PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CULTURES AT WORK:

HOW PRINCIPALS SERVE AS CATALYSTS FOR LEARNING

A Dissertation Presented

By

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my family, who have consistently maintained high expectations for me. I am forever grateful to be surrounded by your love and support.

To my husband Jason, thank you for living with me through this long journey. You never let me doubt that I could successfully complete this degree while changing jobs five times. My most recent position forced you to leave a job you loved as we moved across the State. Thank you for taking this big chance with me. You have allowed me to follow my dreams, all while letting me "retire" from the kitchen.

Mom, this is for you. Bringing me into this world made you grow up way too soon. Thank you for reading to me until I fell asleep and always giving me money for the book fair. I am so proud you are my Mom.

Nans, thanks for not being shy that I am your favorite. You are my favorite too. Pops, I would be thanking a different family right now if it were not for you. Thank you for believing in me. I know this accomplishment is making you and Grandma Tranberg proud.

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ABSTRACT

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MAY 2022

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Principals are an influential factor in a child's academic success (Manna, 2015; Louis et al., 2010; Waters et al., 2003). Although the path of influence is often indirect, principals affect student learning by developing and sustaining strong professional learning cultures (Hattie, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012). As a result of the complexities surrounding principalship, a desire to understand the attributes, skills, and leadership actions of successful principals persists as an international focus of educational research. This study examines principalship through the

experiences of various stakeholders within a school system utilizing a descriptive single case study ethnographic qualitative approach. This approach explores the relationships, experiences, and perceptions between a principal and those vertically aligned to the principal within the system from the teacher level to the superintendent.

This study reflects a conceptual framework representing vertical professional learning within a system and several crosscutting cultural constructs supporting conditions for learning and communication across the system. Research methods included a participant inventory, document review, and non-structured interviews with various stakeholders in a single school district. This research supports that creating a learning culture requires a foundation of leadership talent that balances and reflects both instructional and transformative leadership attributes. When those leadership talents are maximized to foster conditions for collective capacity, collective efficacy, and reciprocal accountability, the leader has built a school that relies on its most valuable resource, its people.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Principals are an influential factor in a child's academic success (Manna, 2015; Louis et al., 2010; Waters et al., 2003). Although the path of influence is often indirect, principals affect student learning by developing and sustaining strong professional learning cultures (Hattie, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012). Michael Fullan describes the principal as the leader of a learning culture, "one who models learning, but also shapes the conditions for all to learn on a continuous basis" (Fullan, 2014, p. 9). Schools—where professional learning is valued—are led by principals who create these conditions that foster teacher efficacy and build the shared desire to improve instructional practices that benefit student learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012).

Due to the influential role of the principal, a desire to understand the attributes, skills, and leadership actions of successful principals persists as an international focus of educational research. As a result, applying old and emerging new leadership theories attempts to clarify the complex construct of principalship. While many leadership theories hold firm in educational discourse, the nexus of theories emerges at the intersection of instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003; Day et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2008). While the apparent overlap between the theories exists, instructional leadership, grounding decisions with teaching and learning focus, and transformational leadership, prioritizing vision, mission, and culture as the guiding forces to school improvement, encompass the core tenets of school leadership (Day et al., 2016). While earlier research presents these theories dichotomously, the complex role of the principal continues to suggest that successful leaders often reflect an intersection of these theories.

Challenging matters further, principals are not autonomous figures, as their leadership is subject to district leaders' clarity in vision and expectations. While identifying principals' approaches to leadership as instructional or transformational offers insight into how they prioritize decisions, the nature of the work they lead necessitates operationalizing larger systemic goals. When principals receive support and consistency from district-level leaders who have set a clear vision and expectations while simultaneously offering autonomy, principals are more likely to experience success as leaders of a learning culture (American Institute for Research, 2010).

This study comprises the experiences of various stakeholders within a school system through a descriptive single case study ethnographic qualitative approach. This approach examines the relationships, experiences, and perceptions between one principal and those vertically aligned to the principal within the system from the teacher level to the Superintendent. Seeking an understanding of a single principal in this manner will offer insight into their leadership actions and how those actions are perceived. In addition, this study seeks to identify congruence between participant beliefs and actions and artifacts that contribute to developing a professional learning culture. My understanding of participants' perceptions and beliefs emerges through an initial participant inventory, interviews, and analysis of site-based documents that guide teaching and learning in the district.

After successfully completing my comprehensive examination, a conceptual framework emerged that informed the development of an analytic framework and the overall analysis of data collected through the research. Additionally, my experiences as a teacher, department leader, assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent will inform the analysis. While my early research examined professional learning for school leaders through a narrow lens, this framework applies theories of reciprocal accountability, collective capacity, and collective efficacy to enhance understanding of the principalship's complexity. Findings are intended to support school systems as they reflect on their vertical leadership structures to build coherence, prioritize professional learning, and improve student learning.

Statement of Problem

Principals are expected to establish professional learning cultures while navigating high accountability responsibilities that are both instructional and managerial (Elmore, 2000). Establishing professional learning cultures challenges principals as planning and providing professional development are among the many responsibilities their roles demand. Principals' prioritization of instructional matters, like professional learning, over managerial tasks is inconsistent, similar to the training they receive in their pre-service training programs. While some principal training programs develop courses of study and fieldwork with a teaching and learning focus, others assume that aspiring principals are teachers themselves and already understand the principles of teaching and learning (Brazer & Bower, 2013). Nonetheless, neglecting to prepare and support principals as effective leaders of the instructional core produces building managers ill-equipped to lead cultures of learning (Elmore, 2000).

Attempts to understand successful school leadership frequently examine the behaviors and actions of principals who meet some pre-determined success criteria. Those actions and behaviors are then associated with an approach to leadership, often instructional or transformational. However, albeit decades of research, consensus definitions of leadership approaches are rarely encountered (Hallinger, 2005; Southworth, 2002; Elmore & Burney, 1999). Instead, the significant output of educational leadership research contributes to multifaceted definitions of complex approaches to the point of incertitude, at times considered representing "more of a slogan than a well-defined set of leadership practices" (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 6). As a direct consequence of ambiguity within leadership models, principals' experiences during preservice training lack cohesion; despite the growing influence in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007), most recently updated in 2015 as the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders.

