with the increase of school funding to high poverty schools came an increase in accountability (Standerfer, 2006). According to Mathison (2009), "through its many Title programs, especially Title 1, ESEA has been a major force in focusing how and what is taught in schools, as well as the ways those activities are evaluated" (pp. 5-6). Unfortunately, ESEA did not close the achievement gap like it initially intended to do (Standerfer, 2006). This led to the ESEA act being reauthorized multiple times and many reforms in education.

A Nation at Risk

The current climate of K–12 public schools can be traced back to 1983, when *A Nation at Risk* was released under the Reagan administration (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). This report claimed that the United States public school system was failing compared to

other countries around the world (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). According to Evans (2015), the report "called for a major new reform movement to improve schooling, along with greater financial support and higher salaries for teachers, but did not address the level from which additional funding should come" (p. 38). According to Guthrie and Springer (2004), "NAR spurred more commotion, controversy, and change to America's schools than any other public statement issued after the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 declarations regarding de jure racially segregated schools in Brown v. Board of Education" (p. 14). According to Turgut (2013), "Discussions of the report raised questions about whether the United States was really 'at risk' and if it was, then 'at risk of what?'" (p. 65).

Many people questioned how accurate the information was on the report (Turgut, 2013) because "the report contained no new research and was based on a compilation of findings" (Evans, 2015, p. 39). After this report came out the public lost confidence in the United States public school system (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). The federal government and more business leaders started to get involved in educational reform (Turgut, 2013). A Nation at Risk started an accountability movement in schools, where schools were judged on students' performance on standardized tests (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). According to Mehta (2013),

> This paradigm which emerged in the early 1980s and is still dominant today, holds that educational success is central to national, state, and individual economic success; that American schools across the board are substantially underperforming and in need of reform; that schools rather than social forces

> should be held responsible for academic outcomes; and that success should be measured by externally verifiable tests. (p. 286)

A Nation at Risk changed not only policy goals about education, but politics in education in general (Mehta, 2013).

A Nation at Risk received criticism from educators (Evans, 2015). Teachers were upset because they felt they were being attacked. Critics in education felt "if the nation did have an educational crisis of the parameters described by these reports, it was a crisis manufactured by business and political leaders" (Evans, 2015, p. 45). One critique of A Nation at Risk by Lawrence Cremin was that school reform cannot change the United States' competitiveness with other countries (Evans, 2015). He felt that was just a way to lay the burden on schools. Other critics argued the accuracy of the data in the reports (Evans, 2015). Another critique was the way the report would change teaching. People felt teachers needed to teach students as critical thinkers instead of using traditional approaches that were called for in previous reforms (Evans, 2015). Another group of critics "argued that the primary problem was a lack of equal opportunity in the current educational system, and that improvement would come only through more equitable funding and reform of school finance" (Evans, 2015, p. 43). Many citizens as well were concerned with the new school reform that would happen as a result of A Nation at Risk (Evans, 2015).

Mehta (2013) discovered four problem definitions that had been building up in the 1970s and 1980s to come together to create the problems that resulted from A Nation at Risk. The first was how A Nation at Risk defined the purpose of schools. It talked about

the economy and how schooling was important for the success of individuals, the state, and the country. The second problem that A Nation at Risk addressed was the need to set the standards higher for all and not just work to increase the performance of the lowest performing students. The third problem A Nation at Risk addressed was the responsibility of school performance on the schools instead of it being a social responsibility. The fourth problem A Nation at Risk addressed was the accountability movement in schools. Schools were always accountable to their local school boards but would now be held accountable to the state with standardized testing. These four problems brought together from A Nation at Risk started an education reform.

The History of School Reform

After A Nation at Risk many school reforms were put into place that shaped the United States educational system that we see today. It seemed that with each president came a new type of school reform that promised to fix the problems addressed in a Nation at Risk. All the reforms led to the current reform that we see today, which is the reauthorization of ESSA.

America 2000

America 2000 was an educational reform that went into effect during the Bush Administration in the early 1990s (Evans, 2015). It was a collaboration between government, business, and educators. There were six educational goals in the reform: readiness for school, high school completion, a raise in student achievement and citizenship, first in the world in science and math, adult literacy skills and the skills necessary to exercise citizen rights and responsibilities, and safe schools that are drug and

violence free. According to Evans (2015), "*America 2000* was described as a 'national strategy,' 'not a federal program,' which 'honors local control, relies on local initiative, and affirms states and localities'" (p. 115, emphasis in original).

Goals 2000 and the Reauthorization of ESEA

In 1994, the Clinton Administration worked on the America 2000 initiative looking to redesign the education reform, and it was renamed Goals 2000 (Evans, 2015). Goals 2000 consisted of the same six goals for education reform, except for goal three, which was a raise in student achievement and citizenship. This goal was revised to include more subject areas that would be focused on than the original America 2000 had. The Clinton Administration also worked on changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). These changes were the most significant since ESEA went into effect in 1965. According to Evans (2015), things that were changed in the ESEA were,

> It required states to develop school improvement plans and challenging content standards in core subject areas in order to receive federal funds. States were also required to develop assessments, set 'benchmarks' for 'adequate yearly progress' by Title 1 students, and publish disaggregated test scores. (p. 144)

Schools that did not meet the goals that were set by the ESEA for two years were labeled as "needing improvement" and were subject to corrective actions, such as not receiving federal funds (Evans, 2015).

The Clinton administration continued to look at different reform options that were happening. The 1996 Education Summit and the 1999 Education Summit brought educators and business leaders together to talk about raising student achievement.

According to Evans (2015), “The 1999 summit was a reaffirmation of the business model for school reform” (p. 163). Critics were saying the standards based reform movement that had been put into place was widening the achievement gap. They felt teachers were changing their instruction to teach to the test (Evans, 2015). Then in 2002, the U.S. Congress passed the No Child Left Behind act, which amended the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Thompson & Allen, 2012). This act added to the standards based reform (Mehta, 2013).

No Child Left Behind

In 2002, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was put into place, building on previous reform movements (Evans, 2015). It emphasized goals of raising achievement in mathematics and reading in elementary school (Taylor, 2006). According to Evans (2015), “It required annual testing in reading and mathematics in grades three through eight; a ‘highly qualified teacher’ in each classroom; and escalating sanctions for schools that did not reach performance objectives” (p. 184). Schools had to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) to receive their school funding (Powell et al., 2009, p. 20). No Child Left Behind was put into place by the federal government which was an increase in how much of a role the federal government had in shaping public education in the past (Evans, 2015). However, schools were given funding for less than 10% of what the policy required from schools (Mehta, 2013). “No Child Left Behind introduced data-driven decision making, choice, charter schools, privatization, deregulation, merit pay, and competition” (Turgut, 2013, p. 39). This caused the public to not trust in public education (Gibboney, 2008).

According to Taylor (2006), “No Child Left Behind addresses the issue of the racial achievement gap (and to a lesser degree, gaps caused by poverty, disability, and language) by expanding federal control of schools and holding public schools responsible for eliminating achievement disparities” (p. 78). Title 1 schools had to make AYP in each subgroup or they would face “increasingly severe ‘corrective actions’ such as replacing staff or turning over operations to state or private management firm” (Evans, 2015, p. 186). The problem with that was that it placed more pressure on high-poverty schools instead of wealthy schools (Taylor, 2006), and it put an emphasis on how students performed on standardized tests (Thompson & Allen, 2012).

Another result of No Child Left Behind was the amount of influence that businesses had in education (Evans, 2015). According to Evans, “Corporate support for school reform was rooted in the same rationale expressed during the 1980’s, ‘because the well-being of their companies and every American is at stake’” (p. 186). After a couple of years of schools completing the requirements for No Child Left Behind, educators had many criticisms of how difficult it was to implement (Evans, 2015). Evans noted,

> Critics have argued, based on substantive evidence, that although the No Child Left Behind law claimed to be a step toward improving schools and establishing equal opportunity for all, it was actually harming those it was most intended to help, stigmatizing students and schools attended by children of the poor, channeling them into remedial programs, labeling them as “not proficient” and “in need of improvement,” and leading many to drop or be pushed out. (p. 208)

Many state legislatures argued that No Child Left Behind was inadequately funded and took away the states' rights. These critiques led to the Department of Education changing some of the requirements of No Child Left Behind and offering more flexibility for state testing. Even with these changes educators saw the rise of school dropout rates.

Powell et al. (2009) completed a study looking at how No Child Left Behind influenced curriculum and instruction decisions. The first thing they found was it increased the amount of instructional time that was spent on mathematics and reading, which then decreased an emphasis on the arts and electives (Powell et al., 2009). The second thing that changed with No Child Left Behind was the Professional Development given to teachers. The professional development all focused on meeting the goal of adequate yearly progress. The third change was the flexibility in curriculum. Schools became more rigid on making sure they were teaching to a pacing guide and were teaching all students in the building or district the same lesson at the same time. The fourth change with No Child Left Behind was how instruction was delivered. Direct instruction was reported as the most common mode of instruction. The fifth change No Child Left Behind influenced was how educators made decisions. Most decisions in schools were made around the goal of having students make adequate yearly progress and raising students' test scores (Powell et al., 2009). This study showed the influence No Child Left Behind had on curriculum and instruction in schools.

Race to the Top

When Barack Obama ascended to the presidency of the United States in 2008, his intentions were to change the reform of No Child Left Behind (Evans, 2015). One of the

reasons Obama believed a new reform was needed was because the United States fell to ninth place on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2007 (Wang, 2011). Obama agreed with No Child Left Behind's increased accountability and higher standards for students; however there were details he wanted to change (Evans, 2015). Obama's plan was disappointing to people who were excited for a change from No Child Left behind because it was still "business-driven standards-based reform" (Evans, 2015, p. 219). The Obama administration's main education reform put into place was Race to the Top. According to Evans (2015), Race to the Top attempted to reform education using the following four strategies:

- Adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals;
- Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices; and
- Turning around the lowest performing schools. (p. 222)

Many educators critiqued the competitive nature of the grant program because it created a culture of winners and losers. Evans (2015) believed that Race to the Top "was a continuation of systematic business-driven reform, built on the same assumptions that underlay reform through two decades: public schools as a failed monopoly, remedies based on application of business principles including standards, measurement, rigor, competition, and choice" (p. 224). Even though Race to the Top had a goal of decreasing

the achievement gap, it did more harm on students who were economically disadvantaged (Evans, 2015).

Reauthorization of the ESSA

In 2010 the Obama administration decided to completely revamp No Child Left Behind and reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Evans, 2015). No Child Left Behind was renamed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and it was put into place in December of 2015 and is still in place today. According to Evans (2015), ESSA focuses on four main areas: "teacher and principal effectiveness; using data for improvement; college and career-ready standards; and improving achievement in the lowest-performing schools" (p. 224). ESSA has the same accountability model of standards and standardized testing that was in place before (Sleeter & Flores-Carmona, 2017). One of the big changes from No Child Left Behind was the removal of the "mandate of full proficiency in reading and math for every child by 2014" (Evans, 2015, p. 225). ESSA is also different than No Child Left Behind in the fact that it gives the states more control over testing and accountability (Peterson, 2016; Sleeter & Flores-Carmona, 2017). What concerns Sleeter and Flores-Carmona (2017) about ESSA is it "does not mention multicultural or bilingual education but explicitly supports charter schools as the favored model of school reform" (p. 21). Previous reforms also neglected to mention multicultural education as well.

Current Challenges in Education

This section addresses the current challenges in education. Educators are dealing with challenges every day from the policies that are put into place by the government,

that is, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, ESSA. Principals have to decide what they believe is the purpose of education and how they want to lead in their school. Principals can choose to lead their building in a way that fits with their beliefs and values of schooling. Henderson and Gornik (2007) encouraged educators to use transformative curriculum leadership to use their judgment to educate in a way where high standards are still expected but teachers focus on democratic values of society in their teaching. Henderson and Gornik (2007) expressed the importance of getting teachers to think beyond the test and how students will pass it, and think more about how teachers can teach democratic values.

One pressing issue in education today is the idea that United States public schools are failing (Noddings, 2013). This idea of failing schools has led to initiatives designed to create school reform (Noddings, 2013). Apple (2013) discussed four types of politically conservative groups that are each working to influence education and curriculum reforms: neoliberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populists, and the professional and managerial new middle class. Apple (2013) connected neoliberalism with the idea of consumerism. Neoliberals view education as a product that can be consumed. The citizen is the purchaser when it comes to education (Apple, 2013). According to Apple (2013), "The entire project of neoliberalism is connected to a larger process of exporting blame for the decisions of dominant groups onto the state and onto poor people" (p. 39). English (2013) addressed the neoliberal agenda and the effects it has had on public education and on society as a whole. English focused specifically on

the ways the neoliberal agenda promoted reform focused on making the public spaces into private spaces to make a profit (p. 43). English (2013) stated:

> Education is not only about math and science, but more importantly the crucible on which every civilization ultimately is judged in the arts and humanities and what they offer to all people around the globe to become more fully human and humane. (p. 54)

English emphasized the importance of educational leaders and professors fighting against the neoliberal agenda to do what is best for students.

Neoconservatives assume that society lacks a consensus on what should be considered "official" knowledge (Apple, 2016). Neoconservatives believe in a mandatory statewide and national curriculum, along with statewide and national testing (Apple, 2013). They also believe in having high standards and focusing on traditional values in schools. Authoritarian populists are a group that feels strongly about promoting Christian values. Apple (2001) pointed out how "this agenda includes, but goes beyond, issues of gender, sexuality, and the family. It extends as well to a much larger array of questions about what is to count as 'legitimate' knowledge in schools" (p. 55). The last group Apple (2001) described is the professional and managerial new middle class. According to Apple:

> These are the people with backgrounds in management and efficiency techniques who provide the technical and 'professional' support for accountability, measurement, 'product control,' and assessment that is required by the proponents of neoliberal policies of marketization and neoconservative policies of

> marketization and neoconservative policies of tighter central control in education. (Apple, 2013, p. 57)

These four social movements are having a powerful influence in education today. Even though these four social movements have different opinions in education, they have many similarities and can come together in unique ways (Apple, 2013, p. 59).

English (2013) focused significant attention on the influence of the neoliberal agenda and the effect it has on public education. Neoliberalism as defined by Harvey (2005), as cited in English (2013), is:

> A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (p. 2)

This definition refers to the privatization that characterizes neoliberalism and results in an impact on public schools. After examining the four political groups that impact politics in educational reform, I explore specific reforms promoted by these groups. Those are vouchers, national standards and standardized tests, and accountability.

Vouchers

Some groups feel that families should be offered a choice of where their children will attend school instead of improving public schools (Noddings, 2013). This choice results in private schools receiving vouchers, which use public funds to pay for students to attend private schools. However, private schools do not have to follow the same strict guidelines as public schools (Noddings, 2013). Neoliberals support voucher programs to

pay for children to go to private and religious schools using tax dollars (Eastman et al., 2017; Rogers, Mosley, & Folkes, 2009). Charter schools are a type of private school that receive public money, but are privately owned business (Levine & Levine, 2014). These charter schools do not have to be accountable to the public and transparent with their money; many times charter school board members do not know how the money is spent. If an individual charter school fails, the students go back to the public school, having lost instructional time while they were away at a charter school (Levine & Levine, 2014).

With the growth of charter schools, public school enrollment is declining, which affects school funding (Levine & Levine, 2014). According to Shiller (2011), "Neoliberalism has created the illusion of choice, without actual choice" (p. 170). The first voucher programs started in Cleveland in 1995 (Ravitch, 2014). The results of vouchers have shown that students at public schools performed just as well on standardized tests as students at voucher schools (Ravitch, 2014). However, even without showing success Ohio expanded the voucher programs across the state (Ravitch, 2014). According to Ravitch, "Vouchers represent a major step toward privatization" (p. 213). School vouchers have turned education into a free-market where schools thrive when they enroll more students, even if they are not providing a quality education (Ravitch, 2014).

International and National Standards and Standardized Testing

Another issue surrounding school reform was the creation of national standards and the use of standardized tests to measure student achievement. The United States has worked towards a common set of national standards by creating the Common Core State

Standards. Currently, 42 states have adopted these national standards. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2017), "The standards define the knowledge and skills students should gain throughout their K–12 education in order to graduate high school prepared to succeed in entry-level careers, introductory academic college courses, and workforce training programs" (p. 1). Many people have expressed concerns that moving to national standards gives the federal government more control over the curriculum that is taught in schools (Jennings, 2011). Sleeter and Flores-Carmona (2017) addressed the issue of how the standards have led to standardization in curriculum instead of meeting the diverse needs of the student. According to Sleeter and Flores-Carmona (2017), "the standards movement further assumes worthwhile knowledge is measurable on standardized tests" (p. 23). Schools are required to teach the standards and then are held accountable for the standards through standardized testing (Sleeter & Flores-Carmona, 2017). If schools do not do well on the tests, parents are encouraged to go to another school (Sleeter & Flores-Carmona, 2017).

According to Sleeter and Flores-Carmona (2017), "testing becomes 'high stakes' when significant consequences are attached to test results" (p. 63). Testing students with high stakes attached is what has happened with reforms like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top (Evans, 2015). According to Sleeter and Flores-Carmona (2017), "the model of reform-by-testing also embodies some inherent equity issues: (1) the track record of standardized testing in communities of color, (2) curricular consequences of testing, and (3) inequitable student and community consequences" (p. 65). Standardized testing is not culturally relevant to marginalized populations, especially to students who

speak English as their second language. Standardized testing also determines what gets taught in schools; therefore culturally relevant curriculum may be put to the side due to it not being tested. The last issue Sleeter and Flores-Carmona (2017) highlighted is the "publication of test results in newspapers not only damages teacher morale in low-achieving schools, but is also widely used by realtors to steer home buyers into some neighborhoods and away from others, increasing residential segregation" (p. 67). These issues make it critical that educators consider more than just standardized test scores to see what their students know (Sleeter & Flores-Carmona, 2017) and has implications for principals as instructional leaders.

Accountability

According to Fullan (2014), "Accountability assumes that the most important thing to do is to make sure that the person down below acts in line with directions or criteria passed down by someone higher up" (p. 26). The neoliberal agenda is focused on fixing schools through a top down approach that controls schools (English, 2013). The neoliberal agenda is negatively influencing the democratic ideals of education settings (Portelli & Konecny, 2013). Democracy does not fit the standardization approach that for which neoliberalism advocates (Portelli & Konecny, 2013). Schools and teachers now are judged on achievement levels and how effective and efficient they are running (Portelli & Konecny, 2013). According to Portelli and Konecny, "Students are categorized according to achievement levels, and teachers are required to incessantly carry out bureaucratic measures of surveillance in the form of constant record- keeping

and reporting" (p. 92). This record keeping allows the neoliberal agenda to enforce accountability measures in schools (Portelli & Konecny, 2013).

When thinking about the current culture of education it is important for school leaders to be critical and think about how to "challenge the existing social order" (Lipman, 2017, p. 594). English (2013) used a critical lens to view current school reform. According to English:

> We must be clear about who is benefitting from the implementation of their agenda and who is not:
>
> - The real agenda is not about improving test scores, but selling more tests;
> - The real agenda is not about improving curricular rigor, but about standardizing curriculum in order to sell more books, materials, and computers to implement that curriculum;
> - The real agenda is not about improving teaching and the life of teachers, but simplifying teaching with standardized evaluations, thus reducing the need for specialization and expertise and with it overall labor costs;
> - The real agenda is not to improve public education, but to sell it to the highest bidder in the form of vouchers and charter schools and to create markets for EMO's (Education Management Organization) to penetrate, profitize, and proliferate;
> - The real agenda is not to equalize learning, thus reducing the achievement gap, but to permit the extension of the gap by erasing the need to have

> outstanding schools for all children under the guise of choice to rationalize our collective failure to effectively educate children of the poor. (p. 58)

With the focus of accountability in public schools, everything is measured by test scores (Lipman, 2017). This leads to labeling of both students and schools. Labeling students and schools as "failing" or "successful" relies on a deficit mindset (Lipman, 2017). According to Lipman, "most African American and Latino/a, are measured against the 'success' of schools that are generally more white, more middle-class" (p. 584). According to Lipman, "By defining the problem of education as standards and accountability they made simply irrelevant any talk about humanity difference, democracy, culture, thinking, personal meaning, ethical deliberation, intellectual rigor, social responsibility, and joy in education" (p. 587). Lipman (2017) suggested that there needs to be more discourse that challenges what is happening in education.