My professional experiences as a department leader, assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent inform my critique of current practices regarding principal leadership in practice and initial pre-service training. Regardless of prior knowledge and experiences, all principals new to a position have limitations. However, building capacity and providing opportunities to support and improve leadership quality while in-service offers hope. For principals to grow as leaders and provide high-quality professional learning experiences for their staff, they must possess and model self-agency to engage in their professional learning designed to grow their skills as leaders while in-service.

This challenge exacerbates the lack of definition surrounding high-quality professional learning for principals despite well-defined attributes of high-quality professional learning for teachers (Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Spillane, 2009). Therefore, not only are principals not trained to meet teachers' professional learning needs, but there is little in the way of research that informs how this might be remedied. Modeling learning takes courage, shows vulnerability, and contributes to a culture of trust that will build teacher capacity (Leithwood & Louis, 2012). If principals lack skills in this area, receiving job-embedded learning to grow their own skills is critical but unlikely.

Even though principals are often expected to function as catalysts of learning cultures, their ability to succeed in this area partially depends on the competence of the larger system (Elmore, 2000). Therefore, understanding how the principal and others perceive his or her role within the system will provide insight into the

complexity of building and leading a learning culture. Prior research leading to this study suggests a model that leadership infrastructures, or layers within the system, influence how principals identify strategic actions for school improvement and professional learning (Curtis & City, 2009, Tranberg, 2019). Findings within a system regarding alignment will inform the principals' positions to make decisions that ignite strong learning cultures.

The literature review examined how principals affect schools through their leadership approach applying the lens of instructional and transformational leadership. Additionally, the review of literature explored how principals are prepared to lead during pre-service and how they are supported as leaders while in-service. This examination of literature contributed to a conceptual framework that explores the constructs of collective capacity, collective efficacy, and reciprocal accountability to better understand the complex role of the principal.

Purpose of the Study

While research related to principal leadership has not been overlooked, the literature often examines the role of principals within their schools. Often, principals function as independent variables, and all other outcomes from school culture to student achievement serve as dependent variables. While some approaches to school leadership, such as distributed leadership and shared leadership, aim to mitigate the heavy responsibilities associated with principalship, research rarely expands beyond the practices within a particular school.

Individual schools are unique and complex, functioning within a larger system compounding that complexity. Regardless, all schools share the common goal and responsibility of educating children. How school systems organize to accomplish that goal depends on various factors not limited to geography, population, politics, community, and poverty. Some schools have a robust leadership infrastructure full of supports, and others must function with a level of personnel that some may consider egregious. Nonetheless, all students have the right to an education, and principals serve as catalysts for cultivating successful learning cultures in schools.

While principals are essential leaders in schools, they also have roles and responsibilities within larger systems. Research shows that effective systems work with principals and do not serve as barriers to successful leadership (Elmore, 2000). Therefore, systems that intentionally enhance principals' opportunities for learning so they may model and lead learning for others. Building a learning culture requires

professional learning experiences for all organization members. School systems that make a conscious effort to build coherence and communicate vertically within the leadership infrastructure from the teacher level to the Superintendent.

This study describes existing research related to instructional leadership and transformational leadership and the influential factors of reciprocal accountability, collective capacity, and collective efficacy to understand better the complex challenges of building a culture of learning. Findings are organized utilizing an epistemological construct examining the relationship between evidence-based truth and educators' beliefs within a school system.

Significance of the Study

This study reflects a conceptual framework representing vertical professional learning within a system and several crosscutting cultural constructs supporting conditions for learning and communication across the system. By examining a particular school district in central Connecticut, a deep understanding of communication within a system and perceptions of principal leadership emerged. When replicated, the process could inform practices in other districts or provide additional insights when applied to different stakeholders within the same school district.

While professional learning and professional development are commonplace in the work of teachers, school and district leaders neglect to engage in their professional learning with similar intentionality (Peterson, 2002). Identifying the planned and implemented professional learning for school and district leaders juxtaposed with professional learning opportunities and expectations for teachers provided insight and exposed inconsistencies in perceived and practiced instructional priorities. I argue that a disconnect between principals' beliefs about building a learning culture is inconsistent with how others perceive those actions. This disconnect can be so extreme that others within the organization view the principal as the cultural problem and not the catalyst to building a learning culture.

I am hopeful this research contributes to school and district leadership. While understanding principals' leadership approaches as instructional, transformational, or otherwise is informative, how their approach inspires learning and supports establishing professional learning culture is largely absent in the research. While the complexities and challenges surrounding the principalship are apparent, there is a lack of clarity in helping principals understand where to focus their efforts to maximize improvement. The answer to this does not lay solely in the principal's

hand but is a shared responsibility of district leadership. How district leaders invest in their learning and provide learning experiences for principals should alleviate the challenges principals face.

While the results of this study are not necessarily generalizable, the conceptual framework is applicable across school and school district settings. The framework requires a reflective examination of professional learning afforded to principals, teachers, and the district leadership within a specific system. How those learning experiences align vertically informs coherence and alignment to the larger mission within a system. Thoughtful application of this framework informs communication systems, promotes collaborative relationships, and encourages principal self-reflection better to understand their leadership in terms of instructional and transformational. This study represents how a framework supporting a learning culture can promote self-evaluation and reflection to inform strategic improvement efforts.

Research Question

This research critically analyzes the work of a practicing principal within a system to establish how a principal can position themselves as an influential leader of a professional learning culture. The selected system for this study comprises a multi-layered infrastructure and is preceded by a reputation of ample professional learning opportunities for various stakeholders. My research will specifically examine the alignment within the system using conceptual and analytic frameworks suggested by a previously conducted comprehensive examination of research.

Theory of Action
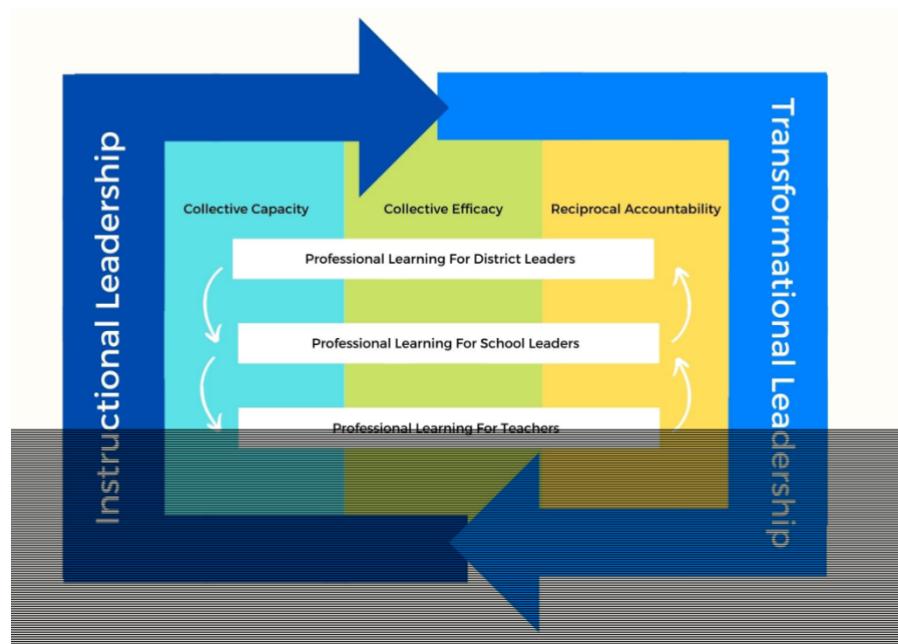
When principals clearly understand their role in building and maintaining professional learning cultures within a system, they can make decisions with thoughtfully aligned strategies and actions to participate in and support professional learning.

Research Question

How does a vertically connected team of educators within a system perceive the principal's role in building a learning culture with high levels of collective capacity, collective efficacy and reciprocal accountability?

Figure 1.1

Professional Learning Culture Conceptual Framework

Findings in these areas will offer insight regarding best practices in principal leadership and expose barriers that, when overcome, will allow principals to serve as "powerful multipliers of effective teaching" more effectively (Manna, 2015, p. 7).
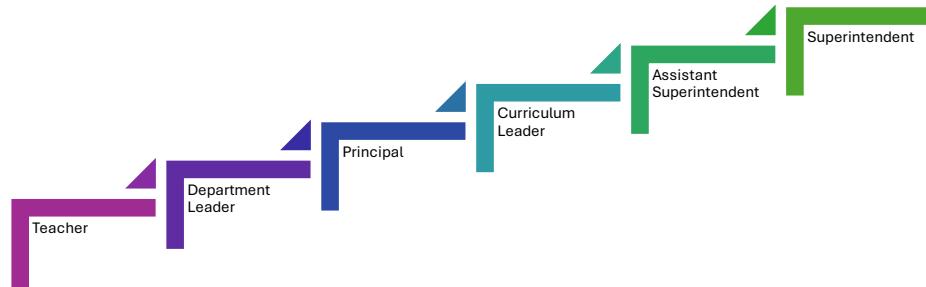
Overview of Methods

This qualitative study aims to understand better how systemic alignment affects the principal's ability to build and maintain a learning culture. Participants include a district superintendent, assistant superintendent, curriculum leader, principal, teacher curriculum leader, and a classroom teacher within a single district aligned to one principal. Data was collected through:

1.   Participant Inventory: Written, personal inventories of participants completed

prior to interviews. This inventory offers insight into available resources, work-in-

progress, and perceptions of goals and strategic planning.

2.   One-on-One Interviews: Personal, in-depth interviews were conducted vertically

within a system to understand how various stakeholders' responsibilities and

actions align to support the learning culture.

3.   Document Review: Relevant existing documents will be reviewed and

incorporated in interviews with various stakeholders. Documents include district

and school improvement plans, the teacher evaluation plan, professional growth

plan templates, and agendas/minutes of relevant meetings.

Figure 1.2

Hierarchy of District Leadership Infrastructure

Descriptive data will be organized and prepared for analysis. Data will be coded and categorized into themes aligned to an analytic framework. The interrelation of themes will support findings to inform the principal's strategic decision-making within a specific system. While findings are not generalizable, the study will inform how an analytic framework may be applied across individual systems to understand better how the principal's strategic decision-making contributes to the learning culture.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"We sink, we swim, we rise, we fall—we meet our fate together."

—Joe Clark in *Lean on Me* (Twain & Avildsen, 1989)

When asked to picture a school principal, most conjure up a person based on personal experience, recall a principal popularized through film and television, or think of a noteworthy news headline reflecting educational malpractice where the principal takes the ultimate fall. The falsely constructed image of a principal often represents positional authority, where their decision is the final word and where all students and teachers compliantly fall in line. Rarely does one consider the complexities of the role, how the principal got there, or how the principal functions within the complex structure of the school, not to mention the larger system.

Demystifying perceptions of principal leadership and understanding what works in school leadership are critical components to systemic school improvement. This review of literature begins with an exploration of two conceptual models of school leadership: instructional leadership and transformational leadership. While these two are not the only school leadership models, they have stood the test of time in educational research and serve as the foundation of other school leadership models (Hallinger & Heck, 1999). Moreover, these two models have also evolved, representing dissatisfaction with their limitations and the perpetual state of educational change (Hallinger, 2003).

Operationalizing and applying leadership models requires an understanding of principal learning. Therefore, examining principals' learning during pre-service training coupled with support principals receive through in-service professional development—when in-service—offers further insight into how principals learn to lead dynamic schools. In contrast, many principals report receiving some type of job-embedded support while in-service, principals working in smaller systems tend to receive less support (Johnston, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016). Evolving models of leadership and inconsistency in principals' experiences based on the size of a school district highlight the need to identify core components of principal leadership.

How Principals Affect Schools

Converging School Leadership Approaches

Instructional leadership and transformational leadership persist as core conceptions to understanding the complexities of school leadership. Approximately

four decades of instructional leadership research and three decades of transformational leadership contribute to our practices, definitions, and understanding of what it takes to be an outstanding educational leader. While many leadership approaches and philosophies maintain a presence in educational research, instructional leadership and transformational leadership serve as their foundation (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger, 2003). For this research, instructional leadership and transformational leadership are explored as overarching approaches that broadly define the actions and behaviors of practicing principals.

While historically referring only to principals, instructional leadership research has expanded to include those with influence or decision-making capital in a school or district. An additional limitation of early instructional leadership research includes focusing on turnaround—severely underperforming schools—over average or typical schools (Hallinger, 2005). This initial narrow focus, associated with the Effective Schools Movement, resulted in a perceived lack of transferability of instructional responsibility to all schools and leaders. Additionally, early research overwhelmingly lends itself to featuring dynamic leaders in lieu of the leadership behaviors and skills that influence instruction, learning, and achievement (Hallinger, 2005). As a result, research resonates more in the area of personal attributes of effective leaders rather than skills related to their leadership capacity (Elmore, 2000). Echoing these sentiments, Rallis and Highsmith (1986) describe how managerial and instructional tasks compete for principals' time, making the idea of a great principal more of a myth than a reality. Additionally, Hallinger (2005) argues that early research profiled instructional leaders more as superheroes than professionals who could learn the behaviors and skills necessary to experience success in the principalship.