Politics in Curriculum

To understand the politics in curriculum, it is important to understand power and who has it in education (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). According to Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin (2005), "politics is conflict, culminating in powerful allocating value, determining who gets what" (p. 5). Politics are embedded in the curriculum in schools (Apple, 2013). Challenging the politics in education happens by looking at the curriculum in schools critically. According to English (2010), "The content of schooling in all of its forms (written and unwritten) is called the curriculum" (p. 5). This is a broad definition much like Greene's (2017), "Curriculum from the learner's standpoint ordinarily represents little more than an arrangement of subjects, a structure or socially

prescribed knowledge, or a complex system of meanings which may or may not fall within his grasp" (p. 155). English (2010) highlighted three types of curriculum in schools that echo what Walker and Soltis (2009) reported: formal, informal, and the hidden curriculum. The formal curriculum refers to the scope and sequence of standards and state regulations and includes curriculum maps and guides. The informal curriculum refers to the unofficial curriculum, for example how the teacher interacts with the students either positively or negatively. The hidden curriculum is the curriculum that is taught unconsciously. This is where the norms in the school are taught; these are things such as students should maintain eye contact when talking to adult (Walker & Soltis, 2009).

Another type of curriculum Henderson and Gornik (2007) described is the null curriculum. This is the part of the curriculum that is not taught; it is consciously or unconsciously avoided. For example, this may be a topic that a teacher chooses not to teach because he or she may feel uncomfortable with that topic or may not even think to teach the topic. Therefore, the students are learning that the topic is not important or worth teaching. Glatthorn and Jailall (2009) shared seven types of curriculum the principal needs to think about: recommended, written, taught, supported, assessed, learned, and hidden curriculum. The recommended curriculum is what scholars recommend, which aligns to the common core standards. The written curriculum is how the curriculum is written in state and local documents. This can be standards, curriculum maps, and what teachers write in their planning. The taught curriculum is what the teachers teach each day. The supported curriculum includes resources that support the

curriculum such as textbooks and online programs. The assessed curriculum is what shows up on state, district, and classroom tests. The learned curriculum is anything the students learn. The hidden curriculum is what is unintended to be taught but students learn it anyways (Glatthorn & Jailall, 2009).

Part of the neoliberal agenda in schools is to have a national curriculum and testing program. According to Apple (2001), "a national curriculum and especially a national testing program are the first and most essential steps towards increased marketization" (p. 84). Once national curriculum and tests are created then schools can be compared even more side by side with the data (Apple, 2013). Apple (2003, 2017) indicated that states decide whose knowledge is important. One way the state decides whose knowledge is important is by the textbooks that are purchased. According to Apple (2003), "In the United States, for example, a complicated process has evolved in which state textbook adoption committees found largely in the South and West have an immense influence on what gets published and sold for use in schools" (p. 8). An example of this is found in the reality that many political and education tensions come from Texas and California, where a lot of textbook companies are located (Apple, 2003). Some states give money to schools to only buy certain state-adopted textbook materials; therefore more money is available for commercially produced curriculum (Apple, 2003). When referring to texts, Apple (2017) said, "As part of a curriculum, they participate in no less than the organized knowledge system of society. They participate in creating what a society has recognized as legitimate and truthful" (p. 82). Apple's analysis supports Portelli and Konecny's (2013) thoughts about curriculum.

According to Portelli and Konecny (2013), "democracy in education calls for a curriculum that takes life seriously in its entirety, not just those aspects that continue to privilege certain groups" (p. 95). Schools continue to use curriculum that according to Gay (2010), "are taught from the middle-class, Eurocentric frameworks that shape school practices" (p. 22). Many educators teach using conventional teaching strategies that come from European American cultural values and they do not even realize it (Gay, 2010). According to Fraise and Brooks (2015):

> If culture is generally understood as customs, beliefs and composed of traditions, practices, and behaviors, then school culture is made up of formal and informal dynamics related to espoused and hidden curricula, instructional strategies, administrator-teacher-staff-student interaction, language, communication, and policy development and implementation. (Fraise & Brooks, 2015, p. 11)

Quite often for students, the culture at school does not match their culture at home. Most schools consist of predominantly White staff, which means there is a dominance of White culture in books and curriculum, even if the majority of the students are not White (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). These factors in schools lead to deculturalization, which according to Herbst (1997, as cited in Fraise & Brooks, 2015), is "the stripping away of a person's native identity and cultural beliefs" (p. 13). When our students go through deculturalization, they lose their identity and conform to the dominant culture (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). Henderson and Gornik (2007) expressed the importance of teachers teaching through the curriculum wisdom paradigm. In this paradigm teachers examine the role that power plays in their teaching. They look at what

Henderson and Gornik (2007) referred to as power over and power with relationships. Power over relationships is when teachers use their power to take command or control over the classroom and the students. The students feel they need to please the teacher and get good grades. The power with relationships focuses on where students and teachers mutually respect each other. Students are encouraged to be creative and teachers are flexible with their instruction (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). Teachers being aware of their power can help students from losing their culture to the dominant culture.

Since the curriculum is part of everything students are learning in school and is controlled by the dominant group, it is important for principals to look at the curriculum in their school critically, through the lens of critical pedagogy. Principals need to lead teachers in asking what knowledge is being taught in schools and evaluate how they are taught (McLaren, 2017). According to McLaren, schools can be "a cultural terrain that promotes student empowerment and self-transformation" (p. 57). This means educators can empower students to think critically about social justice issues and challenge the dominant class interests instead of reproducing them. Henderson and Gornik (2007) talked about teaching the subject matter in a way where educators also incorporate democratic self and social learning. They call this 3S understanding: subject, self, and social. This type of teaching goes beyond just teaching the standards and preparing students for a test. Instead it focuses on teaching democratic values that will help students to be part of society (Henderson & Gornik, 2007).

What is Student Achievement?

With the rise and current influence of the accountability movement, it is important to understand how student success is defined (Turgut, 2013). According to Noddings (2013), "Almost all attention now focuses on outcomes in the form of test scores" (p. 52). With No Child Left Behind, success was achieved by scoring proficient on the standardized tests in math and reading (Turgut, 2013). According to Turgut, Race to the Top "defined success as students' achievement in reading/language arts and mathematics, an increase in high school graduation rates, an increase in college enrollment, and an emphasis on higher-order thinking skills through the CCSS initiative" (p. 67). With the accountability measures in place, success is limited to how students do on standardized tests (Turgut, 2013). The problem with measuring student success on standardized test scores is that educators are then reinforcing what the dominant class determined as important knowledge (McLaren, 2017). According to McLaren, "knowledge is a *social construction* deeply rooted in a nexus of power relations" (p. 58, emphasis in original). This means that tests were made for the dominant group to do well, which keeps the dominant group in power.

Turgut (2013) argued that since the U.S. compares their students to other countries, they should also look at how other countries define success for their students. Japan and China, two countries the U.S. looks up to in education, both define success based on individuality and creativity. They are moving away from standardization and uniformity. According to Turgut, "Currently, success is defined in a rigid, narrow, and uniform manner. This narrow definition will, in return, create rigid citizens who are

uniform in their thinking with diversity or creativity" (p. 68). One of the problems of judging student achievement on standardized testing is that you do not get a holistic approach of how students are learning (Grogan, 2004). According to Grogan:

> Students of color, students whose sexuality marginalizes them, poor students, and students who deal with disability may be particularly vulnerable to the homogenizing effects of the discourse on standardization and high-stakes testing. This is largely because little attention is paid to the different circumstances under which such students are struggling to get an education. (p. 227)

Standardized tests do not show the different circumstances that students are going through when they are getting an education. When students do not perform at benchmark on the standardized test, educators believe there is something wrong with that student, which creates a "Deficit Syndrome" (Gay, 2010). A "Deficit Syndrome" means educators focus on what students can't do and do not have, instead of looking at their strengths. This kind of thinking causes children to do poorly in school (Gay, 2010).

According to Gay (2010), "success does not emerge out of failure, weakness, does not generate strength, and courage does not stem from cowardice. Instead success begets success" (p 26). This means educators should think about how we define what student success looks like, because a deficit mindset can have a negative impact on students (Gay, 2010). Multicultural movements challenge deficit thinking and focus on what knowledge students bring from home (Sleeter & Flores-Carmona, 2017). According to Sleeter and Flores-Carmona, multicultural movements "have emphasized that expectations for children be held high and that means of evaluating student learning be

fair and broad enough to capture the full measure of what children know and can do" (p. 18). Unfortunately, the way schools measure student success through standardized tests does not show a full measure of what children know (Sleeter & Flores-Carmona, 2017). This reality influences the role of principals as instructional leaders.

Principal's Impact on Student Achievement

Supovitz et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative research study looking at how teachers perceived their principals as instructional leaders. They focused on the teachers' thoughts because the principals influenced the teachers, which then influenced students' performance. They relied on surveys completed by the teachers and looked for ways the teachers thought about how their principal was an instructional leader and their students' test scores correlated. Supovitz et al. found that principal leadership did cause a change in teachers' instruction. Also, fostering a community of collaboration and trust helped foster teachers working together, which led to peers influencing teachers' change in instruction (Supovitz et al., 2010).

May and Supovitz (2011) also conducted a study that focuses on the scope to which principals can affect individual teacher's practice. May and Supovitz gathered data using principal logs of their daily activities and teacher surveys. The findings from this study were that principals spent an average of 3 to 5 hours a week on instructional leadership activities. Teachers' responses to the survey were as follows: 10% reported having no instructional leadership contact with their principal, 68% reported having some instructional leadership contact, and 22% reported having high instructional leadership

contact. May and Supovitz also found that as principals, instructional leadership is more valuable among a small set of faculty with targeted influence for that faculty.

Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) conducted a study exploring how the principal influenced classroom instruction and student learning. They found that principals made the biggest difference on instruction and student achievement through the school-learning climate. They also found, "Academic demand and classroom behaviors are better among those teachers who believe they have received high-quality Professional Development and where the instructional programing in the school is coherent and well aligned" (p. 643). Leithwood, Patten, et al. (2010) conducted a study looking at the four paths of instruction that influenced student learning. These four paths were: rational, emotions, organization, and family paths. They found that principals had the most influence on the organization path, and the smallest effect on student learning. However, they concluded that the family paths had the highest potential for impact on student achievement.

Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) conducted a similar study to Leithwood, Patten, et al. (2010) looking at how the principal influenced classroom instruction and student learning. They found the strongest influence in learning to be from the culture of the school. Sebastian and Allensworth concluded that, "Schools where teachers rate their principals highly are more likely to have strong learning climates; schools with strong learning climates are more likely to have strong instruction" (p. 642). These studies are important because they show that the principal can make a difference on student achievement through instructional leadership. The current literature is absent in defining

what student achievement means in schools. However, the subtext shows it is defined by how students do on tests.

The Principal as an Instructional Leader

In this section I explore the literature on the principal as an instructional leader. Instructional leadership is becoming more important for principals because of the accountability of state testing and what the scores mean for their school (Hallinger, 2005; Mestry et al., 2013; Printy & Marks, 2006; Urick & Bowers, 2014). There are many definitions of instructional leadership. Much of the literature on instructional leadership is focused on finding a definition of what instructional leadership means. Instructional leadership involves the principal focusing on activities and strategies to improve students' academic achievement (Wanzare & Da Costa, 2001, p. 272). According to Neumerski (2012), "The aims of instructional leadership are tied to the core work of schools: teaching and learning. Thus, instructional leadership practice must include the connection between instructional leadership and instruction itself" (p. 316). Principals are expected to understand instruction and be able to give teachers feedback to improve their teaching (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012).

Mestry et al. (2013) conducted a study looking at six elementary schools. Three of the schools needed to improve their test scores and three schools already had high test scores. They looked at what instructional leadership practices the principals at each school were using. Mestry et al. (2013) found effective schools had principals who showed the following instructional leadership practices:

> Well defined goals for schools, the promotion of self and staff development, the use of their own teacher practices to inform teaching and learning in their own schools, the development of a climate in schools conducive to teaching and learning, the development of evaluation systems engendering teacher development and improvement, and the encouragement and motivation of teachers and learners to engage enthusiastically in the teaching and learning process. (p. S62)

Overall this study revealed the importance of principals continuing to learn to improve their practice and promoting teachers to continue learning as well.

Similar to Mestry et al.'s (2013) study, Terosky (2014) found that instructional leadership should have a learning imperative. She defined learning imperative as acquisition of new skills in a way that demands attention. It moves beyond just the tasks of instructional leadership and into a deeper idea of principals leading learning for their teachers. Terosky identified two learning imperative themes: grounding the purpose of a school in learning and valuing and fostering professional growth for the adults in the building. The first learning imperative, grounding the purpose of school in learning, means that principals were helping their teachers to acquire new skills to use in their teaching. Principals did this by creating schedules that allowed teachers to collaborate and learn together, and modeling being a learner. The second learning imperative, valuing and fostering professional growth, was seen as teachers always wanting to learn more. Some of the things principals did to value and foster professional growth focused

on providing Professional Development, having teachers present to each other, completing action research, and completing peer observations (Terosky, 2014).

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) have three dimensions of instructional leadership broken down into instructional leadership functions. The first dimension of instructional leadership was defining the school's mission. This was comprised of the leadership functions of framing and communicating the school's goals. The second dimension of instructional leadership was managing the instructional program. This was made up of the leadership functions of supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress. The third dimension of instructional leadership was promoting a positive school learning climate. This was made up of the leadership functions of protecting instructional time, promoting Professional Development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, and providing incentives for learning.

Ruff and Shoho (2005) studied the mental models of three elementary principals and communicated about how they are instructional leaders. Each principal was in a different stage of his or her career and enacted instructional leadership differently. The first administrator thought that data collection, working with teachers, and building collegiality among staff were the most important components of instructional leadership. Another administrator viewed instructional leadership as creating an environment where everyone felt successful. The third administrator felt he or she was an instructional leader by challenging the status quo, maintaining conflict, and shielding teachers from systematic distractions so they could focus on teaching their students. Ruff and Shoho's

(2005) study showed varying viewpoints, which were similar to Leithwood and Seashore Louis's (2012) findings about the two behaviors in which instructional leaders engage to influence instruction. The first behavior was instructional ethos, which is the culture principals built around instruction. The second behavior was the instructional actions, which are the explicit instructional practices principals engage in such as giving teachers direct instructional support. The studies showed the different ways principals are instructional leaders in their building.

Rigby (2014) conducted a study looking at three logics of instructional leadership: prevailing logic, entrepreneurial logic, and social justice logic. These three logics overlap and an administrator usually does not just fit into one of the three logics. Prevailing logic refers to the principal as both an instructional leader and a manager in a school setting. Entrepreneurial logic focuses on instructional leaders looking at data to make decisions and drive their leadership. Social Justice logic focuses on fostering equality in schools and to change beliefs in the schools (Rigby, 2014). This is similar to Reitzug et al.'s study (2008), which focused on learning about what principals think about instructional leadership. This study found that there are four types of instructional leadership: relational, linear, organic, and prophetic.

Reitzug et al. (2008) interviewed 20 administrators to see which category they felt they belonged to when it came to instructional leadership and why. Relational instructional leaders find that forming relationships are the best way to help teachers and students improve achievement. Linear instructional leaders focus on data alone to guide instruction. Organic instructional leaders look at the teachers' practices to see what they

need. These types of leaders try to build teacher capacity through activities like action research. The last type of instructional leader is prophetic. This means they try to focus on moral leadership and work in the school building as a community. The study found that the highest number of principals were located in the linear category, using data to inform their practice. Even though Reitzug et al. (2008) and Rigby (2014) found different types of instructional leadership, each type of leadership focused on the same big ideas, such as increasing student achievement and supporting teachers. Understanding these types of instructional leadership can be helpful for principals who are trying to find what style of leadership works for them.

Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman, and Simieou (2010) conducted an empirical study that focused on how principals have shifted from managers in schools to more of instructional leaders because of No Child Left Behind. No Child Left Behind has influenced how principal preparation programs have added a focus of having future leaders learn how to implement and monitor curriculum in schools. In the Grigsby et al. study, 35 principals in Houston were interviewed to identify themes of how administrators thought of themselves as instructional leaders. The findings from the study suggested that elementary principals knew more about curricular issues happening in the school. Middle school principals focused more on helping teachers through professional development and helping them implement new strategies for teaching. High school principals delegated their instructional leader jobs to leadership teams in the school.

Supovitz et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative research study that explored how principals and peers can influence change in instruction and how this impacted student achievement. They found that principal leadership did cause a change in teachers' instruction. According to Supovitz et al. (2010), "principals who focus on instruction, foster community and trust, and clearly communicate school mission and goals are associated with teachers who report making a greater degree of changes to their instructional practice" (p. 44). They also found that peers having time for instructional conversations and time to talk about teaching and learning increased a change in instructional practices. Their final finding was, "Educational leadership influences instructional practice, which changes student performance" (p. 45). This study found that principal leadership does have an indirect impact on student achievement. This study builds on this work by looking into the ways principals work as instructional leaders in standardized schools.

Limitations of Instructional Leadership

Scholars and practitioners know about the importance of instructional leadership in schools (Terosky, 2014). However, one of the reasons instructional leadership is continuously researched is that it has many challenges of implementation in the school. Managerial responsibilities have the potential to take up all of the principals' time on a day-to-day basis (Terosky, 2014). Fullan (2014) highlighted how having a narrow view of instructional leadership can lead to micromanagement and that it can be time consuming (p. 39). Wanzare and Da Costa (2001) came up with nine constraints of instructional leadership: role complexity, time, lack of principal training in instructional

leadership, insufficient incentives, role diversity, personal factors, teachers' views about the principal as an instructional leader, lack of resources, and legal issues.

May and Supovitz (2011) studied the time spent and scope of instructional leadership. They found that instructional leadership could be broad and focus on the entire staff or targeted and just focus on individual teachers. They found that targeted instructional leadership helped to make bigger changes in the school faculty. However, having a balanced approach between the entire faculty and individual faculty is best. O'Doherty and Ovando (2013) studied instructional leadership challenges for new principals. They found many challenges that can come with being a new principal and trying to enact instructional leadership: succession of another principal's leadership, implementing existing plans from a previous leader, motivating the teachers to change, and the complexity of advocating for change. These are some of the challenges on which new principals reflected in their practice and felt that to focus on academic achievement they needed to build professional relationships with other stakeholders and develop a collaborative culture between staff that focuses on teaching and learning (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013).

Shared Instructional Leadership

The role of instructional leadership has evolved from the 1980s. In the 1980s it was thought that the principal as the instructional leader was the source of expertise in the school (Marks & Printy, 2003). According to Wanzare and Da Costa (2001) one strategy for dealing with the difficulties of instructional leadership was through sharing instructional leadership responsibilities with the teachers in the building. This involves

creating a sense of collegiality with staff and building a culture of collaboration with teachers. Marks and Printy noted, "Shared instructional leadership involves the active collaboration of principal and teachers on curriculum, instruction, and assessment" (p. 371). According to Printy and Marks (2006), principals cannot improve instruction or student achievement alone. Printy and Marks found the "best results occur in schools where principals are strong leaders who also facilitate leadership by teachers; that is, principals are active in instructional matters in concert with teachers whom they regard as professionals and full partners" (p. 130). Urick and Bowers (2014) found that in shared instructional leadership the teachers and principal share the responsibility for leadership around instruction. Principals shifting their thinking of the school as a learning community can substitute the need for direct leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992).

In shared instructional leadership, "teachers assume responsibility for their professional growth and for instructional improvement" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 374). Instructional leadership comes from both the principal and the teachers in the building (Marks & Printy, 2003). When principals share the instructional leadership, the school can perform at a higher level and principals are less likely to get burnt out (Marks & Printy, 2003). May and Supovitz (2011) found the average administrator spends between 0% to 25%, or 3 to 5 hours a week on instructional leadership. This study helped to show the importance of shared instructional leadership, because principals do not have time to do everything that is related to instruction in the building on their own.

Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, and Thomas (2007) felt that leadership teams, which included administrators, lead teachers, specialists, and special education teachers along

with faculty teams, can analyze student data as a form of instructional leadership. Supovitz et al. (2010) found in their study that fostering a community of collaboration and trust helped get teachers working together, which led to peers influencing teachers' change in instruction. The researchers found that peer influence had a greater influence on instruction than principal leadership and it is, "Through fostering a climate of instructional collaboration, principals have the greatest impact on learning" (p. 46).

Sharing instructional leadership with teachers can reinforce what the principal is trying to do as an instructional leader, as well as help the principal to be a better instructional leader (Printy, Marks, & Bowers, 2009). In a study conducted by Printy et al. (2009), one principal used shared instructional leadership through various committees; such as a planning committee for maintaining the school vision and a curriculum and instruction committee for maintaining a scope and sequence for learning objectives. Another principal in the study used shared instructional leadership for teachers to plan choice courses to teach each year as part of the buildings professional development (Printy et al., 2009). Overall, the research shows the importance of principals using shared instructional leadership practices. According to Marks and Printy (2003):

> When the principal elicits high levels of commitment and professionalism from teachers and works interactively with teachers in a shared instructional leadership capacity, schools have the benefit of integrated leadership; they are organizations that learn and perform at high levels. (p. 393)

It is important for principals to share the responsibility of being an instructional leader because a principal cannot be an expert in everything when it comes to curriculum and instruction (Fullan, 2014).

Curriculum Leadership

According to D. L. Ball and Cohen (1996), "our system lacks strong curricular guidance" (p. 6). Curriculum leadership is an area of instructional leadership that has not received a lot of attention (Murphy, 1990). The literature for instructional leadership supported that principals need to understand and monitor the curriculum in their building (Hallinger, 2005; Mestry et al., 2013; Printy & Marks, 2006; Urick & Bowers, 2014). It is important that principals know and understand the curriculum in their building because of the influence of politics on curriculum (Apple, 2003). According to Glatthorn and Jailall (2009), curriculum can be defined as "the exercise of those functions that enable school systems and the schools to achieve their goal of ensuring quality in what students learn" (p. 37). Glatthorn and Jailall came up with a definition to encompass all leaders including administrators and teacher leaders working together towards improving student learning. Gramsci (2001, as cited in Ylimaki, 2012) viewed curriculum leadership as a way for leaders to "guide curriculum in ways that potentially modify relations between social classes" and for "influencing policy" (p. 314).

Ylimaki (2012) completed a study where she had four findings of what curriculum leadership means. Her first finding was critical curriculum leaders do not ignore policy and testing requirements from the state. Instead, "they purposely question underlying assumptions of these practices" (Ylimaki, 2012, p. 341). Second, "curriculum

leadership is inherently political work" (Ylimaki, 2012, p. 341). Principals cannot lead curriculum and ignore what is required in the accountability policies. The third thing she found was that curriculum leadership requires leaders to know their beliefs and be self-aware of their interpretations of responding to policies. The last thing Ylimaki found was, "curriculum leaders clearly have the opportunities to interrupt and change these ideological constructions through curriculum development" (p. 342). Curriculum leadership needs to be collective and shared with the teachers and staff in the building (Ylimaki, 2012).

Creating a Culture of Learning

One part of the principal being an instructional leader is creating a culture of learning (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009). This includes how the entire organization learns. Schools with a strong culture thrive when decisions focus on improving student learning. This includes reinforcing reflection and inquiry as a part of the daily work for educators (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009). Principals have to model the belief to teachers that all students can learn and when students are not making progress, help brainstorm what the problem may be. This means confronting personal biases. According to Kohl (1994):

> Central to what you see in someone is what you are looking for. If you want to find a child's weaknesses, failures, personal problems, or inadequacies, you'll discover them. If you look at a child though the filter of her or his environment or economic status, and make judgments through the filters of your own cultural, gender, and racial biases, you'll find the characteristics you expect. You'll also

> find yourself well placed to reproduce failure and to develop resistance in some children, a false sense of superiority in others. (p. 44)

Kohl suggested the importance of educators understanding their own biases when making judgments about students.

Students sometimes make the choice not to learn even though they are capable of learning (Kohl, 1994). Principals as instructional leaders have to help teachers determine if students are choosing not to learn and be molded by society's standards of what students should learn, or if there is another reason deterring a student from understanding what is being taught. According to Kohl (1994), "deciding to actively not-learn something involves closing part of oneself and limiting one's experience" (p. 4). It is hard work for students to reject learning, but it does appear as if they are failing to learn. Therefore, it is important for educators to understand when a child is making the choice not to learn and why they are making that choice (Kohl, 1994). The literature on instructional leadership does not discuss ways that principals can help students who are choosing not to learn. This is an important aspect of any study of instructional leadership but it is of particular importance given the high stakes pressures on principals to improve test scores.

The Aims of Education

It is important that principals understand the aims of education when they are thinking about instructional leadership and what the aim of education should be (Walker & Soltis, 2009). According to Noddings (2013), "aims are general statements of concern to which we turn when asked (asking ourselves) why we are doing certain things" (p. 45).

Walker and Soltis (2009) examined the aims of education by exploring the teachings of three philosophers from ancient Greece to the present. Plato saw the single aim of education to be a just society where everyone works in cooperation (Walker & Soltis, 2009). Rousseau believed the aim of education to be the recognition of everyone's individuality and allow children to develop freely without society shaping them (Walker & Soltis, 2009). Dewey believed that the aim of education was to fully comprehend democratic living (Walker & Soltis, 2009). He felt children should learn from experience and work together and learn from each other (Walker & Soltis, 2009). According to Noddings (2013), "In education, aims-talk is addressed to large questions seldom asked today. Most why questions, if they are asked at all, arise in connection with objectives and goals- ends at a lower, more specific level" (p. 40). Noddings (2013) suggested we look at aims as the big picture and how different subjects connect with each other and connected to a larger goal than just the lesson being taught. We should be asking ourselves large why questions to understand why we do what we do in schools today (Noddings, 2013).

Walker and Soltis (2009) discussed traditionalist and progressive viewpoints regarding curriculum taught and the aims of education. Progressives in education favor change, they believe society is always changing, experience is important for learning, and individuals must think for themselves. Traditionalists are not sure about change; they want to learn from the past; they feel students can be taught from the wisdom of adults; and academic disciplines are important for training students' minds. Walker and Soltis (2009) looked at three perspectives for the general education curriculum: the

subject- centered curriculum, the society-centered perspective, and the student-centered perspective. According to Walker and Soltis, "The subject-centered perspective—that education exists primarily to transmit knowledge to each new generation and prepare them to add to it—is perhaps the oldest idea of general education" (p. 35). The aims of education that matched this perspective had to do with basic skills and facts, critical thinking, problem solving, and study skills (Walker & Soltis, 2009).

According to Walker and Soltis (2009), "early in the twentieth century, progressive educators placed enormous emphasis on the social role of education and fought vigorously against what they saw as a narrow academic focus of the schools" (p. 36). The aims of education that matched this perspective had to do with civic responsibility, health, concern for others, and transformation of society (Walker & Soltis, 2009). The student-centered perspective in education is about schools helping students express themselves. The aims of education that matched this perspective were helping students to realize their individual talent, self-expression, building self-esteem, helping with mental health and looking at the health and safety of students (Walker & Soltis, 2009). Understanding these three aims of education may help teachers find a perspective they align with and help them to answer their own curriculum questions they may have while teaching (Walker & Soltis, 2009).

According to Noddings (2013), "When dramatic social or political changes occur, we may modify our aims, create new ones, or reorder our emphasis" (p. 40). Many times we have confused aims and goals, which results in unattainable goals in education (Noddings, 2013). Apple (2013) discussed the aims of the neoliberal agenda, which

creates aims of education that are about schools making money and looking at children like they are consumers, consuming a product. According to Sleeter and Flores-Carmona (2017), the aims of the standards-based reform is "making the United States more economically competitive globally by providing the business community with workers for a revamped economy and making future workers more employable by equipping them with skills employers seek" (p. 22). This type of thinking focuses all cultures into assimilating into the dominant culture Sleeter and Flores-Carmona (2017).

Instead of educating students with the purpose of the standards-based curriculum Sleeter and Flores-Carmona (2017) argued that a need for multicultural curriculum is more important. Sleeter and Flores-Carmona discussed the aims of the multicultural movement in curriculum and "defined the main purpose of curriculum as social improvement" (p. 17). According to Sleeter and Flores-Carmona, "multicultural movements situate underachievement within a range of equity issues, arguing that creating equitable conditions for learning will close achievement gaps" (p. 17). This aligns with Gay's (2010) thoughts when she talked about culturally relevant teaching and how many times our aims of education do not include understanding students' culture and heritage. According to Gay, many educators feel that "students, especially underachieving ones, need to learn knowledge and skills they can apply in life, and how to meet high standards of academic excellence, rather than wasting time of fanciful notions about cultural diversity" (p. 22). Instead however, educators need to change their thinking about students and understand the knowledge students bring with them to school (Sleeter & Flores-Carmona, 2017).

When thinking about what effective curriculum is in schools, it is helpful to go back to what educators define as success in school. Previously in the literature review it was discussed how most states define academic achievement as how students perform on mathematics and reading tests. However, according to Fraise and Brooks (2015), "culturally relevant pedagogy is focused on academic and nonacademic success" (p. 15). Thinking about culturally relevant pedagogy is how to create a curriculum in schools that is equitable for the students that attend (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). According to Gay (2010), "culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance studies of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to students" (p. 31). Ladson-Billings (2009) said, "culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society" (p. 140). This approach to teaching includes curriculum that is constantly changing to meet the needs of the students (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). According to Fraise and Brooks, curriculum "should constantly change, and they should be responsive to changes in the culture, both those in the building, as well as those in the community, the nation, and the world" (p. 16). This approach to teaching creates a curriculum where students and teachers are learning together (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). This goes along with Freire's (1970) thinking about teaching.

It is important that curriculum is not taught in a way that the teacher knows the information and deposits it into their students; this is considered the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970). "In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift

bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those they consider to know nothing" (p. 72). Freire suggested that instead, the curriculum should focus on problem-posing education and education that focuses on dialogue that promotes critical thinking. According to Freire, "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (p. 93). According to Ladson-Billings (2016), many schools focus on a skills based approach to the curriculum instead of an integration of arts and other creative forms of learning. Instead schools should think about "what to include in the curriculum is not only subject to what is happening in society, it is also subject to the prevailing conceptions of the curriculum" (Ladson-Billings, 2016, p. 103).

Noddings (2013) expressed the importance of educators understanding what the aims of education are and those aims should help decide what curriculum will be taught. According to Noddings (2013), "Offering a variety of curricula does not mean putting together a set of courses labeled *easy*, *average*, and *hard* and then equating *hard* with *best*. It means cooperatively constructing rigorous and interesting courses centered on students' interests and talents" (p. 432). There are many things that may influence teachers' teaching practices such as: standards, textbooks, technology, and research about ways that students learn (Cirillo, Drake, & Herbel-Eisenmann, 2009). Cirillo et al. believed the one thing that is always the same for the teachers is how they interact with their students. "Ultimately, the teacher's job is to do what is best for his or her students" (Cirillo et al., 2009, p. 74). One way teachers can help all students access challenging curriculum is to have high expectations for all students (Smith, Frey, Pumpian, and

Fisher, 2017). However, this requires educators to put structures in place to help their students be successful with the curriculum (Smith et al., 2017).

Responding to the Accountability

According to Grogan (2004), "most Americans look forward to eliminating achievement and other gaps in schools" (p. 226). This is the goal of all the reforms that have been implemented in the history of the United States. However, according to Grogan (2004) educators need to question the reforms and ask "whose interests do they really have at heart?" (p. 226). This is why with the many pressures of accountability that principals face, they have to decide how they will respond to the politics and demands of it (Shipps & White, 2009). S. J. Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins (2011) completed a study looking at the different policy actors, which are people who had an influence on the policies in schools, and how they responded to the policies and accountability. These policy actors could be the administrators, teachers, community members, and outside consultants who are brought into the district for professional development. The first type of policy actor they looked at were the narrators. These actors are the narrators of the school and are usually the administrators. They help to create the story of the school and make meaning of the policies and how they fit in with what teachers are doing. The second type of policy actors are the entrepreneurs. These actors advocate for policy and try to integrate it with good practice in education (S. J. Ball et al., 2011).

The third type of policy actors are the outsiders. These actors are not inside the school, but can help with interpreting and understanding the policies. These are

consultants and other people who may help with Professional Development (PD; S. J. Ball et al., 2011). The fourth type of actors are the policy transactors. They are the ones that monitor policies and look at the effectiveness of teachers. The fifth and sixth type of actor go together. These are the policy enthusiasts and translators. They model what policy should look like in practice and how it translates into teachers' classrooms. The seventh type of policy actor is the critics. These are usually union representatives that look at policies as a threat to the members of the unions (S. J. Ball et al., 2011). The last type of policy actors are the receivers (S. J. Ball et al., 2011). These are the new teachers who are looking for guidance and do not see the big picture of schools yet. They focus on managing and working in their own classroom. These seven policy actors, which may be multiple actors in the organizations, are working together on how policies happen in schools. As people are at different points in their career they may change how they look at policies and what kinds of responsibilities they take on in their school (S. J. Ball et al., 2011).

Fullan (2014) discussed the influence the accountability movement had on increased de-professionalization, which is why Fullan argues that principals have to decide how they spend their time. They could waste their time working with the accountability system to try and improve teaching, or principals could work towards building professional capital in teachers and being a lead learner. According to Fullan, "if you give people skills (invest in capacity building), most of them will become more accountable" (pp. 26-27). Grogan (2004) shared how school leaders can deal with the accountability movement. She suggested that educators look critically at what is driving

the reform. According to Grogan, "We can resist the arguments that do not fit with our view of the purpose of education" (p. 231). Grogan (2004) and Ylimaki (2012) expressed that principals can respond to the accountability by taking an activist stance. According to Grogan (2004), "Grounded in principles of equity, equality, and diversity, educational leaders can move the ethical agenda forward" (p. 236). This is why leading for social justice is so important during school reform (Grogan, 2004). Principals need to take a critical stance and help lead their teachers into thinking critically about the pedagogy in the school (McLaren, 2017). Otherwise educators will continue to move the neoliberal agenda forward and teach using the dominant educational practices that oppress historically marginalized populations. How principals respond as instructional leaders is an important aspect of this study.

Justice Oriented Leadership

In Theoharis's (2007) study he defined social justice leadership as when "principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice and vision" (p. 223). Grogan (2004) discussed the importance of social justice leadership when leading during reform movements. According to Grogan, "we have a moral responsibility to ask probing questions about who benefits from our educational policies and practices and who loses out" (p. 223). When we ignore where students are coming from and their culture, and just focus on the reform movement in schools, educators can further harm socially marginalized populations (Grogan, 2004).

Shields (2004) examined how educational leaders lead for social justice. According to Shields, "one of the central interventions of educational leaders must be the facilitation of moral dialogue" (p. 110). This includes giving all students the chance to learn in a socially just environment. Shields (2004) shared three concepts that educational leaders must do to challenge education. Shields highlighted how "educators must become transformative leaders, develop positive relationships with students such that children may bring their own lived experiences into the school and classroom, and facilitate moral dialogue" (p. 113). It is important, especially with all of the reforms happening in education, that educators think about how their current practices are marginalizing students (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). If educators look at students' lived experiences as a way to teach students, instead of deficit thinking it will help to empower all children to learn (Shields, 2004).

Mullen (2008) found democratically accountable leadership as a way to enact social justice leadership. She defined democratically accountable leadership as merging democracy, which she defined as collaborative decision making and working atmosphere, with accountability which she referred to as sharing responsibilities with all of the school stakeholders. Many times people think of accountability as a bad thing. However, Mullen argued that a democratically accountable leader can use the accountability to work as a democracy on issues of equity (Mullen, 2008). This went along with what Marshall and Oliva's (2010) thought about educational leaders having the opportunity to have an impact on societal change. According to Marshall and Oliva, "leadership for social justice interrogates the policies and procedures that shape schools and at the same

time perpetuate social inequalities and marginalization due to race, class, gender, and other markers of difference" (p. 31). Educational leaders can challenge the policies in place and create an environment where equitable practices are in place for the students (Marshall & Oliva, 2010).

Summary

This review of the literature showed the impact school reform and accountability has had on education. Each reform has new requirements for schools to meet. The literature also demonstrates the importance of principals being instructional leaders in their building and the impact principals can have on student achievement. Principals have to reflect on what their aims are for the students in their school and what is the purpose of educating students. The research demonstrates the range of how principals can choose to respond to the demands of school reform. One way principals can respond to the reform is to follow the policies and conform to a neoconservative agenda where they encourage teachers to teach to the test and do what is needed to ensure high test scores.

Another way principals can respond is to take a more critical stance, in which they question who benefits from the accountability movement and instead focus on equitable learning for all students (Fullan, 2014). Principals need to reflect on what they value in instruction, and how they choose to lead as an instructional leader. Enacting instructional leadership with an equity focus and working with teachers to use culturally relevant pedagogy can be challenging when there are so many pressures put on principals by the federal, state, and district reforms. This is why it is important to understand how

urban elementary principals who face accountability everyday in their jobs are able to enact instructional leadership in their building.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this bounded case study was to explore how urban elementary principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 urban elementary public schools at a time where principals are held accountable for their schools state test scores. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 schools?
2. To what extent do principals' beliefs, attitudes, values, and/or lived experiences influence how they understand instructional leadership?
3. To what extent do principals' beliefs, attitudes, values, and/or lived experiences influence how they engage in instructional leadership?
4. How do principals understand integrity and accountability in schools?

In this study, the researcher explored how urban elementary principals' beliefs, attitudes, and lived experiences influence how they enact instructional leadership in their schools. This chapter includes the design of the study, how entre was gained for the study, an overview of participant selection, and a timeline of how the study was conducted. I also included how data were collected and analyzed, as well as the trustworthiness of the study.

Design of the Study

The goal of the research conducted in the study was to understand the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and lived experiences in a very specific setting. Researchers who are seeking to learn this information typically use qualitative research as

their methodology. Qualitative research looks to "understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and experiences" (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). Qualitative research looks to understand the participant in their natural setting and how the participants make sense of their everyday lives (Hatch, 2002). According to Hatch, "qualitative methods provide means whereby social contexts can be systematically examined as a whole, without breaking them down into isolated, incomplete, and disconnected variables" (p. 9). Since urban school districts typically have higher percentages of minority students and students living in poverty than their surrounding suburban or rural districts, the setting of this study was a deliberate choice. In this study the context was explored using interviews, a school walk, and documents the principals had that related to instructional leadership.

In qualitative research the researcher is the instrument for data collection (Merriam, 2002). The openness of qualitative research allowed me as the researcher to ask questions and make discoveries throughout the research process (Glesne, 1999). Glesne noted the benefits of conducting a qualitative study is "the open, emergent nature of interpretivist approaches means a lack of standardization; there are no clear criteria to package into neat research steps" (p. 6). The lack of standardization allowed for the study to go in whichever direction the data led.