Transformational leadership in education emerged to repudiate the Effective Schools Movement and the growing dissatisfaction with the dominating emphasis and practices associated with instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2003). While widespread agreement remained that principals must possess skills as instructional leaders, an undercurrent of desire for collaboration and shared decision-making emerged in response to the principals' pervading perceptions and realities as top-down decision-makers. Transformational leadership embraced the idea of many leaders in lieu of one and found its way to education after a decade of instructional leadership prominence (Hallinger, 2003).

Instructional Leadership and Transformational Leadership Defined

As the instructional leadership and transformational research bases perpetually expand and evolve, new professional learning resources support principals' and other educational leaders' efforts to improve schools. To better delineate instructional leadership, my synthesized definition for this research is an approach in which *leaders utilize their behaviors and actions to directly influence instruction and improve student learning*. Transformational leadership, however, is defined as an approach in which *leaders utilize their behaviors and actions to collaboratively influence instruction by empowering teachers to improve student learning.* While the expanded definitions of instructional leadership and transformational leadership are not limited to principals, much of this study presents leadership through the principal lens due to my greater focus on principals' capacity for building professional learning cultures where high-quality professional learning is accessible to all.

Reviewing instructional leadership and transformational leadership research supported the development of these definitions. While many factors informed these definitions, three prominent themes emerged summarized succinctly by Leithwood and Louis (2012). First, principals' relationships with teachers in tandem with building cultures of trust are paramount. Second, principals must make decisions aligned with their vision to change teachers' instructional practices. Additionally, strong principals maximize environmental effectiveness with leadership stability, prerequisite skills of allocating time appropriately, possessing instructional knowledge, and having consultative skills to engage in professional discourse (Leithwood & Louis, 2012).

The Principal as Instructional Leader

Direct involvement with instruction is a rare occurrence for principals (Elmore, 2000) but may not necessarily serve as a sign of poor leadership. Principals' perceptions of how they fulfill their instructional leadership responsibilities illuminate the critical tasks of instructional leaders. When comparing principals' perceptions of their skills as instructional leaders to teachers' perceptions of their principals' instructional leadership, principals often rate themselves higher than their corresponding teachers (Hallinger, 2013). More recently, Gurley, Anast-May, O'Neal & Dozier (2016) found that principal and teacher perceptions aligned more than previous studies when using the same measure. As preservice principal

training programs align more to nationally adopted leadership standards, researchers speculate a more streamlined understanding of instructional leadership responsibilities on the part of school principals (Gurley et al., 2016).

Emerging clarity in the role of principals as instructional leaders also suggests the identification of attributes exemplifying effective instructional leaders. While attributes may be too vast to identify in a streamlined manner, strategies to promote school improvement are more tangible in instructional leadership research, providing a starting place to connect behaviors and actions. A longitudinal study of elementary principals in Chicago found similarities in style, strategies, and issues tackled by effective principals (Sebring & Bryk, 2000). Pervading attributes among effective instructional leaders included a clear focus on instruction, coherent school improvement plans with an instructional focus, and a major commitment to professional learning (Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

Operationalizing instructional leadership proves to be challenging due to the many variables that contribute to the principals' roles, personal attributes, and the environment. While there is a shared belief that visibility is a vital role of the principal, visibility could prove more disruptive than helpful, depending on the principals' abilities to help teachers grow. An instructional leadership framework may help principals grow professionally, improve and monitor progress, and create a desirable learning environment focused on teaching and learning.

Environmental factors exacerbate principals' positive or negative influence within the school but rarely play a prominent role in instructional leadership frameworks. Blasé and Blasé (2004) present the TGR framework of talk, growth, and reflection as strategic areas for principals to influence instruction. Each component of the TGR Framework underscores the emergent theme of the principal's influence on teacher behavior as the path in shaping instruction and student learning.

Blasé and Blasé acknowledge that effective talk, "T," is a powerful and overlooked tool in instructional leadership. Effective instructional leaders embrace conferencing about instruction and demonstrate a level of interpersonal skill necessary for instructional leadership success. They assert that far too often, conferencing skills are assumed but are often absent in principals who might otherwise be equipped with skills in data gathering methods, instructional pedagogy, and communication. Additionally, their data suggest that successful principals made suggestions, provided feedback, modeled, utilized inquiry, and solicited advice and opinions on the most effective talk strategies (Blasé & Blasé, 2004).

Growing teachers, "G," by addressing their instructional needs is an attribute of successful Principals (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). Principals who navigate instructional leadership well establish a culture of growth by emphasizing teaching and learning. Supporting teacher collaboration and encouraging teacher participation in action research enhances principals' development of a culture where professional learning for instructional improvement is job-embedded. Furthermore, once teachers identify growth areas, effective principals support teachers' needs through coaching, participation in professional learning, and allocation of instructional resources reflective of teacher input (Blasé & Blasé, 2004).

Powerful reflecting, "R," or guiding teachers toward reframing and problem solving, is the final component of the TGR framework. This component assumes that instructional leaders have high levels of self-efficacy coupled with the desire to grow professionally (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). Osterman & Kottkamp (1993) stated that reflecting is grounded in a belief that all can assume responsibility for their professional learning and people intrinsically desire to improve their own performance.

Blasé and Blasé (2004) focused a large body of their research on survey data representing over 800 K–12 teachers. Their goal was to examine how successful principals promote teaching and learning. Hallinger (2005), however, dedicated much of his research to evaluating and operationalizing instructional leadership. Hallinger's research evolved from defining instructional leadership to developing a tool designed to assess school leaders' abilities to function as instructional leaders. Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) early research contributed to developing a model designed to understand better and assess instructional leadership, the *Instructional Management Rating Scale* (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The Hallinger and Murphy model identified three dimensions of instructional leadership for the school leader: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive learning climate. Ten leadership functions further support the three dimensions of instructional leadership: framing goals, communicating goals, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, coordinating curriculum, supervising and evaluating instruction, monitoring progress, setting standards, setting expectations, protecting time, and promoting improvement (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987; Hallinger, 2005).