The type of qualitative research conducted for this particular study was a bounded case study. Merriam (2002) described a case study as "an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as individual, group, institution, or community" (p. 8). This study focused on one particular urban school district and how

elementary principals enacted instructional leadership. Since, the case study focused on one particular system, it is considered a bounded system. A bounded system is "a single entity, a unit around where there are boundaries" (Merriam, 2002, p. 178). Merriam noted for a study to be considered a case study, "one particular program (bounded by a system), selected because it was typical, unique, experimental, or highly successful, etc., would be the unit of analysis" (p. 8). In this study there were three elementary principals from the same urban school district who were studied, so the bounded system was one urban school district. The study was conducted in the participants' environments, since that is where participants wanted to meet and felt comfortable.

Entre

This study included three urban elementary principals who worked at different K–5 schools in the same urban school district. To find principals to participate in the study I first emailed the assistant superintendent for the school district to ask permission to complete the study in the district. The assistant superintendent then directed me to the research office for the district, which approves research studies. I filled out a district application for approval to complete the research study. I also submitted proof of approval from my dissertation committee and an IRB from Kent State University. The district then sent an email to the 28 elementary principals and asked who would be willing to participate in the study.

Three principals responded that they would be willing to participate in the study. The district sent a letter to me verifying the study had been approved and listed the participants who would be participating in the study. The letter included stipulations,

such as interviews could not happen during the school day, the study could not disrupt the school day, and a video camera could not be used in any of the schools. This letter of approval had to be given to each participant during our first meeting. Therefore, each participant could see the stipulations for the study and the names of the participants in the study. The district also requested that a copy of the dissertation was sent to them when the study was completed. Participants were made aware of this during the first interview. When talking with participants I was transparent about the study and what would be involved in participation (Glesne, 1999).

Participants

The participants were selected by the school district. The school district sent an email to the principals to see who would be willing to participate in the study. I wanted to have at least three principal participants so saturation of data could be reached. I focused on three principals who worked in the same urban school district but each led a different elementary school. The reason I decided to study an urban school district was because they serve a diverse population and have felt the increased demands from the accountability movement (Harris, 2012). Once given the list of participants who agreed to be in the study I sent them an email introducing myself and told them what the study is about, and asked them when we could meet to either talk about the study or complete our first interview.

During the first interaction I worked to build trust with the participant so they would feel comfortable being a part of the study (Glesne, 1999; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All of the risks involved in the study were given to the participants, as well as what I

would be asking from them by participating in the study. One of the risks involved in the study was the district knowing who the participants were and wanting a copy of the dissertation directly sent to the district. Also, the district wanted a copy of the dissertation sent to the participants in the study. The participants knew who the other participants were, which made the study less confidential. In order to mitigate the loss of confidentiality and anonymity, the participants in this study are referred throughout the study with gender-neutral pronouns. Since, there were only three participants, keeping their identities gender neutral protects the participants' confidentiality and anonymity.

Timeline

I started by completing an introductory interview with each participant as a way to get to know them and build trust (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). At this interview I asked the participants for any documents they had such as curriculum maps and a vision and mission statement. Then, I started analyzing the data from the first interviews and the documents. I completed a second interview with the participants asking more in depth questions about instructional leadership, as well as any follow up questions I had from the first interview. I also asked the participants to go on a community walk and/or a school walk at a time that was convenient for them. The participants did not want to complete the community walk and just completed the school walk. It was difficult at times to get interviews scheduled with the participants. The participants had very busy schedules and many interviews were rescheduled multiple times.

Data Collection

The type of study I conducted was a bounded case study. According to Merriam (2002), "except for the selection of a 'bounded system,' qualitative case study researchers proceed in data collection and data analysis like other qualitative researchers" (p. 179). In a qualitative study, data are usually gathered through interviews, observation, and documents (Merriam, 2002, 2009). I chose to focus on collecting data through interviews, documents, and a school walk. This helped me to address my research questions by looking at three forms of data collection. The reason I chose to collect three different types of data was to have enough sources to complete triangulation of the data (Glesne, 1999; Hatch, 2002). Merriam (2009) stated:

> Triangulation using multiple sources of *data* means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people. (p. 216)

Triangulation was one of the ways I made the study more credible (Merriam, 2009). Table 1 shows the type of data collected for each question. It also includes the documents used for data collection.

Table 2 lists when each interview and school walk was completed with the participants. It also includes how much time each interview and school walk took to complete.

Table 1

Data Collection Chart

Research Question	Three Interviews with Each Principal	Documents Collected	School Walk with Each Principal
1. How do principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 elementary public schools?	X	● District's Focus ● Names of District Purchased Curriculums ● Curriculum Maps/ Pacing Guides ● Curriculum Documents (How to use the curriculum, etc.) ● Number of non-negotiable minutes per subject area ● Response to Intervention Pyramid for literacy ● Professional Learning Community Agendas and Minutes ● 90 Day Action Plan for Participant B's building	X
2. To what extent do principals' beliefs, attitudes and lived experiences influence how they understand instructional leadership?	X	● District's Focus ● Names of District Purchased Curriculums ● Curriculum Maps/ Pacing Guides ● Curriculum Documents (How to use the curriculum, etc.) ● Number of non-negotiable minutes per subject area ● Response to Intervention Pyramid for literacy ● Professional Learning Community Agendas and Minutes ● 90 Day Action Plan for Participant B's building	X
3.To what extent do principals' beliefs, attitudes, values, and/or lived experiences influence how they engage in instructional leadership?	X	● District's Focus ● Names of District Purchased Curriculums ● Curriculum Maps/ Pacing Guides ● Curriculum Documents (How to use the curriculum, etc.) ● Number of non-negotiable minutes per subject area ● Response to Intervention Pyramid for literacy ● Professional Learning Community Agendas and Minutes ● 90 Day Action Plan for Participant B's building	X

(*table continues*)

Table 1 (continued)

Data Collection Chart

Research Question	Three Interviews with Each Principal	Documents Collected	School Walk with Each Principal
4. How do principals understand integrity and accountability in schools?	X	● District's Focus ● Names of District Purchased Curriculums ● Curriculum Maps/ Pacing Guides ● Curriculum Documents (How to use the curriculum, etc.) ● Number of non-negotiable minutes per subject area ● Response to Intervention Pyramid for literacy ● Professional Learning Community Agendas and Minutes ● 90 Day Action Plan for Participant B's building	X

Table 2

Interview and School Walk Dates and Minutes

	Participant A Date and Time	Participant B Date and Time	Participant C Date and Time
Interview #1	5/2/18 – 30:09	6/20/18 – 42:40	6/20/18 – 39:24
Interview #2	5/14/18 – 34:29	6/21/18 – 32:17	6/21/18 – 47:08
Interview #3	2/12/19 – 24:13	3/20/19 – 38:17	3/21/19 – 48:57
School Walk	5/2/18 – 30 minutes	6/20/18 – 20 minutes	6/20/18 – 15 minutes

Interviews

Responsive interviews were conducted, which is a format of interviews from Rubin and Rubin (2012). "In responsive interviews, the researcher sets the overall subject for discussion and encourages replies that are detailed and in depth" (p. 99). The

importance of the interviews was to build relationships with the participants to address the research question. In the interviews I was looking for data that had depth and detail, so reoccurring themes could emerge (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

To develop a connection with the interviewee, the interviews started with surface level questions so the participant felt comfortable responding and did not feel threatened. Later in the interview after rapport was established, the interview questions became more complex. The last part of the interview was designed to close the interview in a way that left contact open with the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). There was a focus on making sure that the interviews were accurate and credible. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), "accuracy requires great care in how you obtain, record, and report what you have heard" (p. 64). Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed (Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews were transcribed within 24 hours of conducting each interview, which helped because it was easier to remember what the participants said (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Credibility of the interviews refers to choosing participants who can inform you about what you are researching (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews showed credibly by selecting urban principals who were credentialed and could draw from experiences to address the questions.

When developing interview questions the questions were well thought out and constructed ahead of time. However, I would ask follow up questions based on how the participant responded. According to Merriam (2009), "asking good questions is key to getting meaningful data" (p. 114). Open-ended questions were asked and presented in a related way; this assisted to get richer responses from the participants (Rubin & Rubin,

2012). Interview questions that were planned out were followed with probes to gather more information (Hatch, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). An important part of the interview process was being an active listener so probing questions could be asked during the interview (Hatch, 2002). Sample interview questions are included in the Appendix A.

Documents

Documents were also collected from the participants. According to Merriam (2009), "Documents include just about anything in existence prior to the research at hand" (p. 140). Documents were chosen to be collected because using documents along with interviews was a great way to use triangulation of data to ensure trustworthiness of the study (Glesne, 1999; Hatch, 2002). The documents collected were any form of curriculum documents the participants had available such as: the school's vision and mission on curriculum, the school district's educational goals, the building's 90 day plan, professional learning community notes, names of district purchased curriculums, curriculum maps/pacing guides, names of common assessments, and the building schedule. The documents from Participant A were collected after the first interview and school walk. The participant gathered binders of documents that were from the district and I took the binders to the school's office copier and copied the documents that pertained to the study. Participant B entrusted me with two binders that were about two inches thick to copy and return during the second interview. Participant C gave documents that pertained to his/her school such as information about the summer program that was happening at the time.

I went through all of the documents received and eliminated any documents for which I was given multiple copies. Many documents were duplicates because the principals all had the same district documents. Participant C only had a few building documents at the time because s/he was moving buildings. However, the documents participant C described in the interview were the same documents received from the other principals. After examining the documents I emailed the principals if a document was found that I had for one building but not another. For example, Participant B gave me the building's 90-day plan, so I asked the other participants for a copy of their 90-day plan through email. Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated, "documents are most useful when combined with in-depth interviews that allow you to discuss with their creators what they contain and how they were prepared" (p. 27). Reading through and analyzing the documents early on in the interview process made it easier to understand what the participants were referring to in later interviews. It also allowed for interview questions to be asked that pertained to the documents and their creation. An important factor I kept in mind while analyzing the documents was that data from documents were similar to interviews in the sense that it is someone's interpretation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The documents helped to support, expand, and challenge perceptions from interviews and observations (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 2009). The documents also helped to generate interview questions to ask the participant. "Documents and other unobtrusive measures provide both historical and contextual dimensions to your observations and interviews" (Glesne, 1999, p. 59). The documents gave a timeline of when the district's instructional programs were adopted by the school district. The documents were also

helpful because unlike interviews or observations there was no presence of the researcher, which can alter the study (Merriam, 2009). Part of collecting documents as data collection was checking that they were authentic and accurate. Most of the documents came from the school district and had the school district's logo on it, which helped verify it was an official document.

Community and School Walk

Originally the study included not only a school walk but also a community walk. The purpose of completing both walks with each participant was to gain a deeper understanding of the culture and how it related to the principal as an instructional leader. The community walk would have been an opportunity for the participant to walk with me around the community and talk about points of interest and things that are important in the community. I would have observed how people from the community interacted with the principal and explored how the principal viewed the community. The participants did not complete a community walk, which was originally part of my data collection, because they felt constrained by time. Since the participants' schools were Community Learning Centers, the participants felt the community came to the school. The school walk was an opportunity for the participant to give a tour of their school and show what they valued in the school. Also, I originally thought I would be able to gain insight on how staff members and students interacted with the principal. However, the school walks with the principals were after school hours because the school district did not want the study disrupting the school day. This could have affected the data collected because I was

hoping to see how the participants interacted with the teachers and students during the school day.

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis was to deductively look at the data and find insights into the research questions from the study (Merriam, 2009). Data analysis was ongoing throughout the data collection process. According to Merriam (2009), "without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed" (p. 171). Analysis started during interview transcriptions, which allowed for insights to be noticed as I was listening to the interview (Merriam, 2009). My deductive reasoning began with the premise that urban elementary principals may have a calling to lead through a critical lens.

During this time I was also reading through the documents to understand what information they contained. This way I had an understanding of the district and building information when I interviewed participants for the next round of interviews. The documents also helped to better understand what the participants were referring to in the first interview. I reread the data multiple times to see what new insights I could come across each time (Charmaz, 2014). During the process of collecting and analyzing data, I kept memos of reactions and reflections I had throughout the research process (Hatch, 2002). I also made sure to put any biases I had or any catchy quotes that I wanted to consider when analyzing the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

After reading through the data I started to develop codes. Merriam (2009) noted, "coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various

aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data" (p. 173). Codes were developed throughout the interview transcriptions. Once the interviews were coded I went through the documents and looked to see where the codes fit into the documents and if any additional codes could be added. I also used notes from the school walks to triangulate the data and see what was said in the interviews, written in the documents, and discovered during the school walk. I created a chart that had all of the data from the three sources of data collection, as well as the codes that were found.

After I completed coding I compared the codes to see which codes could go together and summarized my findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I started to look at themes that emerged from the data that addressed the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Preconceptions about the data were kept in mind as themes emerged. I needed to be aware of these preconceptions and I used the data to help strengthen my claims (Charmaz, 2014). In qualitative research there is no correct time to stop analyzing data. There are always more meanings to understand and stories to be told (Hatch, 2002). However, I knew that my findings were credible when I had reached a point of saturation, which refers to the point when you are no longer gathering data that reveals new insight for your study (Charmaz, 2006).

After collecting and analyzing the data I wrote up my findings. I included quotations from interviews and other examples from the data in the findings (Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I made sure my findings were thorough. Rubin and Rubin (2012) referred to being thorough as, "you followed up different lines of inquiry, paying attention to contradictions or unexpected findings, and that you examined alternative

views" (p. 226). I went through the findings multiple times and was able to notice any unexpected findings, as well as contradictions.

Trustworthiness

According to Glesne (1999), "the credibility of your findings and interpretations depends upon your careful attention to establishing trustworthiness" (p. 151). Triangulation was used in the study to make the data trustworthy. Triangulation refers to using multiple methods of data collection (Glesne, 1999; Hatch, 2002). Interviews, unobtrusive documents, and school walks were used as three sources of data; this allowed for the different types of data to be compared and assessed for trustworthiness. Another important step to ensure trustworthiness was member checking. This refers to going back to research participants to confirm themes and findings with them (Charmaz, 2006). Member checking is an important step to see if the researcher's interpretations of the data seem to be true (Merriam, 2009).

Trustworthiness was ensured in the study by addressing the issues of presence, selectivity, and subjectivity (Schram, 2006). Researchers need to be careful and think about how their presence in an environment can change what is happening in that setting. I was aware of this as I went into the participants' schools and interviewed and completed observations. Another area as a researcher I was careful of was selectivity. This means that the researcher is thinking about how their interests and what they select to focus on may change the trustworthiness of the study. I had to be aware of how my interest in instructional leadership could impact how I looked at the data that were collected. I read through the data multiple times trying to look at it objectively. I questioned my own

personal knowledge and emotions about what I saw as a researcher (Schram, 2006). I made sure to check my own biases before I entered the setting as a researcher (Glesne, 1999).

The credibility of the participants in the study also added to the trustworthiness. The participants should be knowledgeable about the research topic, have credentials that are persuasive to the reader, and address interview questions from past experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each participant in the study had been a principal for more than 10 years. I was not necessarily looking for principals with a particular amount of experience but it does mean that the participants had knowledge and experience in their field. Another strategy I used to gain trustworthiness in my study was having data to support each claim that I made (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Evidence from the participants' interviews, documents, or school walks was incorporated throughout the study.

Summary

In this dissertation study I explored how urban elementary principals enacted instructional leadership in K–5 elementary public schools at a time where principals are held accountable for their schools' state test scores. Throughout this chapter I demonstrated how utilizing a bounded case study helped explore the study's research question, given that the research questions were designed to develop a deeper understanding of how urban elementary principals' beliefs, attitudes, and lived experiences influence their ability to be an instructional leader in their school. I conducted qualitative interviews and collected documents from each participant. Data analysis was ongoing throughout data collection, and I relied on methods drawn from a

bounded case study. This study was designed to ensure trustworthy results that can explore how principals enact instructional leadership in their urban elementary schools.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this bounded case study was to explore how urban elementary principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 urban elementary public schools at a time where principals are held accountable for their schools' state test scores. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 schools?
2. To what extent do principals' beliefs, attitudes, values, and/or lived experiences influence how they understand instructional leadership?
3. To what extent do principals' beliefs, attitudes, values, and/or lived experiences influence how they engage in instructional leadership?
4. How do principals understand integrity and accountability in schools?

This qualitative bounded case study was bounded in a particular urban school district exploring how three elementary principals enacted instructional leadership in their K–5 elementary schools.

Drawing on a critical theoretical framework exploring culture and leadership, the study looked at how these all contribute to principals' beliefs, attitudes, and lived experiences and the influence it has on how they enact instructional leadership. The participants in the study completed three semi-structured interviews, took the researcher on a walk of the school, and provided the researcher building/district documents that were related to curriculum and instruction. Most of the documents were developed at the district level by a team of curriculum specialists and teachers, and were given to the

building principals by the district. The principals did not complete a community walk, which was originally part of the data collection.

In the findings section, I first present each participant individually, discussing their experiences and perceptions of being an instructional leader in their building. After, I went back and explored common themes that emerged from all three participants' data. The participants in the study are referred to using gender-neutral pronouns to better protect their confidentiality and anonymity.

Participants

Three principals participated in the study. The participants were selected by the school district. The school district sent an email to the principals in the district to see who would be willing to participate in the study. Each participant who responded to be a participant was an experienced principal with 10 years or more of experience.

Participant A

Participant A is a principal in a building with approximately 290 students. S/he has been a principal for 21 years and in his/her current building for seven years. Participant A has a background in social work and worked at children services. S/he was a play therapist and also helped open preschool programs in Bridges. S/he taught in the classroom and then became a principal. Participant A brought his/her background experiences to not only engage with families but the community as well. S/he had done a parent-to-parent group to work with a small group of parents and give them support. S/he also explained how s/he is involved in many community groups and these groups have become involved in the school.

The demographics of his/her school include: 100% economically disadvantaged students, 20.5% of students with disabilities, 55% White, 29% Black, and 14% Multiracial. As part of the data collection, three interviews were completed, a school walk, and documents from the school and district were collected. Participant A's school is located on a main road near the expressway. S/he explained that students did not walk out in the community, but instead the community comes into the school to do activities with the kids. Participant A walked me around the building and gave a tour of the elementary school, which is a Community Learning Center. They have many community events in the school. The school has a cafeteria with a stage and a wall to the gym that can be taken down. This allows for large family and community events to be held in both the cafeteria and gym.

During the school walk, Participant A showed off the classrooms in the school. The upstairs was for grades 3–5 and the downstairs was for grades K–2. The district is one-to-one, which means there are enough Chromebooks for each student to have their own at all times, and each classroom has a SmartBoard. There were large murals of the school mascot on the wall and signs that listed the expectations for students in each area of the building. Participant A explained these were part of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. Students could earn tickets from different staff members for following the expectations throughout the building. Students could then be part of a drawing to win prizes. Participant A also showed a case of prizes that students could look at as they walked to lunch or recess.

Participant B

The second participant, Participant B, is the principal in a building of approximately 515 students. S/he has been a principal for nine years and has been in his/her current building for four years. Before s/he became a principal, Participant B was a kindergarten teacher for seven years and then a literacy coach for seven years. Participant B feels that his/her experience as a literacy coach helps him/her to be an instructional leader more than being a teacher, but s/he does use what s/he knows from teaching as well. Participant B talked about how previously, when s/he was in a smaller building, s/he would go into classrooms and model lessons because of his/her background as an instructional coach.