Daniel Duke's 1987 research expanded upon Hallinger and Murphy's 1985 work and related studies to offer an instructional leadership framework focused on *situational competence* and the ability to adjust to the challenge at hand effectively. This

framework assumes that school leaders can identify the challenges requiring prioritization. Duke's work considers the complexity of the job of school leaders and is guided by the belief that there is unlikely one core set of behaviors that defines success for all because schools are different. The framework designed by Duke includes seven items that may require a situational response from school leaders: teacher supervision and development, teacher evaluation, instructional management and support, resource management, quality control, coordination, and troubleshooting (Duke, 1987).

The frameworks of Blasé and Blasé (2004), Hallinger (2005), and Duke (1987) offer coherence to the complex responsibilities of principals as instructional leaders, but all focus on the principal as the only leader within the building. While each framework has unique qualities, each speaks to the need for principals to develop and sustain professional learning cultures. In addition, each framework accounts for the unique variability among leaders and highlights skills and behaviors that may serve as areas of focus for the professional development of principals as instructional leaders.

Challenges related to balancing the demands of the principalship contribute to a high rate of transiency among school principals. Expecting one individual to have all the desired traits is unrealistic, but prioritizing traits that repeatedly make a difference demands identification and development. One shared trait of districts that succeeded in moving from low performing to high performing was a sustained commitment to developing instructional leadership skills collaboratively in principals and district leaders (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Similar to Hallinger and Murphy's instructional leadership framework, if determining, driving, and sharing the mission are essential aspects of instructional leadership at the school level, they must also be a factor in instructional leadership at the district level. Leadership frameworks contribute to the identification and prioritization of skills needed to build a culture of sustained improvement and student learning.

Leithwood and Jantzi's (2012) research findings offer further validation of the importance of the principal as an instructional leader while challenging common assumptions of principal influence. Assuming principals function as experts in all aspects of content has proven to be an unreasonable expectation. However, assuming principals should understand the tenets of quality instruction, learning, and curriculum is a reasonable expectation of their professional responsibility (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2012). A shared understanding among faculties of the

principal's role as an instructional leader maximizes potential to develop cultures where teachers are encouraged to grow, change, and influence student learning.

While this examination of instructional leadership is broad, commonalities across studies offer some hope for coherence in the daily practice of educational leaders. In its simplest form, instructional leadership represents educational leaders' work to address teaching and learning. While some principals might argue that all of their actions address teaching and learning, unfortunately, this is not the case. Prioritization of student learning must serve as a conduit for decision-making between principals and teachers. Honoring the mission, taking action in developing policies and practices to achieve that mission, and committing to reflection, evaluation, and continuous improvement define instructional leadership as a practice, not just another slogan. Described succinctly, school leaders who can articulate shared goals, engage in the teaching and learning required to achieve those goals, and create an environment that allows for achieving those goals, are high-functioning instructional leaders.

The Principal as Transformational Leader

Leithwood and several of his colleagues were influential scholars in bringing transformational leadership from the business world to education (Leithwood, 1992). Leithwood's early research describes transformational leadership as the evolution of instructional leadership, acknowledging that schools needed a balance of top-down decisions and facilitated decisions from the bottom-up (Leithwood, 1992). Despite Leithwood's initial attempt to urge the evolution of instructional leadership with the new label of transformational leadership, both constructs coexist and continue to respond to the rapid changes in education. While both approaches become more similar over time, instructional leadership and transformational leadership still hold separate places in educational research (Hallinger, 2003).

Branding transformational leadership as a new and responsive approach to address the widespread dissatisfaction of top-down leadership ignited the interest of many educators (Leithwood, 1992). Transformational leaders, branded as facilitators, develop a shared mission and goals for the organization's benefit. Leithwood's (1992) early research on transformational leadership found three key attributes of principals that set them apart from traditional instructional leaders: 1) Transformational leaders cultivated a collaborative and professional culture, 2) Transformational leaders supported and facilitated the professional learning and development of teachers, and 3) Transformational leaders helped teachers

effectively problem solve. All three descriptors reflect a principal who engages teachers by creating conditions to collaborate, contribute, and commit to continuous improvement. How leaders operationalize their practice to transform their schools presents the next level of challenge.
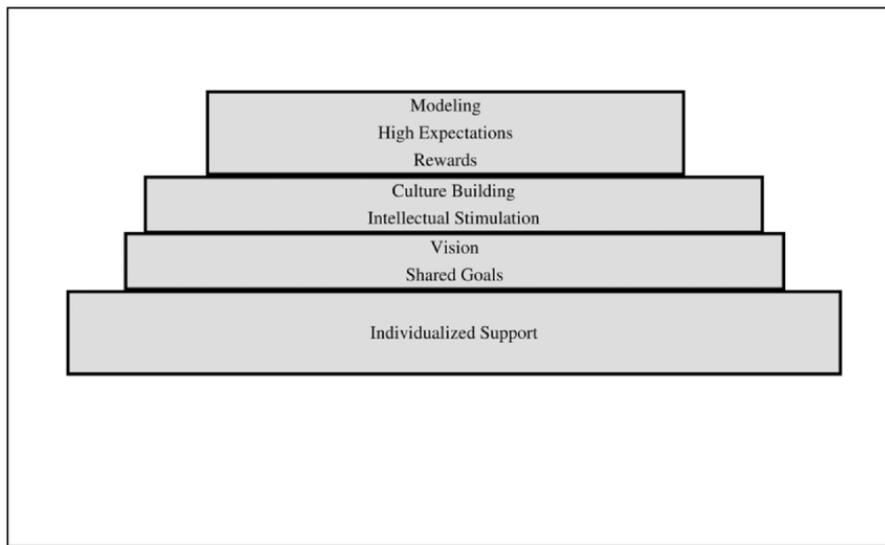
Leadership practices that directly target improved instruction are successful by improving the relationship between the leader and the teacher (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2012). When leadership is solid and shared, relationships are strong, and achievement is higher. The findings of Louis and Wahlstrom support Leithwood and Jantzi's assertion that a professional community—one where there is trust in shared decision making—serves as a strong predictor of student achievement in a school. Therefore, a supportive leader who builds a culture of trust and teacher efficacy creates conditions for teacher-led decision-making, contributing to higher levels of student learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012). Leaders who build a culture through their teachers make a difference, but not always in a predictable way. How principals shape the environment and utilize their role to affect instruction is critical to leading effectively.