The demographics of the school include: 100% economically disadvantaged, 14% of students with disabilities, 68% White, 20% Black, 3% Latinxs, and 9% Multiracial. Participant B's school is a Community Learning Center and was built in 2013. The school sits in the middle of a residential area and is surrounded by houses and located on a backstreet. Participant B said students run the neighborhood during the Girls on the Run running group. Students also walked to a local ice cream shop in Kindergarten as one of their field trips.

Participant B took me on a walk of his/her school where s/he showed the first floor, which were grades K–2, and the upstairs, which were grades 3–5. Every classroom has a SmartBoard and Wi-Fi, so students could get online with their Chromebooks. Each student is one-to-one with Chromebooks. The building can hold up to 600 students so there were plenty of classrooms for tutors and other specialists. The cafeteria and

gymnasium were built with a removable wall so they can be combined and the large area can be used for family and community events. The building has a video room where students are able to create morning announcements on TV for the entire building.

Participant C

When the study was started Participant C was in a building of approximately 400 students. S/he was in the building for 3 years. Participant C was a classroom teacher before becoming a principal. S/he feels like his/her teaching experience helped him/her know how to manage a class and s/he feels s/he manages the staff in the same way. The demographics of the school include: 100% economically disadvantaged, 10% of students with disabilities, 39% English Language Learners, 24% White, 32% Black, 3.5% Latinxs, 6.5% Multiracial, and 35% Asian. This school is located near an International Institute, which helps families relocate from their native country to the United States.

Participant C's first school was a Community Learning Center that was built in 2008. The school is set up so grades K–2 classrooms are on the first floor and grades 3–5 classrooms are on the second floor. The building has a large auditorium and gym in the building so family and community events can be held there. During the school visit, Participant C shared a group was hosting a special summer program in the school. This is a program for the English Language Learner students in the community. It gives students from 8:45–3:15 opportunities to learn about their cultural heritage, receive English Enrichment and complete fun activities. Participant C also explained the technology in the school and pointed out each SmartBoard and student Chromebook.

Participant C's most recent school has approximately 380 students. S/he has been a principal for 17 years and was new to the building this year. Within the school there are two classrooms for students with behaviors and two classrooms for students with Autism. The demographics of the school include: 100% economically disadvantaged, 25% of students with disabilities, 10% English Language Learners, 17% White, 57% Black, 8.5% Multiracial, and 14.5% Asian. This school is a Community Learning Center, which was opened to the students in 2010.

Overview of Findings

The purpose of this bounded case study was to explore how urban elementary principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 urban elementary public schools at a time where principals are held accountable for their schools state test scores. Four research questions guided this study and the data collection of interviews, documents, and a school walk. Three themes emerged during data analysis. The following three themes emerged: (a) instructional leadership was shaped by district focuses, (b) building positive school climate was important to principals as instructional leaders, and (c) principals in urban districts face a variety of challenges.

Instructional Leadership was Shaped by District Focuses

The first theme that emerged was, instructional leadership was shaped by district focuses. The participants in the study were from the same urban school district and enacted instructional leadership in similar ways. In this section I explore ways the participants enacted instructional leadership by: allocating resources for students,

working with instructional coaches and curriculum specialist, leveraging Professional Learning Communities, supporting district curriculum, and connecting with families.

Table 3

Data Analysis Chart

Data	Codes	Themes
English Learner services (C, #2, p. 4), (C, #2, p. 10)	Principals allocate resources for students	Instructional leadership was shaped by district focuses.
Tutors in the buildings (C, #1, p. 2), (A, #2, p. 5), (A, #3, p. 4) Tutors use Map to target skills (B, #2, p. 3), 20 community members to tutor (C, #3, p. 2), (A, #3, p. 2)		
One-to-one technology (B, #1, p. 7), (C, #1, p. 7) (SW)		
Instructional coaches in each building (SW) (A, #1, p.3), (B, #1, p. 6), (A, #2, p. 4), (A, #2, p. 5), (A, #2, p. 6), (B, #2, p. 5)	Instructional Coaches and Curriculum specialists	
Curriculum specialists and team of teachers create curriculum documents for the district. (D)		
Curriculum specialist at the district level for each content area (A, #2, p. 5)		
Principals meet with their instructional coaches to talk about data (A, #1, p. 5)		
Full time coach (B, #1, p. 6) (B, #2, p. 5), (A, #2, p. 1)		
Coaches model lessons for teachers (A, #2, p. 1)		
Teachers collaborating (A, #1, p. 3), (A, #1, p. 4), (B, #2, p. 2) building teamwork (B, #1, p. 3) (D)	Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)	
Teachers meeting vertically and horizontally by grade level (A, #1, p.5), (B, #1, p.4), (A, #2, p. 3), (A, #3, p. 4)		
Use data to inform instruction (A, #1, p. 3), (B, #1, p. 5), (C, #1, p. 1), (B, #3, p. 2) Uses MAP data (C, #1, p. 4), Look at growth (C, #2, p. 7), (C, #3, p. 1) (D) (SW)		
Look at instructional strategies (B, #1, p. 5) (D)		

Fluid small group instruction (A, #1, p. 3), Flexible Grouping (B, #3, p. 2)		

(*table continues*)

Table 3 (continued)

Data Analysis Chart

Data	Codes	Themes
Pacing Guides Framework (B, #1, p. 6), (C, #1, p. 7), (A, #2, p. 4), (C, #3, p. 6), (B, #1, p. 9) (D)	Standardization in Curriculum	
Curriculum Maps, Know the curriculum/ Good teaching (A, #1, p.3), (D) District Curriculum (A, #1, p. 4), (C, #3, p. 6) Make sure teachers are teaching curriculum (C, #1, p.1), (C, #2, p. 5), (B, #3, p. 2) Conversations about teaching old curriculum (C, #1, p. 7)		
Teachers can supplement curriculum, research based (B, #1, p. 8)		
Non Negotiable schedule (B, #1, p. 7), (C, #1, p.6), (C, #2, p. 5) (D)		
Parent nights for math and reading (B, #1, p.4), (B, #2, p. 1), (C, #2, p. 4), (B, #3, p. 3)	Connecting with Families	
PTA events throughout the year (B, #2, p. 1)		
Grade level meetings with parents (A, #2, p. 2), (C, #2, p. 1)		
Find different PDs for teachers (C, #1, p. 4),	Professional Development	
Instructional Improvement Days (B, #2, p. 2) (B, #2, p. 1) (D)		
Book studies (C, #1, p. 6) (B, #2, p. 1)		
Following through with PD during walkthroughs (B, #2, p. 4), (B, #3, p. 4)		
Principals meet with their instructional coaches to talk about data (A, #1, p. 5)		
Full time coach (B, #1, p. 6) (B, #2, p. 5), (A, #2, p. 1)		

(*table continues*)

Table 3 (continued)

Data Analysis Chart

Data	Codes	Themes
Principals and teachers greet all students as they enter the building in the morning. (A, #3, p. 3), (B, #3, p. 5) (C, #3, p. 3)	Building Relationships	Building positive school climate was important to principals as instructional leaders.
Principals are visible in the building. (A, #3, p. 3), (B, #3, p. 5), (C, #3, p. 3)		
Teachers mentor students and help students even if they are not their teacher. (C, #3, p. 3)		
Shoutouts (A, #1, p.3) Tickets/ Prizes, (A, #1, p.3), (B, #3, p. 2), (B, #3, p. 4), (C, #3, p. 3) (SW)	PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports in their Building)	
Working on lowering suspension rates. (C, #3, p. 3)		
Principals have high expectations for students to come to school to learn. (A, #2, p. 2)		
Principals try to help staff think the students' background and even their own personal backgrounds. (A, #1, p. 2)	Understanding the Students and their Families	
Look at the whole child (B, #1, p. 4)		
Peacemakers Team (A, #1, p. 3)	Students as leaders in the building.	
Student Ambassadors (B, #3, p. 1, 6)		
Team that comes into the buildings monthly to see what principals are doing (B, #1, p. 5), (B, #3, p. 2), (C, #3, p. 3), (A, #3, p. 5)	District Accountability	Principals in urban districts face a variety of challenges as instructional leaders.
Everything is based on the District Focus: rigorous teaching and learning, safe learning centers, and public engagement (B, #1, p. 7) (D)		
How the district does OPES is time consuming (A, #1, p. 2)		

Balancing being an instructional leader and manager (C, #3, p. 8)		

(*table continues*)

Table 3 (continued)

Data Analysis Chart

Data	Codes	Themes
Trying to get in classrooms and observe, while dealing with behavior (C, #3, p. 3)		
Principals want more autonomy (C, #1, p. 2)		
90 day plan for school improvement (C, #3, p. 6) (D)		
Team that comes into the buildings monthly to see what principals are doing (B, #1, p. 5), (B, #3, p. 2), (C, #3, p. 3), (A, #3, p. 5)		
Principals feel students are tested too much (B, #2, p. 6), (C, #2, p. 3)	State Accountability	
State has the same requirements for urban districts who face many more issues than other districts (B, #1, p. 2)		
Balancing being an instructional leader and manager (C, #3, p. 8)		
Students are making one years growth but not meeting benchmarks (C, #1, p. 3), (A, #2, p. 4)		
Attendance (A, #2, p. 1), (B, #2, p. 5) Getting kids to school (A, #3, p. 2)		
Students experience trauma (B, #1, p.2), (C, #2, p. 1), (B, #3, p. 2), (B, #3, p. 3), (C, #3, p. 5) Counseling for kids (B, #1, p.3), (A, #2, p. 4) Guidance Counselor (B, #2, p. 5), (C, #3, p. 5)	Building Challenges	
Teacher Challenges (C, #1, p. 4) (C, #3, p. 5)		
(Participant, Interview #, and page number) (D)- Documents (SW)- School Walk		

Allocated resources for students. The principals in the study discussed a variety of resources they have in their buildings. These resources include: a variety of technology in classrooms, a variety of tutors and English Learner (EL) teachers depending on the needs of the students, and mental health supports for the students. The principal allocated all of these resources. Each building had different resources based on the community in which it is located and how the principal works with the community to obtain the resources in the school. Technology was part of what Bridges Public School district calls their foundations, which helps the district meet one of the focuses of rigorous teaching and learning. The principals expressed the district wants students to have access to the technology and to understand how to use it to access their world. Each student in the district had their own Chromebook and instead of calling it one-to-one, as a district, they called it one-to-world. Participant C said, "We call it one-to-world because it's not about one computer for each student, but it's about how they access the world with that technology." Technology in the classroom was evident on the school walk and brought up in the interviews. Each classroom in the elementary building had SmartBoards for the teachers to use in their lessons, which were interactive whiteboards connected to the computer. Teachers were able to project information from the computer or plan interactive lessons where students could manipulate information or pictures that were projected. Each classroom had a place to store the students' Chromebooks so students were able to charge them at school. Students also had a protective case that made it easy to carry their computer around. Many resources were available online for students that were part of the district curriculum. One example of a resource was the

online textbooks that could read the information to the student. Participant C expressed how important this was for EL students because the computer could read a text to students in their native language.

Each school had different resources that matched what their students needed. One of the buildings had a high population of English Learners, so there were translators that worked in the building and EL tutors that worked with the students. Participant C said, "I have three teachers and a tutor just for EL services. I have two interpreters here 5 days a week, but only about 5 hours a day. Then I have access to other interpreters as well." Also, the schools get Title 1 tutors that are part time to help work with students in small group and provide targeted interventions. Participant A shared that their building received an extra tutor each nine weeks for the third grade students because of the third grade guarantee. The buildings were built to hold more students than what were enrolled in each building. This meant there were plenty of classrooms and work areas for the tutors who come into the building. Participant C shared in his/her building a large church has volunteers who come to the building twice a week to tutor first graders.

Leveraged Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). One of Bridge Public School district's focuses is for rigorous teaching and learning. Under this focus are three components and one of the components was Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for all staff. The three principals spoke positively about the PLCs and expressed how they play a large role in how they enact instructional leadership. At the PLC meetings, teachers, instructional coaches, and principals collaborate and talk about state, district, or classroom data. The PLC members then use the data to evaluate if the instructional

practices being used in the classroom are working. Each principal expressed the importance of being at each PLC meeting that happened in the building.

Participant A talked about meeting weekly for PLCs. Participant B scheduled his/her day so s/he could attend PLCs all day on Tuesdays during teachers' common planning time. Participant C explained the PLCs in the building were teacher led. S/he attends the PLC meetings but sits and listens and offers suggestions when needed. Participant A explained the purpose of PLCs. "With my instructional coach you know we are talking about what is happening in the classroom. We take the data and address the specific skills the kids might be weak in." Another way Participant A used PLCs in his/her building was a little differently than the other principals. S/he had cross grade level PLC meetings once a month, where teachers met vertically. An example would be first grade met with second grade. Participant A stated, "Everybody's business is everybody's business. So there's no, they didn't learn this in first grade and now I have them in second." Participant A not only used PLCs to help students academically and find ways for them to be successful, but the PLCs also built a culture of collaboration in the building.

Participant B looked at his/her PLCs as a focus of improving instruction for students. S/he said, "Sitting in on those PLC's, making those decisions with the data, looking at the instructional strategies for students, and what we can do to improve instructional strategies to increase student achievement." Participant B explained how his/her experience of being an instructional coach helped him/her lead PLCs in the

building. Participant B explained how s/he was able to have teachers reflect on their instructional strategies and look at what is or is not working. Participant B said:

> First of all, I try to help them to have a lot of reflection. So we have done a lot with looking at our instructional strategies. And if our instructional strategies are not working, it doesn't mean we're doing something wrong but it means we need to reflect and say what can I do differently. What can I change within my instruction that will meet where I need my students to go?

S/he believed that having teachers reflect on their teaching helped them to improve the instruction in their classrooms.

The principals explained that looking at data is such a large part of their job as an instructional leader and a large part of PLCs. Participant A worked with PLCs to make sure they were not only collaborative but data driven. Teachers had to come prepared to meetings with data from classroom, district, or state assessments. These meetings helped the teachers and tutors set up flexible groups to teach the skills the students needed. According to Participant A, "Our groups are fluid small group instruction all day long." This is how s/he found the teachers can best meet the needs of all their students. Participant A shared how teachers use data to group students. S/he said, "Data from assessments. They'll do a quick check then they will form a group of . . . this kid didn't get that skill. It's a daily thing." According to Participant A, "With my instructional coach you know we are talking about what is happening in the classroom. We take the data and address the skills through specific skills the kids might be weak in." The

conversations with the principals made it apparent that data was used to help address students' weaknesses and to try to help students understand the skills at their grade level.

Participant B explained how they looked at data throughout the school year, especially during the three times of year when the district does benchmark testing to see where students were academically. The PLCs also looked at the results from the Ohio State Tests (OSTs). Participant B said,

> We do a lot of looking at either our OSTs or our MAP data throughout the year, on those benchmarks, we have fall, winter, and spring, so we do a lot of goal setting and looking at where students are.

These tests helped the principals and teachers see how much growth students were making and how close they were to the benchmark goals.

Participant B explained how the teachers, tutors, and intervention specialists looked at data to help struggling students with certain skills. S/he said, "we tried to intentionally use those student profile reports with our tutors and intervention specialist." Participant B explained how they looked at data for the goals of the building. Participant C also shared how the building looks at MAP data to set individual student goals for teachers to talk with the students about. S/he said, "I like it, they can see their goals. They can print their goals out and have conversations with them about reaching their goals."

Participant C felt the district was very data driven. S/he said, "We are really data-driven. We spend a lot of time looking at our numbers and how we can help kids out." Participant C explained how the building looked at data to help students. S/he said,

"Digging and diving deeper into the individual kids information so we can see how can we help this one or this one improve and then providing the assistance." Participant C used the data with his/her staff and explained how data were also used in the teachers' PLC meetings and to promote collaboration. S/he said:

> So most of that is done through our PLCs. You know working together and looking at similar data. They all give the same assessments and we have this data to desegregation tool that we use so they can look at it and talk about their kids. They talk about ability grouping and flexible grouping. A lot of collaboration that happens weekly with the PLCs and most teachers with the exception of maybe one grade level are meeting and talking every day. But it's the formal time during the actual PLCs that they're putting it down on paper.

Participant C showed the data s/he uses during PLCs to look at how students in his/her school were making progress and which students were falling behind. Participant C said:

> We are really data-driven. We spend a lot of time looking at our numbers and how we can help kids out. Digging and diving deeper into the individual kids information so we can see how can we help this one or this one improve and then providing the assistance.

Participant C easily navigated the MAP reports and explained the student data for his/her building. S/he could tell which students were making academic progress and which students were meeting the benchmarks for the assessment.

The PLC form used in the buildings was the same form used for Ohio's Teacher Based Teams (TBTs). The team met and shared data and looked at the data for each sub

group. Then the team looked at the weaknesses in the data and what instructional strategies they could use to help students who are struggling. The team then came back together to evaluate if students made progress after a couple of weeks of instruction. This process of assessing, teaching, and then assessing to see if students made progress goes on throughout the entire year. All three principals seemed to find PLCs to be a beneficial process in looking at data and helping their teachers evaluate if their instruction was working.

Principal A shared that although all of the elementary buildings are doing PLCs in the district, their effectiveness was not the same in each building because of the structure of the PLC or how often the teams met. S/he shared the success of the PLC in his/her building was because the teachers met weekly and the PLC was collaborative. The teachers in her/his building looked at all of the students as their students. Teachers were willing to help each other out and s/he felt that made a huge difference in the effectiveness of the PLC.

Worked with instructional coaches and curriculum specialists. Another way Participant A and Participant B noted being an instructional leader was through working with their instructional coaches. Both buildings found additional funding to get their coaches in the building full time. Bridges gets every elementary building a part-time instructional coach through Title 1 funds. When talking about the instructional coach, Participant A said,

> I rely a lot on my coach and our weekly meetings looking at where we are at. I sent my coach this year to talk to the district curriculum specialists. I said here's

> a couple of our weaknesses; what other ideas do you have, cause you are the district reps.

Participant A also made sure the coach knew what s/he expected from him/her when working with the teachers. S/he said,

> My first directive to her was to take off teachers' plates what you can so they can teach. Take all the information they need to know to fine tune their teaching whatever resources they need to assess students, model for them, encourage them.

From this directive Participant A explained that teachers built relationships with the coach and now 100% of the staff were willing to have her in their classrooms. Participant A told his/her instructional coach, "Get to know them so they freely welcome you in the classroom." Participant A talked about getting the teachers to feel comfortable with the instructional coach coming into the classroom. S/he said, "After a year 90% and the next year 100%, doors were open. Friendships were built and respect all over the place."

Participant B shared how s/he uses the instructional coach often for planning PD for the building. They did PD on technology and differentiation that was separate from the district. Participant B said, "We had PD during the day where we brought subs in for the teachers. So they came in as grade level teams and met with my instructional coach and myself." Participant B also explained how s/he had the instructional coach work with gifted students doing activities that the classroom teachers would not have time to do with a non-negotiable schedule. According to Participant B,

> My coach has been really good about supporting teachers as well, because we have her full-time and we have been able to do that in this building. Not all buildings do that, they have instructional coaches part-time. We can have her kind of do whatever we want the other 50%. It doesn't have to be district-based. So she's pulled some of our higher kids to do literature circles. Things that classroom teachers don't really have. . . . they really don't . . . it's very difficult for them to meet that non-negotiable schedule and do things like literature circles.

Participant A and Participant B utilized the instructional coaches to help them be better instructional leaders to the teachers.

Participant C did not talk about his/her instructional coach in the interviews but I was introduced to the instructional coach when I was at the building for an interview. The district also had curriculum specialists in each content area who worked with teachers to create curriculum maps, pacing guides, and other district documents. The curriculum specialist helped to guide the instructional coaches. Participant A shared how s/he encourages his/her instructional coach to utilize the district specialists. The curriculum specialists were a resource for principals, coaches, and teachers in each content area.