One model of transformational leadership that encompasses a variety of environmental components emerged from the research of Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998). This model emphasizes that leadership is shared and supporting adult individuals within the organization is the foundation for success. Transformational leadership and this model very much emphasize the needs of the adults within the organization. The adult centeredness of transformational leadership is reinforced by Hallinger (2003) as he identifies three characteristics that set transformational leadership apart from instructional leadership: 1) Transformational leadership reflects a bottom-up approach to school improvement, 2) Transformational leadership relies on second-order change, freedom to break the perceived mold, and 3) Transformational leadership requires principals to have more than a managerial relationship with staff.

Figure 2.1

Shared Leadership Model

Modeling
High Expectations
Rewards

Culture Building
Intellectual Stimulation

Vision
Shared Goals

Individualized Support

Research findings related to transformational leadership effects very much speak to what Leithwood (1994) references as 'people effects.' Most frequently, the people reference teachers as their changes in behavior have the most direct impact on student learning. The principal's role relates to changes in the culture, resources within the school, and professional learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). Additional findings by Leithwood (1994) emphasize the importance and effects of group goal setting. Leithwood found principals were more equipped to support their staff and willing to engage in professional learning when evidence of group goal setting and professional learning and collaboration connected to achieving those goals.

Convergence of Instructional Leadership and Transformational Leadership

Decades of instructional leadership research assumes a linear theory of action: *If principals utilize leadership behaviors and skills to provide teachers with feedback related to instruction, teachers will change their instructional practice, and student learning will improve*. However, closely examining the research suggests a less linear path more aligned with transformational leadership: *If principals utilize behaviors and skills to create a professional learning culture, teacher efficacy will increase, improving instructional practice and positively affecting student learning*. What a principal says directly related to instruction might situationally make a difference for one teacher in that place and time. Principals who create cultures of collaboration and inquiry have a greater chance of making immeasurable and long-lasting differences for the schools they lead.

Elmore (2000) posits that direct involvement in instructional matters is among the least frequent activities of the principal and describes instructional leadership as "the equivalent of the holy grail" (p. 8). Therefore, the expectation that principals

serve as the sole instructional leaders of schools and remedy all challenges is illogical. Instead, Elmore argues for movement beyond the gift of the visionary leader and takes a more systematic approach to instructional leadership design. Elmore states it is important not to rely on the emergence of naturally talented leaders but instead develop systems that will grow effective leaders. Elmore's work maintains the focus on the instructional core while seeing the need to share the leadership responsibilities associated with the principal as the only instructional leader.

A broad examination of leadership practices, similar to what Elmore propagates, is available in a report prepared for the American Educational Research Association (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). This report advocates for building on the breadth and depth of knowledge accumulated over decades of educational research. Many questions remain unanswered, most importantly principals' abilities, or lack thereof, to maintain a balance between building and instructional management. However, three themes emerged that bring coherence regarding successful school leadership and instructional leadership. First, develop principals' abilities to set measurable goals aligned to strategic actions. Second, build principals' capacity to build a culture promoting high levels of shared decision making and teacher efficacy. Finally, principals must embody organizational coherence by creating structures that promote collaboration, continuous improvement, and student learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Principals cannot rely on a single approach to leadership if they aspire to a lasting organizational change. However, if principals thoughtfully adopt successful instructional leadership and transformational leadership strategies, they focus on the instructional core and build a culture of empowered educators. However, these empowered educators require training that develops their skills and desire to lead effectively (Marks & Printy, 2003). Hallinger's (2005) crosswalk between instructional leadership and transformational leadership concludes that leaders, like teachers, must evolve and grow. Principals who model their own professional learning and development while offering authentic opportunities for teachers to learn and grow demonstrate strong leadership and cultivate professional learning cultures (Hallinger, 2005).

The next section of this literature review recognizes that principals must be instructional leaders who focus on student achievement. However, the literature also reveals that strong instructional leadership is not enough. Supporting principals on the journey of building professional learning cultures requires the

infusion of transformational leadership practices to develop sustainable organizational improvement and improve overall school performance (Marks & Printy, 2003). Unfortunately, a disconnect between principals' self-perceptions of their leadership approach and teachers' perceptions of their principal's leadership approach presents a challenge (Mayes & Gethers, 2018). A void exists if collaboration, relationships, and teacher's voice are lacking from the teacher's perspective but not the principal's. Therefore, collective capacity, collective teacher efficacy, and reciprocal accountability are explored to support effective principal leadership.

Cultivating Professional Learning Cultures:

Collective Capacity, Collective Teacher Efficacy, and Reciprocal Accountability

Evoking the talents of teachers requires that principals create a balanced culture of an instructionally focused vision while recognizing the contributions and leadership of teachers in their schools. Principals' abilities to expand teachers' knowledge and skills have some influence on student learning; however, principals' ability to motivate teachers to grow professionally is the area of greatest opportunity for positive change to the instructional practice of teachers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012). Principals who do this well create conditions for high levels of collective teacher efficacy.

Beyond motivating teachers to learn and grow, principals who share decision-making responsibility further build capacity for collective teacher efficacy (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012). Collaborative decision-making on instructional matters builds teacher confidence and affects student learning more than leadership decisions made in isolation. Additionally, principals who embrace shared decision-making with instruction improve their positional authority and build decision-making capital with their staff (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012). Collaborative principals rely on the collective capacity of their schools to grow teachers as leaders and learners.

Recognizing the voices of those closest to the students builds an efficacious culture of trust and high expectations for all. In addition, shared decision-making creates conditions for a collaborative culture. However, cultural changes can require a significant amount of professional development and job-embedded professional learning. Job-embedded learning cultures encourage the evolution from the principal as the sole instructional leader to one who leverages teachers and other leaders with specific content knowledge to emerge and inform practice (Leithwood

& Jantzi, 2012). For cultural transformations to occur, principals need to provide teachers with opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills to do what they are being asked; this is reciprocal accountability.

While principal trust and healthy learning environments are critical, operationalizing them is complex. School leaders play a vital role in student achievement by serving as instructional resources and being accessible and visible to address issues in a timely manner (Andrews & Soder, 1987. Additionally, we know that teachers' perceptions of principals' skills as effective leaders indicate higher levels of student achievement for the school (Moore et al., 2016). Therefore, finding a healthy balance of *principal as instructional expert* and *principal as king of culture* will create exceptional learning conditions for students beginning with schools where teachers and principals work together to create ideal conditions for student learning.

Collective Capacity

Earning the designation of a high-performing school district is a sought-after distinction. While earning this label of distinction might be viewed as arbitrary, often, high-performing schools are synonymous with high levels of student achievement. When student achievement is high, schools meet indicators required for the classification of effective according to state and federal guidelines. While there are exceptions, effective schools result from an effective system (Harris, 2011). Effective systems require collective capacity among the stakeholders within those systems. Collective capacity refers to the skill that exists within organizations and the shared will to improve where deficits are identified (Curtis & City, 2018).

Capitalizing on the collective capacity within organizations requires the simultaneous building of capacity. At the organizational level, change will not occur if a sense of urgency is not shared and clarity is lacking (Harris, 2011). School systems often misstep by implementing many changes at once at high levels of speed (Fullan, 2011). When this occurs, the building of teachers' skills is compromised, and culture falters. Organizations that thoughtfully utilize the collective capacity within their schools have fewer but focused goals, develop infrastructures for success across their organizations, and allow principals and teachers space to develop school level and individual goals to help them connect to the larger goals of the organization (Harris, 2011, Fullan, 2011, Spillane & Coldren, 2011).

Constructing goals requires clear communication and a shared sense of purpose to develop strategic actions that address the core problem (Curtis & City, 2018). A

hallmark of high-performing systems is diagnosing those problems unapologetically and with veracity (Spillane & Coldren, 2011; Curtis & City, 2018). When making the connection between district level and schools, and then from principals to teachers, the need and demand for principals to create conditions for achieving these goals becomes necessary. How principals design infrastructures and allocate resources to meet teachers' current skill levels while providing opportunities to grow professionally is utilizing the collective capacity within their schools. These infrastructures allow for professional learning, coaching, feedback, and an opportunity for teachers to personally connect with the larger goals of the school and system (Noguera, J., & Noguera, P., 2018).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are the epicenter of systemic collective capacity (Harris, 2011). While PLCs look different in schools, their common purpose of providing a collaborative space for teachers to improve practice is consistent. How teachers utilize that time requires oversight and feedback from principals (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Richard DuFour operationalized PLCs in North America with the assertion that the greatest hope for our schools is building the capacity of the teachers. His work supports PLCs as a systemic approach to addressing the fundamental questions of what we want students to learn and how data-informed instruction will be used to support students who struggle and those who demonstrate early proficiency of content (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Finding the time for teachers to work together who share students or content is the role of the principal and serves as a critical step to building the collective capacity of their schools (Harris, 2011, DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Principals' skills in individually developing teachers contribute to the group's collective engagement and capacity (Gibbons et al., 2017). Teachers want to learn the skills necessary to instruct to support the goals at hand. However, the knowledge-building process to support initiative-aligned teacher learning is frequently overlooked (Harris, 2011). Creating conditions for effective change requires that principals ignite the commitment of teachers, create collaborative structures for PLCs, provide consistency with policies and expectations, allocate resources appropriately, and use data to guide decision-making (Harris, 2011). Teachers who remain learner-focused and adjust their pedagogy to meet the needs of struggling learners are emblematic of an organization with a high level of collective capacity (Harris, 2011).

"Time and again, we see the power of collective capacity. When the group is mobilized with focus and specificity, it can accomplish amazing results" (Fullan,

2010, p. 9). However, focus and specificity require a change in practice that requires skills and knowledge. If the organization's culture changes, existing norms must be displaced (Elmore, 2003). If the past practice was working effectively, the need for change would not be warranted. However, current performance triggers new goals that challenge existing practices. Improving the collective capacity of organizations requires that those within schools know what they need to do differently and provide the learning required to turn that new knowledge into practices that benefit student learning (Harris, 2011).

Collective Teacher Efficacy

Maintaining high expectations for all is one of many shared principles among educators (Proefriedt, 2008). Whether referring to a teacher's belief in her students, or a principal's belief in her teachers, educators aim to meet or exceed expectations. The construct of high expectations contributing to improved performance has a history in social cognitive research dating back to the early 20th century, commonly referred to as the Pygmalion Effect. The belief in the power of high expectations, popularized by George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* and the subsequent musical *My Fair Lady,* by Lerner and Loewe, made its way to education largely due to the research by Robert Rosenthal in the 1960s.

Understanding this background is contextually significant to the evolution of social-cognitive research contributing to the theoretical framework of self-efficacy. For example, Albert Bandura (1977) researched connections between self-belief in one's capacity to accomplish specific goals and their ultimate achievement. Bandura's research suggests that when one believes they can achieve at a certain level, several factors, including behaviors and motivation, change to achieve that goal (Bandura, 1977). As a result of this theoretical framework, subsequent researchers corroborate and assert that thoughts regulate actions (Donohoo, 2017).

Beyond the efficacious actions of the individual, Bandura (1977) found that this theory transcends to the success of groups. Therefore, when groups of individuals share a common goal and belief that their collective actions can positively influence outcomes, they are working within the theoretical framework of collective efficacy. Over time, Bandura's social cognitive theory has been credited for reducing neighborhood violence, increasing business productivity, and increasing student achievement (Sampson et al., 1997; Kim & Shin, 2015; Bandura, 1993; Donohoo,

2017). For this literature review, the construct of collective efficacy is focused on looking more closely at collective teacher efficacy.

John Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis applies the quantitative effect size measurement to instructional strategies and actions. The larger the effect size, the greater the influence of strategy or action on student achievement. According to Hattie, an effect size of 0.4 represents one year's worth of growth. Therefore, to close access gaps to student achievement, teachers must engage in strategies and actions, referred to as visualizations in Hattie's research, with an effect size greater than 0.4. Collective teacher efficacy has an effect size of 1.57, second only to teachers' estimates of student achievement, reflecting an effect size of 1.62. Collective teacher efficacy ranks number two in visualizations among a comprehensive list of 195 (Hattie, 2009, Hattie, 2011, Hattie, 2015).

While all effective strategies are worth exploration, collective teacher efficacy transcends barriers educators often consider beyond their reach or control. For example, parent involvement, socio-economic status, and student motivation are among the many barriers educators often reference when working toward a root cause of low achievement. However, schools with high levels of collective teacher efficacy have higher levels of student achievement despite the socio-economic level of the student population (Ramos et al., 2014, Goddard, 2000). These results are impressive and important as they reinforce the importance of collective teacher efficacy, the Pygmalion Effect, and reject the Golem Effect.