Supported district curriculum as an instructional leader. Participant A, Participant B, and Participant C expressed how one part of their job as an instructional leader was supporting the district curriculum that teachers should be teaching. The district's curriculum documents showed there are specific expectations that have been set for teachers. Curriculum maps have the standards mapped out for the year that correlated

with a pacing guide so teachers know when they should be teaching each standard. Documents show which common assessments the teachers should have given their students during certain points in the year. There were also Response to Intervention (RTI) guidelines principals used when students were struggling to determine which tier of interventions the students needed. Frameworks showed how much time teachers should be spending on each literacy component during their literacy block. These documents were used by the principals to support the teachers. One of the principals expressed how s/he liked the district curriculum guides. Participant A said, "I have to say what I like about having a coach and the district curriculum is that we have a pacing guide and we know what's supposed to be going on." Participant A felt like knowing where students needed to be in the curriculum through the pacing guide helped the teachers know where they should be in the curriculum. Participant A said, "We have the data and it takes it down to the immediate skill and each benchmark." The documents showed what part of the curriculum teachers should be teaching and what assessment should be given.

Participant B shared their perspective about teachers using the district pacing guides. Participant B said, "Those were created by the district and given to the teachers. I think they follow the timeline. I think the timelines more important than the curriculum map." Participant B explained how s/he worked to create the master schedule. S/he said,

> The master schedule we really look at the special subjects to really assist the grade levels, especially for intermediate kids so that they can get specials in the morning then they have that late block from late morning through all the way later in the day to be able to do the instruction.

Participant B explained how s/he had to make the master schedule based on the district minutes. S/he said, "I have to make my building schedule on what they recommend, so if it's 120 Minutes for ELA, then it's 120 minutes for ELA."

Participant C also shared how the instructional minutes were part of Bridge's district wide goal, because it was considered a focus of time on task. S/he said:

> Our goal is to be the number one urban district in America. So most of that centers around instruction time, so what we have is a lot of non-negotiables. And that is time on task in reading in math. So like K–3 we have a hundred and forty five minutes a day designated for reading and writing. 90 minutes a day does it made it towards Math. Then that drops off a little bit and the math stays the same at 4th and 5th and reading drops down to 120 Minutes. In K–3 science and social studies is integrated into reading. At 4–5 it's taught as a separate subject. So as far as the goals, it's just time on task.

Participant C did share that district leaders came to the schools as part of their improvement team to check to see that teachers were following the pacing guides. Participant C said,

> We have these meetings where district-level teams will come out to meet with us as principals and they'll be like it's the 23rd week in ELA and they should be doing compare and contrast. Let's go look at your third grade classroom.

Participant C shared that s/he then had to take the district leader to the classroom and make sure teachers were following the pacing guide. Participant C said that most of the time teachers were where they needed to be in the curriculum. If they were not, s/he

shared they usually had a good explanation as to why they were not on track with the pacing guide.

Connected with families. Another way the principals enacted instructional leadership was through connecting with families and making them feel part of their child's education. The district had a third focus of public engagement. One of the components of public engagement was focused connections with parents. Participant A had a background in social work and expressed how s/he tried to help families feel supported. S/he met with a parent group, which the goal of the group was to connect parents to each other. S/he wanted parents to feel like they had support outside of the school. Participant A said, "I want them to know each other, so they have someone else to call." This group talked about anything the parents wanted to bring up. Participant B and C both explained they are involved with the building Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Both principals shared they attended PTA meetings and collaborated with the PTA to create events at the school that focused on learning. For example, Participant B talked about the read-a-thon that s/he worked with PTA to put on in the school.

Each participant shared their buildings hosted family nights that focused on math and reading. A variety of strategies were used to get families to attend. According to Participant A, "The grade levels do individual parent trainings." S/he talked about how it was done in the grade level classrooms. Participant A said, "We do them in the classroom right with them. Working problems out with them like they are teaching kids in the classroom and they come with their kids, sending samples home." Participant B said, "We do still provide a lot of parent type activities within the culture of our school

that parents can come in for. We have math night. We have literacy night. We do programs." Participant B expressed how his/her parent nights are planned so they match the standards and can help parents work with their child at home. S/he said, "We have been connecting the standards to the stations and doing activities that promote that particular standard and trying to tie in a home component piece." The most recent event Participant B's school was having a math carnival night for parents. This event was planned to have fun games that were centered on the math standards.

Participant C explained how s/he has math and reading nights on conference nights to get families to conferences and the learning activities. S/he said, "What we found is if we feed them they will come. So we actually started combining our math and reading nights with our conference nights." Participant C also talked about a family night they did at the beginning of May, hosted by college students. S/he was surprised by how many families came that late in the year. According to Participant C, "We just did one late in May which I was surprised it was in conjunction with some students at the University that were working on their undergrad stuff. It was about 120 families there." The three principals all tried different strategies to try to encourage families to come to the educational events at the school.

Therefore, based on the data analysis, I found principals enacted instructional leadership in their buildings the following ways: allocated resources for students, worked with instructional coaches and curriculum specialist, leveraged Professional Learning Communities, supported district curriculum, and connected with families. How the

principals enacted instructional leadership were shaped by the district focuses and resources provided by the school district.

Building Positive School Climate was Important to Principals as Instructional Leaders

The second theme that emerged was building positive school climate was important to principals as instructional leaders. The way principals worked to build a positive school climate was an example of how the principals chose to lead with integrity. In Chapter 1 integrity was defined in leadership as having a commitment to morals, adhering to ethics and beliefs, being transparent, and consistent in decision making (Monga, 2016). When principals shared their beliefs about creating a positive environment for the students, it was clear that it was what the principals believed and not something they were being held accountable for by the district or the state. Participants worked to build a positive school climate by: building relationships, utilizing PBIS, understanding students and their families, and students as leaders in the building.

Building relationships. Each principal shared how they built relationships with the students by being visible in their building. Each principal explained how they completed walkthroughs in the classrooms to be visible to the students and teachers, as well as understand what was happening in the classrooms. The principals also shared they were at the front doors consistently each morning to greet students as they walked in the building. The principals recruited teachers who did not have a homeroom to ensure that there were multiple people greeting the students. Participant A said, “There is at least three us of talking to every kid that walks through that door checking them head to

toe." Participant C explained, "We have to find a way that separates what has happened at home and get behind these kids to make them feel welcome and safe when they come into school." This demonstrated the principal's desire to make the students feel welcomed into school each morning and to know there are adults who support and care for them.

Participant A shared that in his/her buildings all of the teachers were responsible for every student, even if they are not in their class or grade level. Participant A said,

> Everybody is responsible whether they teach fifth grade or first grade for the kids. Umm knowing them, who are there parents? Where do they live? What happens when they come to school? How do we get them ready to learn?

In each interview, Participant A expressed many times how important it is that all of her staff knows everything about each student in the building. Participant C talked about a mentoring program s/he has in their building for students. Participant C said, "Every teacher has four students they mentor. We pick those kids at the start of the year. It's just to touch base and make sure they are seen in the hallway three or four times a week." Participant C also shared that the guidance counselor eats breakfast with a group of students who have behavior issues. It is a way to check in for the day and students then had the opportunity to earn rewards for making good choices throughout the day.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). Each building had a PBIS system where students could earn rewards for following the expectations. Participant A shared that students could earn tickets and pick prizes for being respectful and responsible, as well as other things. Participant B said her teachers have attended

four PD sessions this year on PBIS through the state support team. S/he felt with the implementation of PBIS the suspension rates in the building have gone down, so students were staying in the classroom more and missing less instructional time. Participant C's school does a specific PBIS program that teachers received PD to implement. They started using the program with fidelity this year and there have been many compliments given about the improvement of the overall school climate, and the suspension rate for the building has decreased. Participant C shared how important s/he felt it was to keep students in the classroom so they do not miss instructional time.

Understanding students and their families. Another way the principals worked to build a positive school climate was by helping teachers understand the students' and families' backgrounds. Participant A shared that any information s/he learned about a student s/he shared out to the entire staff because all staff shares responsibility for each of the students. Participant C said, "The biggest struggle that I feel we still face is teachers establishing strong relationships with kids and having an understanding of where they are coming from every day." S/he tried to help the teachers understand that things such as a kid not having a pencil or being prepared for class is small compared to what the student may be going through at home. Participant C shared that two families in the school lost their fathers to shootings that were happening in the neighborhood. One of the teachers was worried about the student missing the district wide benchmark MAP test. Participant C said, "Don't make him take it. If he wants to take it let him, but don't push it. He's eleven and just lost his dad." This is a way the principal shows s/he valued the students' well-being over testing.

Participant A discussed how s/he tried to get his/her staff to understand the students' cultures and where they were coming from. S/he said,

> We also study race to understand race and different cultures, because I obviously have a predominantly White staff. I also had to have my staff be aware of where they came from and not everybody came from middle class. We have to remember where we came from or where you're at . . . still. Understanding the culture within and not just the skin and the neighborhood and being part of the community.

Participant A felt this understanding from the staff of where their students come from helped to build a better school culture. Participant B shared his/her perspective of looking at students as a whole child instead of just how students do academically. This is why participant B feels that clubs and extracurricular activities were important for students in the building.

Students as leaders in the building. Two of the elementary principals mentioned having student leadership in their building. Participant A had what s/he called the Peacemakers. These students were third through fifth grade and they met with him/her to talk about any issues they wanted to discuss. In the past they have discussed the PBIS prizes, feeling safe in the building, and what they would like to see the teachers doing. Participant A liked getting feedback from his/her students. Participant B shared how s/he is proud of the student ambassadors in the building. These students are fourth and fifth graders in the building who were nominated and voted on by their peers. The student ambassadors do things needed around the building. They have picked up sticks

on the playground. They have greeted the school improvement team at the doors when they came to visit the building and took them to the room where they met the principal.

The principals in the study showed how they led with integrity when they cared about their students and demonstrated building a positive school climate. Each principal shared that the students were what kept them coming to work every day. They felt like they could make a difference in the students' lives. Each principal shared how they wanted teachers to understand the difference they could make in students' lives as well. The principals tried to model being understanding and caring for the students' well-being and not just how they are doing academically, although they shared academics are also important. When discussing discipline the principals seemed to be consistent in their approach of trying to build relationships to let students know they care. This way when there was a discipline issue the principals had the relationship with the student, so they could help the student understand what he or she did was wrong.

Principals in Urban Districts Face a Variety of Challenges as Instructional Leaders

The third theme that emerged was principals in urban districts face a variety of challenges as instructional leaders. These challenges came from state accountability, district accountability, and building challenges. Each principal expressed these challenges in different ways but made it clear that the job of being a principal was a challenge. Participant A shared, "You know the life of a principal, you never know what's going to happen. It's fun and it's exciting, it's challenging and I love it."

State accountability. In Chapter 2, I quoted Fullan who described accountability as follows, "Accountability assumes that the most important thing to do is to make sure that the person down below acts in line with directions or criteria passed down by someone higher up" (Fullan, 2014, p. 26). The challenge of directions being passed down by someone higher up came up in the data multiple times. Participant A brought up accountability in the form of Ohio Principal Evaluation System (OPES). Participant A said, "it is so demanding of your personal time and it is irrelevant to what you are doing for your job." Participant A also brought up that the state was all about district's ratings and things that were reported in the state report card. S/he said, "The tensions from the district come from the state and all about our ratings. The data. The attendance. The growth. The value added." This goes along with how Fullan described accountability as top down.

Participant B saw that just being in an urban district was a challenge. S/he said, "For us being in an urban district the mandates from the state are very challenging. We are always held up to the same standard as any other school districts but we face many more challenges." Participant C said, "you know we're actually close to state takeover because of our performance." The performance Participant C was referring to was how students perform on the state assessments. Participant C said, "The state you know . . . they hammer superintendents, our senior staff, and the districts, about your school not doing well. Then they turn around and put it on our directors who turn around and put it on us." Participant C felt frustrated with the top down approach from the state to the district in how to run their buildings. Participant C said, "I wish the leaders higher than

us in Bridge schools would allow us a little more autonomy in leading our building." The principals each felt the pressure from the state that was put on the district. The frustrations came from having the same expectations for an urban district, where students face many challenges, to a district where students come to school ready to learn because they face less challenges at home.

Another type of accountability that came up in each interview was from the third grade reading guarantee. According to the Ohio Department of Education (2017b):

> Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee is a program to identify students from kindergarten through grade 3 that are behind in reading. Schools will provide help and support to make sure students are on track for reading success by the end of third grade.

This law specifically states that students will get more support for reading to be on track by the end of third grade. The Ohio Department of Education (2018) also stated, "Each year, schools must retain students who score below the promotion score on Ohio's grade 3 English language arts test, unless those students are exempt from retention under the Third Grade Reading Guarantee" (p. 12). Therefore, Bridges Public School provided numerous resources for third grade students to make sure they passed the test, so they would not face retention.

Participant A said, "We get an extra tutor for a nine week period that is strictly focused in the third grade reading guarantee. The tutors and my coach all have a responsibility with that group of students." Participant B explained about co-teaching in his/her building only happening in third grade. S/he said, "Third grade does co-teaching.

And that has been very successful the last two years because we targeted third grade with the co-teaching because of the third grade reading guarantee." Participant C noted the caseloads for his/her intervention specialists. S/he referred to a large number of students who were identified on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in third grade. Students on IEPs get exempt from retention on the third grade reading state test. Participant C said, "We tend to identify a lot of kids in third grade on IEPs. Next thing you know fourth grade has a whole case load just in 4th grade." Participant C also explained how s/he met with his third-grade guarantee students who took the MAP Assessment, as an alternate way to pass the third grade reading guarantee, to encourage them to do well on the test. Participant C said:

> My instructions to the kids were like a video game and I met personally with the third grade guarantee kids. We had 29 that weren't going to go on. We ended up with 11 that are in our summer program right now.

Participant C said, "The 18 that passed the MAP told me, it was like I was playing it like a game, like you told me." Participant C tried different tactics to help students pass the test. The participants also explained how the district had a summer program to give students another opportunity to pass the state test after school was out. Participant A said, "They will get to retest during the summer and get another opportunity." S/he talked about one of her students who did not pass the reading test. S/he said, "Like one was one point away. You know. I just had it out this morning. One little point." Participant B said, "I have 3 kiddos over there who didn't make it. So they go to the Third Grade Reading Academy." The Third Grade Reading Academy was the summer

program the district hosts for students to retake the third grade state tests. This program gave students one more opportunity to pass the test before having to be retained in third grade.

Another challenge Participant B has faced was student attendance. The state passed a new law, House Bill 410, which tracks student attendance by hours. Students must go on an intervention plan if they missed more than 30 or more hours without an excuse, 42 or more unexcused hours a month or 72 unexcused hours a year (ODE, 2017d). Participant B explained that not only was it exhausting to try all the ways to get students to school, but the attendance law took up an abundance of time. Another challenge Participant B brought up was the state of Ohio ranking schools. S/he said, "It's just so cut-and-dry. You know and to hear that and it's very hard to keep the morale of the teachers as well, because we have teachers just working their butts off." Also, Participant B said the amount of testing was a challenge. The students at his/her school tested from the day after spring break for almost 6 weeks straight. Participant C shared s/he would like to eliminate a lot of testing. Participant C said:

> We obviously do the state tests but we also do a quarterly Benchmark test in a reading program. So once every 9 weeks they are getting a test. We do MAP three times a year. So I think from spring break . . . we had a late spring break this year, through the end of the year. I think the last 45 days of school I think third, fourth, and fifth had an assessment 28 to 30 of those 45 days. That doesn't count classroom assessments.

Not only do students have to complete tests for the state, but the state required benchmark assessments completed for the third grade reading guarantee. Also, it could help the district to see how the students were progressing and if students were on track to pass the state test.

Participant B explained a challenge s/he faced at his/her old building was being in Focus School status. According to the Ohio Department of Education, "A Focus School is a building that receives Title 1 funds and has one of the state's largest achievement gaps in student-performance and graduation-rates" (ODE Website, 2015). Participant B said:

> We had three years to get out of focus school status. But we got an additional $55,000 a year for three years. I had a small building so we had a really small budget. So that $55,000 was a tremendous amount. We got out in three years so what does the state say. You are out of Focus School status. We want you to do this but we aren't going to continue to give you any money. So you're back to square one again.

When I spoke with Participant B at a later time in the study s/he shared that his/her current school had become a focus school because of an achievement gap with students with disabilities and multi race students. S/he shared that the compliance documents of being a focus school had questions that had to be addressed about the building and was quite intensive and time consuming. One of the issues of accountability Participant C saw was getting the students to grow enough to be proficient as measured by the state. S/he said:

> So we may have a year's growth on a kid which we get, but we need at least a year and a half growth from our kids in the first couple years of school. Just to catch them up. So that's our biggest push this year we see a lot of growth but not a lot of achievement.

Participant C also talked about the kids coming into kindergarten and starting off lower than other school district. S/he said, "we're getting kids that don't know the 26 letters of the alphabet." S/he explained on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) their students scored very low compared to what other districts score. Since the building needs to work on having students meet the achievement level and not just make growth, they are making it a goal for the next school year. Participant C said:

> 88% of our kids made a year's growth in a year's time. But then again we need them to grow a year and a half. But the achievement level is less than 50%, so they all grew but it was less than 50% that had the achievement to be considered on track.

The accountability from the state requires that students not only make progress, but they need to meet the achievement indicators on the state report card. This is where Participant C saw the biggest issue.

District accountability. Another form of accountability came from the school district. The district had numerous accountability measures since it was a large urban district where students were very transient between the elementary schools. Participant C shared the s/he had a 38%–40% transient rate. Therefore, the curriculum maps showed exactly what teachers should be teaching at each point in the school year. Teachers were

given documents with the number of minutes they had to teach each subject and a framework for how long each component of the literacy block should take. The framework gave suggestions for how much time to spend on literacy components when grades 4 and 5 were departmentalized, or self-contained classrooms. The curriculum maps and the minutes that were required to be taught were expected to be monitored by the principals. Participant C shared how central office administrators would do walkthroughs to see if teachers were teaching the correct unit at the correct time as listed on the curriculum map. If teachers were not on the correct part of the map, the principals were expected to address this with the teachers. The principals explained that this is the way the curriculum stays consistent across the district. There were also common assessments that teachers gave to their students and these data were discussed at the PLC meetings in each building.

Participant C also described the stresses of being a principal. There is a lot of pressure from the top down and s/he feels like it makes his work challenging. Participant C said:

> There is a lot of stress at this level. We are middle level managers as principals. You still have to manage. You have to do things like billing and payroll, building permits, scheduling all those manager type jobs skills that take place. But you also have to be that educational leader too. And when everyone is pulling on you, you have to find that balance. That's difficult. The state you know . . . they hammer superintendents, our senior staff, and the district about your school not doing well. Then they turn around and put it on our directors who turn around

> and put it on us. And we should be a reflective model and looking at the kids and how they're learning.

Participant C also explained how s/he felt that principals were being pulled in multiple directions. S/he said:

> The last year it feels like principals are being drawn and quartered. So we have our state and our district administrators here tugging, we have parents here, teachers here, and students here. And they're all going opposite directions. So the tension from the state . . . you know we're actually close to state takeover because of our performance.

The challenges Participant C expressed can make it difficult for principals to be instructional leaders in their buildings. Participant A explained a challenge of being a principal:

> The tensions from the district come from the state and all about our ratings. The data. The attendance. The growth. The value added. How do we keep our school district from being taken over? How do we work smarter? You know. Divide and conquer. It's a constant battle. Every month there is a team that comes in and looks at everything we are doing.

The three principals in the study shared their frustrations with the existence of an instructional improvement team that visited their school building each month.

The instructional improvement team consisted of directors, which one or two of the directors are the principals' direct bosses. The team met with the principals for about 30 minutes and then walked around the building for 20–30 minutes. The team

reconvened with the principal and talked about data from the building and what they saw during their visit. Participant A shared these meetings used to stress him/her out because s/he never knew what type of questions they would ask. Now s/he is just prepared with highlights and data from the building. S/he felt the team is nice and very congratulatory because his/her building did well. Participant B did not feel like the team gave the supports they need.

Building challenges. Along with the state and district challenges, the principals also faced challenges that were specific to their building. One of those challenges was the amount of students who were experiencing trauma and a need for more services to support the students. Participant A shared that last school year s/he had an outside counseling service coming into the school to help counsel about 30 students. This school year, the main counselor for the counseling service left, leaving interns to provide counseling services. Participant B shared that s/he has a school counselor and two outside counselors who all come in and work with students. The two outside counselors work with about 30 kids each. Participant B shared that even with having three full time counselors in the building, they could use more support. Participant B said, "In a class of 25 you know you can have anywhere between 5 and 8 kids that may have a lot of trauma." Participant C shared that s/he has a part-time guidance counselor who met with students and checked in with a group of students having behavior issues. Although counseling is a resource available to each school, the amount of support changes yearly. Each principal felt they could use additional counselors to help support the mental needs of the students.

Another challenge that was mentioned was pushing teachers outside of their comfort zones. Participant C expressed the struggle of being able to get teachers to think critically about what they were teaching. S/he said:

> I think my older staff I don't get them to think critically at all. I think I get them to ponder some things once in a while but to get them to actually think about it and think I should make change, I don't see that.

When referring to his/her newer staff, Participant C felt they were more open minded to thinking critically. "They say that's a good idea or I saw that in one of my classes. They're a very connected generation so they're also looking at things on Twitter, and YouTube, and Facebook." Also, Participant C shared that teachers do what they feel comfortable with. S/he said,

> We do struggle . . . in the building it would be the same but we struggle with our rigor. We're learning that along with several other districts in the state as we look at our OST data. You know the rigor whether it's in our curriculum or in our instruction, it just isn't there. At least not for our kids. We have to find a way to push that rigor, push to that higher level.

The participants in the study knew the strengths and weaknesses of their buildings as it pertained to teachers' skills and how grade levels worked together as a whole. The participants each shared how they were working with teachers and grade levels to challenge them to better.

Summary

In this dissertation study, I explored how urban elementary principals enacted instructional leadership in urban elementary schools. Throughout this chapter I explored my findings based on my data collection of interviews, documents, and a school walk. The themes that emerged from the data on how principals enacted instructional leadership in urban elementary schools were: (a) instructional leadership was shaped by district focuses, (b) building positive school climate was important to principals as instructional leaders, and (c) principals in urban districts face a variety of challenges as instructional leaders. In the next chapter I explore the implications of these findings and how they relate to the literature.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this bounded case study was to explore how urban elementary principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 urban elementary public schools at a time where principals are held accountable for their schools' state test scores. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 schools?
2. To what extent do principals' beliefs, attitudes, values, and/or lived experiences influence how they understand instructional leadership?
3. To what extent do principals' beliefs, attitudes, values, and/or lived experiences influence how they engage in instructional leadership?
4. How do principals understand integrity and accountability in schools?

This qualitative bounded case study was bounded in a particular urban school district exploring how three elementary principals enacted instructional leadership in their K–5 elementary schools.

Drawing on a critical theoretical framework exploring culture and leadership, the study looked at how these all contribute to principals' beliefs, attitudes, and lived experiences and the influence it has on how they enact instructional leadership. I speculated that urban elementary principals may have a calling to lead through a critical lens. The critical theory lens had the potential to reveal those leadership dynamics.

This qualitative study consisted of three elementary principals from the same urban school district. The participants in the study completed three semi-structured

interviews, took the researcher on a walk of the school, and provided the researcher many building/district documents related to curriculum and instruction. Most of the documents were completed at the district level by a team of curriculum specialists and teachers. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings of the study and how the findings relate to literature, as well as how the findings relate to the theoretical framework. It also includes implications for what the study means for the field of educational leadership. Finally, I talk about the limitations of the study and what future research could be explored with this topic.

Discussion

In this study, I was curious to find out how principals enacted instructional leadership during a time where they are held accountable for students' test scores. I speculated that urban elementary principals may have a calling to lead through a critical lens because they chose to work in an urban school (Rodriguez et al., 2009). Urban schools face many challenges and it is important for principals to care for students and have a deep commitment to help all students succeed beyond simply doing well on standardized testing (Rodriguez et al., 2009). Another reason I chose an urban district is because they have multiple elementary schools, and I knew I would be more likely to get three elementary principals from the same district to participate in the study. I wanted to understand how the principals navigated the challenge between what they valued in instruction and how they actually enacted instructional leadership.

What principals believed about instruction and instructional leadership was demonstrated by how they led district created initiatives. The themes that emerged from

the study showed how principals enacted instructional leadership primarily through district focuses. A common belief the participants shared as instructional leaders was the importance of a positive school climate where they were visible and students knew adults cared for them. Rodriguez et al. (2009) studied groups of urban principals and found the principals made it a priority to create a student centered environment, even with all of the accountability the principals faced. The principals in this study each shared the belief that all students can learn.

Muhammad (2018) referred to teachers as believers when they had the core belief that all students can learn. Even though he was referring to teachers, the same characteristics could be found in the three participants in the study. One of these characteristics was developing a deep connection to the school community. Each principal wanted to be in that school district because they were connected to the community. They grew up in the community and/or currently lived there. Another characteristic was the principal's ability to be flexible with students, but still have high expectations. Each of the principals in this study expected a lot out of the students and the students knew they cared about them. Participant A shared that a student told him/her s/he was strict and mean but they knew s/he loved them. The last characteristic the principals shared with teachers who were believers was their intrinsic motivation to always do more than is required. The principals shared how much they work after school hours. Participant A shared s/he makes sure to have good attendance during the school year because the students wonder where s/he is when s/he misses for a meeting. This showed how the principals want to be there for the students.

The belief that all students can learn was not explicitly stated, but was shown by how the principals talked about the students and the families in their buildings. The principals each had many positive things to say about the students and families they served. According to Kruse and Seashore Louis (2009), "administrators who remain focused on the underlying messages—the expectations that schools will improve learning for all students—have found increased accountability to be less of a burden" (p. 37). The principals in this study enacted instructional leadership in similar ways between the buildings because many of the things they do instructionally are district wide imperatives such as PLCs, family nights, and the resources they are given. The principals were held accountable to make sure they are leading with the district's areas of emphasis at the forefront.

The participants did share frustrations from the constant accountability they face from the district and the state. They also expressed that they wished they had more autonomy at times in the decision-making in their building. However, when the participants shared the ways they enacted instructional leadership in their building they were proud of what was happening in their building. The principals felt strongly about the climate of their building and having a PBIS program implemented with fidelity. Each of the principals wanted to keep behavior issues under control, so they could keep students in their classrooms learning. The principals made it a priority to be visible in their buildings to make sure the students saw them around and in their classrooms.

The district had a variety of resources tied to the district focuses that principals had to allocate for teachers and students. The ways the principals enacted instructional

leadership aligned with the district focuses. Firestone (2009) expressed how districts with a culture of accountability create a system where principals have to focus on central office requirements, instead of on ways they feel they can help teachers improve instruction. The possibility exists that if principals had more autonomy they may enact instructional leadership differently. However, the principals did not express anything they would do differently as an instructional leader if they did not have to be aligned with the district focuses.

The data suggested that participants' background experiences influenced how they both understood and enacted instructional leadership. When principals explained what they thought the definition of instructional leadership was, it aligned with how they were enacting it in their building. The data demonstrated that the principals' beliefs about instructional leadership were influenced by their background experiences. What the principals believed to be important in leadership came from their background experiences. The data did not reveal any indication that the principals wanted to lead differently than how they were leading. Even though the participants were frustrated with the accountability they faced, the data did not reveal specific values or beliefs that the participants felt they could not enact in their leadership. The district had a large push for every elementary school in the district to be teaching the same curriculum and the participants remained student centered. How principals understood critical theory and how they used it in their practice as instructional leaders did not emerge in the data. The principal's primary focus was building relationships with students and encouraging

teachers to do the same. They worked to give families resources and supports, while also supporting the mental health needs of the students.

The findings from the study demonstrated that principals enacted instructional leadership in a way that showed students they cared for them and believed in their ability to learn. The principals did not fight against the district accountability, but they seemed to succumb to the accountability while keeping what is best for students at the forefront. The principals used their PLC work to make sure there were extra supports available for struggling students and enrichment activities for students who understood the content already. The principals did work to teach behavior expectations through their school PBIS programs.

The following themes emerged on how principals enacted instructional leadership in their building: (a) instructional leadership was shaped by district focuses; (b) building positive school climate was important to principals as instructional leaders; and (c) principals in urban districts face a variety of challenges as instructional leaders. Principals have to navigate these tensions to be able to be an instructional leader in their building. The themes that emerged from the study showed how principals enact instructional leadership in a time where principals are being held accountable for the achievement of their students on state test scores. A theme that did not emerge was how principals understand critical theory and how they use it in their practice as instructional leaders.

Instructional Leadership was Shaped by District Focuses

During the interviews the principals discussed the variety of resources available in their school district and ways they had to allocate them. Resources available to principals came from the district and the community. The majority of resources were consistently distributed, yet there was some variation between resources allocated to buildings. Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) found providing instructional resources and materials, as well as aligning resources to be a successful core leadership practice. This related with Stronge, Richard, and Catano (2008) who stated, "the effective school leader seeks and monitors financial and other available resources that will benefit the school community" (p. 102). The principals had to allocate resources such as the tutors they would get from the district or where special education staff would be placed. Leithwood and Riehl (2003, as cited in Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012) stated, "when necessary, leaders redesign school structures and allocate resources as necessary (within established guidelines) in order to achieve goals, working with all stakeholders toward accomplishment of the school vision" (p. 102). As instructional leaders, the participants in the study were always moving around resources to match the needs of their buildings.

Each building within the Bridge Public Schools had access to the same curriculum and resources to enact the curriculum. The participants were all principals in elementary schools that were schoolwide Title 1 schools, which means they received funding for their schools through Title 1 funds. A school can qualify for schoolwide Title 1 services if they have a poverty rate higher than 40% (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), Title 1 funds "Provides

Supplemental Federal funds to ensure all students have fair, equal, and significant opportunities to obtain a high-quality education and reach at minimum proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (p. 2). The benefits of having schoolwide Title 1 funds is the school is able to purchase resources that serve all of the students in the building, provide supplemental services for their students, and consolidate local, state, and federal funds (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). These additional resources allowed principals to be more effective instructional leaders.

The principals in the study shared how PLCs played a large role in how they were instructional leaders. PLCs were a goal throughout the district and were required from teachers weekly during their common planning time. The principals attended the PLC meetings and made it a priority to be part of the learning community. The PLCs consisted of teachers, instructional coaches, tutors, and the principal. The PLCs looked at a variety of types of assessments during these meetings, including district, state, and classroom assessments. The principals shared leadership with the teachers and instructional coaches to find better instructional strategies for struggling students by utilizing data to identify students' strengths and weaknesses.

DuFour, Eaker and DuFour (2005) shared three big ideas of professional learning communities: ensuring that students learn, a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results. The first idea, ensuring students learn, refers to making sure all students are not only taught but are learning. This is a shift in thinking from the teachers focusing on what is taught. The second idea, a culture of collaboration, focuses on teachers working

"together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all" (DuFour et al., 2005, p. 36). PLC collaboration is systematic and helps teachers improve their practice. The third idea, a focus on results, means the professional learning community focuses on measurable results and looks at data and knows how to use it. According to DuFour et al., "the results oriented professional learning community not only welcomes data but also turns data into useful and relevant information for staff" (p. 40).

Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2009) argued the goal of PLCs is not looking at what is taught, but what students actually learn. PLCs are collaborative in nature and require teams to work together to achieve a common mission of helping all students learn (Buffum et al., 2009). According to Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012), "If principals are to have an impact on instruction by building a positive school culture, they must foster collaborative and effective working relationships among teachers" (p. 33). This is why professional learning communities can be an important part of improving instruction and student achievement (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012).

Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) argued that for professional communities to exist in schools there must be strong leadership from the building principals. Leithwood and Seashore Louis argued "that in schools where teachers work together intensively on instruction and learning, they also create a school climate that is supportive of student learning outside the classroom" (p. 33). Moore (2018) expressed the importance of using PLCs as a way to get educators to think critically about their views about culture and being culturally aware. Moore felt that having these conversations will better help teachers advocate for diverse students.

The data used during the PLCs are standardized district and state assessments as well as classroom assessments. The standardized assessments would ask questions that are meant for students with cultural capital to be able to answer and do well (Fruchter, 2007). The PLC form did show that when discussing data the schools look at subgroups of race, socioeconomic status, and disabilities. The PLCs look for patterns of how students in the subgroups are doing and they create goals for improvement for groups of students. What was not clear was how the subgroups of students were discussed in the meetings. The forms showed surface level conversations where student data were looked at based on race and students on an IEP. However, the depth of the conversations about groups of students was unclear in the data. This could be something that is explored further.

The participants in the study relied on their instructional coach to assist them in being an instructional leader. The district curriculum specialists were another resource for the buildings as well. They are able to offer suggestions to the instructional coaches and principals when they need them. According to Knight (2007), instructional coaching is important because it helps teachers to implement research-based strategies, realize professional goals they have, and work collaboratively with teachers to improve student learning. Knight shared that traditional Professional Development approaches only have a 10% implementation rate. Knight (2007) suggested, “when teachers receive an appropriate amount of support for professional learning, more than 90% of them embrace and implement programs that improve students’ experiences in the classroom” (p. 4).

Desimone and Pak (2017) found instructional coaching to be a powerful way for teachers to learn new skills. Desimone and Pak noted, "instructional coaches working one-on-one with teachers are able to embed discussions and activities in a specific subject area" (p. 3). Another positive aspect of coaching is that it happens all year long; it is not just one day of PD (Desimone & Pak, 2017). The coaches at Bridges work with the principals to help come up with what the teachers needed for PD. The instructional coaches also help lead professional learning communities, which is a type of job embedded PD. During the professional learning communities the coaches were responsible for helping the teachers look at their data.

In a study completed by Huget, Marsh, and Farrell (2014) they found that strong coaches use data to assess what goals teachers needed to work on, model how to use data, and observe the teachers to see how they were using data. The coaches then gave the teachers feedback and offered dialogue and questioning about what the teachers learned from the data. The coaches finally looked at where there was a disconnect from the data and what was happening in the classroom. Coaches who were newer to coaching or not as strong just modeled using data, observed the teachers using data and provided tools to look at data. The study also found the organization of the school played a large role in the coaches' work. Huget et al. (2014) found principals played a large part in helping to build and mediate coach-teacher relationships. It was clear throughout the study, the principals at Bridges worked hard to promote coach-teacher relationships. This made the teachers more comfortable with the coach coming into the classroom and it made it more likely for them to use the coaches' strategies suggested to them.

Another strategy for enacting instructional leadership in the study was the principals supported the district curriculum. The district had many curriculum documents the principals followed in their schools. These documents were created with teams of teachers and administrators in the district. Glatthorn and Jailall (2009) shared the importance of districts having consistent standardized curriculum throughout the district for three reasons: (a) equity across the district with what core curriculum students are learning, (b) student mobility where students can switch schools in a district and not miss parts of the curriculum, and (c) coordination of the curriculum from each district.

Glatthorn and Jailall's (2009) thoughts about curriculum matched what Henderson and Gornik (2007) noted with the standardized management paradigm, which is an approach focused on accountability. The standardized management paradigm focuses on how students perform on standardized tests. Henderson and Gornik (2007) argued there are problems with this paradigm because curriculum judgments need to be made based on the students. Henderson and Gornik stated, "Particular students in a particular classroom in a particular school year may benefit from particular practices aligned to particular standardized tests, but this does not hold for all students at all times for all educational goals" (p. 9). Henderson and Gornik argued the standardized management paradigm is not all bad; it just lacks students learning democratic morals and values that students will take with them for the rest of their lives.

The curriculum documents provided by the principals in the study showed the district curriculum was standards-based with a focus on reading and math, which are the two most tested areas by the state. However, one thing the curriculum was missing is

teaching the students to think critically about what is happening in society. According to Ladson-Billings (2009), students need to be learning about "structural inequity, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society" (p. 140). These topics could be discussed in classrooms but did not come up in the principal interviews or in any of the district documents. The principals in this study had the challenge of making sure the teachers were following the district curriculum and were pacing the curriculum as mapped out by the district.

The principals tried different ways to get families involved in the school. They worked with teachers to put together math and reading nights that happened at school, as well as on conference nights. Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) argued that principals play a large role in getting families to feel ownership of the educational process. Principals need to create a school culture where families feel welcome. This enhances families being in the schools and creates a positive attitude toward the school and school staff members. According to Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012), "Important characteristics of school culture related to engagement include a caring atmosphere, significant family volunteerings, and a supportive environment for teachers' work" (p. 92). This shows the importance of family involvement on school culture and the need for principals to find ways to increase family involvement in the schools (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012).

Kruse and Seashore Louis (2009) found a link between parent involvement and student achievement. However, Kruse and Seashore Louis have found there is a lot of focus in schools on a perceived decline in parent involvement and a focus on obstacles

that make it hard for parents to be engaged in the school. Kruse and Seashore Louis argued that "reforms that go beyond simple parent involvement activities represent a shift in the cultural assumptions about whom the school 'belongs to'" (p. 144). They suggested that principals and teachers need to learn from the families to blend what the community knows and their professional expertise. This will not only help the school culture but it can help kids' learning. Kruse and Seashore Louis (2009) also shared how schools cannot give students all the support they need to be successful. Students need multiple supportive people in their lives; this gives them social capital. According to Kruse and Seashore Louis, "the concept of social capital refers directly to the well-established findings that people who have stronger and more resilient networks of relationships with other people are healthier, happier, and live longer" (p. 148).

Auerbach (2010) expressed school-family partnerships on a continuum. This continuum has a goal of cultural proficiency and authentic partnerships with families. There are leaders who get families involved just to say they did it and other leaders who are looking for authentic family partnerships. Auerbach shared the leadership preventing partnerships where the leader's goal is to maintain a separation between families and community partners. It also looks at diverse families through a deficit lens. In leadership for nominal partnerships the goal is to work with families for compliance. Parents and families are welcomed as visitors in the school and culturally are seen through a deficit lens. In leadership for traditional partnerships, the goal is to raise student achievement and help meet the needs of the families. Diverse families are seen through a mix of a deficit lens and a strengths-based model. In leadership for authentic partnerships there is

a democratic relationship and cultural responsiveness that advocates for partners. In authentic partnerships, relationships are two-way and diverse families are looked at through a strengths-based view (Auerbach, 2010).

When working with families it is important for principals to understand their cultural capital and how this may affect how families want to come into the school. Bourdeiu (1986, as cited in Claussen & Osborne, 2013) defined cultural capital as "the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are transmitted to an individual within their sociocultural context through pedagogic action" (p. 59). The dominant group in society determines what their values are and what cultural capital is (Claussen & Osborne, 2013). According to Claussen and Osborne:

> Formal education is important because it can be viewed as an academic market for the distribution of cultural capital: Those who enter the classroom with sufficient cultural capital of the appropriate, dominant type—capital that fits well with the discourse and values of schools—are well positioned to increase their cultural capital further. (p. 59)

The majority of teachers in urban schools are White teachers who have cultural capital (Fruchter, 2007). Claussen and Osborne (2013) stated, "Students who possess cultural capital of a form that is incongruent with the culture of the school, or who lack it altogether, are at a distinct disadvantage" (p. 59). This makes it more important for teachers and principals to understand their own cultural capital and their students. They can do this by becoming more involved in the community the school belongs to and using supports in the school that come from the community (Fruchter, 2007). Principals and

teachers can make home visits that will help build better relationships with families (Fruchter, 2007). Authentically getting to know families and the community helps principals and teachers learn about students and their culture (Fruchter, 2007), and it helps get the families to feel more welcome in the schools.

The research shows the importance of getting families involved at a deeper level than just getting them involved to say the families are involved. The goal is for schools to build authentic relationships with families. These relationships help students to be more successful in school. Getting to a point where a school builds authentic relationships takes a lot of work from the principal. A culture around building relationships with families needs to be created in the school. It is important for principals to understand this and understand their role in creating these relationships. The principals in the study expressed how they try to get parents into the schools for different events. Each school is a community learning center, where the community holds events. It seems like many events happen at the school through the community. However, it seems principals get shuffled around in the district depending on how the building is doing, which can make it difficult to build relationships with families.

Building Positive School Climate was Important to Principals as Instructional Leaders

The participants in the study made it clear that building positive school climate was important to them as instructional leaders in their buildings. When talking with the principals they shared ways they supported the students. Each principal shared how they were visible throughout the building and made sure to greet students each morning as

they came into the building. The principals worked on PBIS in their schools to make it a positive place for students and to reward when students were following the expectations.

Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, and Leaf (2008) explained, "The school-wide PBIS model utilizes universal positive preventive support strategies that provide systematic training of expected social behaviors and reinforcement of those behaviors to all students in the school" (p. 3). PBIS is a three-tiered system; 80–90% of students should respond to Tier 1, which is the school-wide behavior expectations and supports. Tier 2 provides students with more support and should be between 5–10% of the school population. Tier 3 provides students with intensive behavior supports and is for students who have skill deficits in certain areas. This is about 1–5% of the school population. The goal of PBIS is to support a positive climate and reduce the amount of discipline referrals to the office (Bradshaw et al., 2008). PBIS was not something that was required by the district for each elementary school. Each school implemented PBIS in different ways and with a different amount of fidelity.

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) described the climate as the attitude of the school where culture is the personality. The climate can easily be changed where the culture takes years to change. However, climate change can turn into a cultural change in the building over time (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). A study completed by O'Donnell and White (2005) found "principals who emphasize the improvement of their school learning climate might be helping to improve their students' ability to achieve at higher levels" (p. 67). Behaviors that were associated with a positive school climate were: protecting instructional time, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives to teachers,

promoting professional development, and providing students with incentives for learning (O'Donnell & White, 2005).

According to Skiba, Ormiston, Martinez, and Cummings (2016), "Maintaining a positive and organized classroom setting free from disruption is critical to providing an instructional environment conducive to teaching and learning" (p. 120). Although this quote is referring to the classroom specifically, it can also pertain to principals. If principals do not support the teachers with limiting disruptions in the classrooms and throughout the building then the environment won't be conducive to learning, which is why maintaining a positive school climate is part of being an instructional leader. Cobb (2014) expressed how the school climate can either help or hurt a student's academic progress. Cobb (2014) stated, "Principals set the belief system that all students can achieve to the highest of standards, and they lay the groundwork for a positive and trusting environment" (p. 16). Principals' beliefs and attitudes towards students can be the models for the teachers and students in the school (Cobb, 2014). If principals believe that all students can learn and model that belief in how they lead, then it will become part of the school climate.

Principals in Urban Districts Face a Variety of Challenges as Instructional Leaders

The principals in the study expressed many different challenges they face as a school leader, which made it difficult to be an instructional leader in their building. Some of these challenges were: district accountability, state accountability, and building challenges. All of these demands can be very challenging as a principal. Farmer (2007)

discussed the complexity of the job of the principal, especially with increased demands from accountability. Farmer stated:

> The push for data-driven decision-making requires systematic data-collection and analysis. Increased accountability about student achievement has been accompanied by an increase in stakeholders' demands and bureaucratic paperwork. Amid these pressures, principals often must deal with issues of diversity and social inequities. (p. 57).

Robey and Helfenbein (2018) found that principals in urban schools face issues with finances in their district, which then created more challenges in the principal's work. They also found that even with all of the challenges principals face, they value instructional leadership and made student learning a priority over operational tasks. According to Robey and Helfenbein, the following tasks were the most challenging for principals: "Managing the budget, addressing the needs of individual learners, and maintaining an adequate supply of effective teachers" (p. 318).

West, Peck, and Reitzug (2010) studied the challenges that urban principals faced with increased accountability. They found principals have: extensive responsibilities, limited control, and a lack of personal and professional time. The extensive responsibilities principals now have made it difficult to be an instructional leader. One principal in the study expressed how managerial tasks can take over the day and make it hard to be an instructional leader. The principals felt like they had limited control over events that happened in the day. There might be a situation that occurs that demands the principal's time or demands help from central office. Another challenge they found in

the study was a lack of personal and professional time because principals were spending such long hours at work. The principals felt they had to stay over everyday or come into the building on the weekend to get caught up or plan for the next week (West et al., 2010).

Other additional challenges West et al. (2010) found were the increased academic performance expectations, technology in the building, and political power dynamics. According to West et al. (2010), "such public accountability systems have created significant new pressures for the principal, who is often the only individual whose name is directly linked to a school's academic performance" (p. 251). Technology in the building also brought challenges because principals felt like they had to constantly check their email and this meant they were always connected to their work, even at home.

The last challenge shared from West et al. (2010) was the political power dynamics that principals face. West et al. explained how "in many American urban districts, superintendents and their central leadership teams have consistently focused on increasing individual school academic performance as the means toward aggregate district improvement" (p. 254). This pressure on the superintendent and other central office leaders then trickles down to the principals. The research above is confirmed in this study, in that principals in this study expressed similar challenges. They felt a pressure with the accountability from their district and the state. These challenges make the job of being an urban elementary principal very difficult. When principals understand what the challenges are and the struggles they may face it will help them to be better equipped to handle the challenges that come at them.

Connecting the Theoretical Framework to the Findings

The theoretical framework for this study focused on three areas: school culture, leadership, and critical theory. School culture was a large part of the themes that emerged in the study. The culture of a school consists of the values and beliefs, where the climate is the values and beliefs in action (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). The school climate can become the school culture over time (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). The culture of the school district in this study was a culture of standardization and clear expectations of what content teachers should be teaching and when they should be teaching the content. The principals created a culture of caring for students in their building and modeling that for the teachers. They also worked to build a culture where parents were involved in the school, even though that was a large challenge in the district.

Leadership was the approach the principals in this study used to exercise influence in their school (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012). Participants enacted instructional leadership leading through district-wide focuses and based on their beliefs and values about creating a positive school climate, and how to help students learn to follow the building expectations. Although the principals were leaders in their school, they also had to follow the directives of their supervisors and district leaders. Principals faced many challenges as school leaders, yet they were still able to influence their teachers in a positive way to keep working towards the district focuses and continue to do what is best for their students.

Critical theory was the final theoretical lens used in this study. As discussed in Chapter 1, critical theory encourages questioning of traditions and how things have

always been, along with investigating the hidden assumptions behind practices in place (Bronner, 2017). Principals demonstrated an ability to think critically about discipline practices in the building and how students were treated. The principals understood how suspending students instead of trying to keep them in class was a hidden assumption that the student cannot learn and need to leave school. The principals would help teachers reflect on their own behavior practices through PBIS and how they were treating the students. The principals wanted the teachers to build relationships with the students and for each student to have someone who cared for them in the school.

Viewing curriculum through a critical theory lens as a school leader was not evident in the data. This was because the district had a standardized curriculum and curriculum maps that were followed closely. The teachers also had non-negotiable schedules they followed. This did not leave much time or autonomy for principals to challenge their teachers to think about hidden assumptions in the curriculum or social justice issues. Critical pedagogy challenges the subjectivity of knowledge and how it was socially constructed. This includes the importance of understanding class and culture in the construction of knowledge (McLaren, 2017). Critical pedagogy could be used for principals and teachers to question and understand the lived experiences of the students and the culture of their school and how the two contradict.

Implications

The results of this study have implications for potential positive change for principals as instructional leaders. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how urban elementary principals enact instructional leadership in K–5

elementary public schools during a time when principals are held accountable for students' test scores. An urban district was chosen because principals were more likely to view their leadership through a critical theory lens because of the diverse student population the district serves. When the study was created, I anticipated that a main theme would be how principals led with integrity while facing the accountability of the state and district. However this did not emerge in the study. The data revealed the challenges principals face as an instructional leader because of all of the demands put on them. The data also revealed that principals led with integrity when creating a positive climate for their students. However, it did not emerge that principals face a tension between being an instructional leader in their building and leading with integrity in a way that pushes against the accountability that principals face. This leads to my first implication that resulted from the study.

The first implication is that it is possible for urban elementary school principals to navigate leading with integrity for equity while facing the tensions of accountability. Principals can lead in a way in which accountability can help improve learning for students while also promoting equity for students. Although accountability measures can be challenging for principals to navigate in their buildings, they can also have positive outcomes. An example of this was PLCs, which was a district accountability measure facing the participants in this study. However, the principals felt PLCs were beneficial to the students in their buildings and helped improved teaching practices. Principals can respond to the accountability with integrity and always put the students first. Monga (2016) defined integrity in leadership as leaders having a commitment to morals,

adhering to their ethics and beliefs, being transparent, and consistent in their decision making.

According to Monga's (2016) definition, principals lead with integrity when they challenge the accountability within certain parameters and focus on ethical decisions as it relates to the accountability that is put on them, as well as ensure that all students are getting what they need to be successful. It is difficult for principals to do what is best for students when they feel like they have their hands tied because of accountability brought on by the district and the state. Especially, when state funding is tied to test scores it makes it difficult to not succumb to the accountability. School districts, especially in urban districts, need the state funding and therefore have to worry about the district report card and how students score on state tests. However, principals can make a choice within certain parameters to do what they feel is best for their students and lead in a way that does not succumb to the dominant testing and accountability culture, while also promoting equity for all students in the building.

The second implication is principals can lead teachers to think about curriculum through the lens of critical theory. Principals can have conversations with their teachers about curriculum and help teachers see that it serves the interest of a particular group of people (Apple, 2017). When principals and teachers question the curriculum and whose perspective the curriculum was written from it can help educators see that it was made for the dominant class of students (Darder et al., 2017). Principals can challenge teachers to think about the hidden and null curriculum they teach in their classroom and not even

realize they are teaching. When conversations about critical theory and critical pedagogy happen it empowers students to understand the truth behind what they are learning.

The third implication is principals need to better understand the variety of ways they can be an instructional leader in their building. The principals in the study enacted instructional leadership in ways that were shaped from the district focuses. However, how the principals enacted instructional leadership could be implemented in any type of school and the research showed the benefits they have for students. The principals in the study were instructional leaders and were very involved in holding the teachers accountable in the building to meet collaboratively to talk about their instructional practices and ways to intervene with struggling students. The principals had knowledge of how to navigate programs that showed data about the students in their building and they were able to interpret what that data meant. When principals are instructional leaders in their building they can make sure all students are growing academically and making progress. Principals can use data to look at subgroups such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status to make sure all students are making progress and learning in the classroom.

A fourth implication for this study is for principal preparation programs. Professors of preparation programs can use the findings from the study to align them with the 2008 ISLCC standards. Each finding fits in well with one of the ISLCC standards. Standard one and four emphasizes collaboration and using data to improve the educational environment, which fits in well with the participants in the study and their work with PLCs. Standards two, three, five, and six all relate to promoting a positive

school culture and aligns with the finding in this study of how the participants worked to create a positive school climate. The findings serve as examples for ways future principals can incorporate the ISLCC standards into their future buildings.

Limitations

The first limitation of the study was that all three participants were from the same urban district. I chose to study principals in one district purposely to learn about the culture of the district. However, when learning about how principals enacted instructional leadership many of the strategies the principals enacted were based on the district focuses. The principals did not express ways they enacted instructional leadership that were different from the district focuses.

Another limitation to the study was the organizational culture of the school district. The culture played a large factor in how the study was carried out and the findings that emerged. The organizational culture of the district is rooted in the history of the district and what they choose to focus on because of the district's past (Farrell, 2018). The organizational culture's beliefs and values come out in the district's mission and vision (Farrell, 2018), which were very explicit from the principals in the study. The principals mentioned what the district's goals were that stemmed from the district's mission and vision.

The context of the school district and how the district runs as an organization impacted the findings of the study. It impacted how the participants answered based on the organizational culture and how the study was set up. According to Schram (2006) "qualitative research is context sensitive or context specific—that is, it proceeds from the

assumption that ideas, people and events cannot be fully understood if isolated from the circumstances in which and through which they naturally occur" (p. 9). One part of the context of this study was the district gave the participants the names of the other participants in the study. This meant the participants could read how others responded in the dissertation and it was not completely confidential. Also, the district knew who the participants were in the study. The participants were asked by the district to respond to them if they would be willing to volunteer for the study. When principals agreed to volunteer, the district knew the names of each participant. Therefore, participants may have felt uncomfortable to answer honestly and open because the district would know how they responded in the interviews.

Firestone (2009) expressed how districts with a culture of accountability create a system where principals have to focus on central office requirements. Since, the principals in the district did have to focus on accountability they may not have wanted to share things they were doing that were not part of central office requirements. Khoo (2010) expressed how in an organization when someone feels the organization is doing something ethically wrong and shares that with others, there could be negative consequences. This could be a loss of support from the organization and it could lead to a type of workplace bullying called mobbing. Mobbing is done by a group of people and is a type of emotional abuse and harassment that leads to an unhealthy work environment for the victim. This could be a fear of the principals in the study, even if it has not ever happened in the district before. However, one principal did share that a principal could end up on an improvement plan if he or she did not follow the district focuses.

Another limitation in the study is the possibility that the participants were "faking good" (Griffin & Wilson, 2012). According to Griffin and Wilson (2012) "faking good" refers to a "conscious effort to manipulate responses to personality items to make a positive impression" (p. 486). The principals may have wanted to give responses back that were in line with what the district would want to hear, since they would be reading the dissertation. Hatch (2002) expressed the importance of understanding the organizational setting and the context where the research will be happening. In this study the context played a large role in the findings of the study. The findings were directly related to how the district wanted principals to enact instructional leadership based on their initiatives and focuses as a district and the resources that were given to the principals.

Another factor that impacted the study was the principals felt pressed for time during the interviews. One principal was in the process of moving buildings; the other principals were finishing up the school year and it was a busy time of year. The principal who was moving buildings had been told the week before we met for the first interview. When s/he agreed to be a participant s/he did not know they would not be in the same building the next year. S/he was in the middle of going back and forth between buildings and preparing the assistant principal to take over as principal. The other two principals were finishing up end of the school year paperwork and making sure their work was done before they left for summer break. The third round of interviews was also conducted in the spring when principals were wrapping up the school year.

Recommendations for Future Research

This bounded case study suggests that principals can enact instructional leadership and lead with integrity, even with all of the accountability that is placed on the principals. However, this topic needs further exploration. First, this topic needs to be explored in a context where the participants feel like they have the ability to share anything with complete confidentiality from the school district. The principals did not explicitly express reservations about being candid in interviews with me. They did not state any concern that their supervisors were going to have access to this dissertation. However, knowing the district was going to read the dissertation may have held the principals back from sharing tensions and frustrations that they were feeling. The school district knows the district focuses that must be followed and the principals mentioned all of the focuses they are doing in their building. Missing, however, were expressions of lived experiences that showed what the principals actually believe as instructional leaders, as it pertained to curriculum and instruction, that were different than the focus of the school district. Principals may not have wanted to share what they value if indeed those values are contrary to that of the school district.

Second, the topic of how culture plays a role in instructional leadership needs to be studied further. Culture is such a big part of how principals lead as instructional leaders because culture is part of everything that happens in schools (Gay, 2000). This study showed how culture plays a large role in how principals can enact instructional leadership and yet there is a lack of literature on this topic. In this study the culture of the school district influenced how principals were instructional leaders because many of the

strategies the principals were enacting were happening as district focuses. Also, the culture each principal worked to influence in their schools impacted how they were instructional leaders in their buildings. The principals also shared how they were working to improve the school climate in their building. The school climate can become the culture after a long enough period of time.

Finally, the topic of how principals understand critical theory and critical pedagogy and how they use it in their practice as instructional leaders could be researched. It was unclear how the principals understood critical theory and critical pedagogy because it did not emerge from the data. It would be interesting to explore this more with principals who are instructional leaders and challenging the standardization and accountability. The interviews and curriculum documents did not show any critical pedagogy as a foundation of instructional leadership. However, critical pedagogy conversations could be happening at staff meetings or during professional development in a specific building. It may not be necessarily found in a district or building document.

I am optimistic that principals in the district are helping their staff think critically about what they are teaching. I also believe there are teachers in the district who draw on a critical approach to guide their teaching. The principals did share there were great things happening in classrooms throughout their buildings. There may be teachers who think critically on their own and who choose to teach this way in their own classroom. It just was not apparent in the study whether it is something the principals and teachers discuss during staff meetings, PLCs, or professional development. Also, the district curriculum did not include any content or time to talk about critical pedagogy in the

curriculum. The curriculum matched the Ohio standards and was mapped out for teachers, so they knew what they needed to teach and when to teach it.

Summary

This study explored how urban elementary principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 urban elementary public schools at a time where principals are held accountable for their school's state test scores. This study found that many of the ways principals enacted instructional leadership were based on district-focuses. The principals' background experiences did influence how they understood and enacted instructional leadership. The ways that principals seemed to understand instructional leadership aligned with how they enacted instructional leadership in their building. The themes that emerged from the data on how principals enacted instructional leadership in urban elementary schools were: (a) instructional leadership was shaped by district focuses; (b) building positive school climate was important to principals as instructional leaders; and (c) principals in urban districts face a variety of challenges as instructional leaders.

Implications that emerged from this study were: (a) principals knowing that it is possible to navigate the tension of trying to lead with integrity while dealing with the tensions of accountability, (b) principals can lead teachers to think about curriculum through the lens of critical theory, (c) principals have a variety of strategies that are available to be an instructional leader in their building, and (d) principal preparation programs can use the findings from the study to align them with the ISLCC standards. Further research on this topic could be studied using principals from different school

districts. The principals enacted instructional leadership in ways that aligned with what the district focuses. Therefore, how principals enact instructional leadership in K–5 urban elementary schools could be explored more in different school districts.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Appendix A

Sample Interview Questions

Sample Interview Questions for Interview 1

1. Why did you become a principal?
2. How long have you been a principal?
3. How many schools have you worked at? Can you describe these schools?
4. What are ways you think you are an instructional leader in your building?
5. When you were learning to become a principal did you learn about being an instructional leader?
6. How did your teaching experience help you be an instructional leader to the teachers in your building?
7. Do you engage in professional development in being an instructional leader?

Sample Interview Questions for Interview 2

1. In the first interview we discussed your thinking about being an instructional leader. I was hoping you could talk to me a little more about how you enact your role as instructional leader?
2. In what ways do you see your role as an instructional leader as a response to the community where your school is located?
3. How do you protect teachers' instructional time?
4. How do you promote collaboration between teachers?
5. How do you work with teachers on curriculum and instruction?
6. What do you believe to be important in curriculum?

    a. How do you let teachers know this is what you think is important?

7. What tensions do you experience as a leader in your building from your district? From the state?

Sample Questions from Interview #3

1. How is the year going so far?
2. In your view, please describe the greatest successes in your school this year. Also describe why you think these successes occurred. What have been the greatest struggles or disappointments so far? Also, describe why you think these struggles or disappointments occurred.
3. How did you come to this position today? What brought you to Bridges and what keeps you coming back?
4. What excites you about coming to work every day?
5. What is something happening in your building related to instruction that you are most proud of?
6. How do you understand the strengths of the families served?
7. What is something happening in your building that is exclusive to just your building? This can be programs or instructional practices, etc.

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