The Golem Effect represents a theory of action that lower expectations result in lower performance. When applied to education, the Golem Effect reinforces educator biases, low teacher expectations, and self-fulfilling prophecies for students to perform below their potential. Research by Babad et al. (1982) suggests that when teachers hold low expectations for certain students, they perform at lower levels than those whose expectations are higher. Low levels of achievement reinforce low expectations, just as high levels of achievement reinforce higher expectations on the part of educators (Rowe). Both the Pygmalion Effect and Golem Effect have tremendous influence over the actions of individuals. When high expectations can be cultivated for an entire school through collective teacher efficacy, the potential for students to achieve is impressive. Therefore, it is critical that principals build and maintain learning cultures where collective teacher efficacy is high.

Cultivating beliefs is a cultural challenge that principals face daily. However, focusing on specific conditions fosters a positive culture of collective teacher

efficacy. Building an efficacious culture requires *mastery experiences*—successes that can be replicated, *vicarious experiences*—opportunities for teachers to witness colleagues perform successfully within similar conditions, *social persuasion*—credible and trustworthy peers encouraging colleagues, and *affective states*—feelings of excitement and joy in the building (Goddard, 2004, Bandura, 1986). In addition, educators with high efficacy encourage students, relinquish control, and share responsibility for learning (Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990).

While principals create these conditions where shared responsibility contributes to the culture, how principals do this requires specific actions. Tschannen-Moran and Barr's (2004) research offers six leader actions to build collective teacher efficacy. 1) Principals must advance teacher influence by building a collaborative culture where teachers have a voice and input school-wide decisions. 2) Principals must have a consensus with clear goals that reflect teachers' voices, motivating them to engage and achieve. 3) Principals must expect transparent practices in their school where teachers collaborate, observe each other, and provide critical peer feedback. 4) Principals must cultivate a cohesive staff to agree on the core issues related to teaching and learning in the school. 5) Principals must be responsive and support teachers. 6) Principals must create conditions for effective student intervention systems where teachers clearly see observable student successes that reflect the competence of the school or system. These principal actions are further supported with suggestions to shift conversations away from what everyone already knows because these conversations fail to provide opportunities for educators to grow (Hattie, 2015). By empowering teachers, setting high expectations, and providing feedback to clearly understand goals and data-centered results, the principal is modeling the tenets of collective efficacy (Nelson et al., 2010). When efficacy is high, teachers are more accepting of change and more likely to take healthy risks and try new approaches to help students achieve at the highest level possible (Ross & Bruce, 2007).

Reciprocal Accountability

Reciprocity and accountability, or exchange and responsibility, reach far beyond education. However, the marriage of those terms as reciprocal accountability has found a unique niche in educational research and discourse. Examining research exposes reciprocal accountability as having some chameleon-like attributes. For example, a New Hampshire study initially describes reciprocal accountability as providing teachers and leaders with intense support to do the work asked of them. However, that same report uses reciprocal accountability interchangeably with

shared leadership (Marion et al., 2017). Additionally, the broad use of professional development and the frequent conflation of teacher efficacy and capacity building further confuse what is precisely meant by reciprocal accountability.

Elmore (2002) clarifies by asserting that the high level of teacher accountability for student achievement requires a reciprocal response by leaders. "For every increment of performance, I demand from you; I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation. Likewise, for every investment you make in my skill and knowledge, I have a reciprocal responsibility to demonstrate some new increment in performance." (Elmore, 2002, p. 5). The idea of reciprocity is transformative because it considers the school systems' verticality and larger infrastructure.

Enhancing the conditions for students' learning and achievement requires strategy, willingness to do things differently, and commitment to listening and responding across the organization (Elmore, 2002). When considering the construct of reciprocal accountability, reciprocity and accountability must transcend teachers' work with students as teachers respond to the decisions of others within the school and district. Elmore's definition does not limit reciprocal accountability to giving teachers what they need but articulates that reciprocity requires learning for all within the organization (Elmore, 2002).

Reciprocal accountability in partnership with collective capacity and collective teacher efficacy offer a foundation for systemic success. School districts that plan with reciprocal accountability in mind thoughtfully consider the learning of all organization members. Unfortunately, the quality of professional development for school leaders is lacking even though principal effectiveness plays a prominent role in student learning and policy. Whether examining No Child Left Behind, Blueprint for Reform, or Race to the Top, school accountability often becomes principal accountability (Kearney, 2012). At the forefront of policy discussion, the Every Student Succeeds Act, accountability, and allocation of resources are now in state control. How those resources will support the next generation of principals remains to be seen.

Leading a Learning Culture: How Principals are Prepared to Lead

Teacher quality is the most critical factor in determining a child's success in school (Aaronson et al., 2007; Hattie, 2003; Hanushek, 1992, 2002; Rivkin et al., 2005; Slater et al., 2009). "There is widespread agreement that of all the factors inside the school that affect children's learning and achievement, the most important is the

teacher--not standards, assessments, resources, or even the school's leadership, but the quality of the teacher" (Hargreaves, & Fullan, 2012, p. xii). As research supports the importance of teacher quality concerning student learning, practices aimed at improving teacher quality through professional development and job-embedded experiences prove essential in creating systemic efforts to optimize opportunities for student learning. As leaders of learning who are responsible for the professional learning culture, principals must have an active role in developing optimizing these opportunities for teachers.

The capacity to improve teacher quality within schools partially depends on the professional development experiences for teachers. Professional development, however, is often inconsistent in quality (Hill, 2007) and frequently has little impact on change in instructional practice (Porter, 2000, Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers & Killion, 2010). Teachers commonly engage in self-selected workshop formats of professional development that require participation in presentations they perceive as disconnected to instructional goals and daily practices (Garet et al., 2001). While it is true that not all professional development opportunities are created equal, the traditional workshop model fails to improve the quality of teaching and perpetuates pessimistic views of how professional development might positively affect teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hirsh, 2009).

A 2010 collaborative effort between the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center, and the National Staff Development Council adopted a definition of Job-Embedded Professional Development (JEPD). They synthesized the conditions needed to provide high-quality opportunities in a variety of settings. First, JEPD is content-specific opportunities that reflect teachers' daily performance expectations and aim to improve their instructional practice, improving student learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hirsh, 2009). Second, JEPD emphasizes authenticity by asking teachers to cooperatively engage in work connected to standards, curriculum, and student learning. Third, this research brief also concludes that JEPD should occur on location, utilizing the professional talent and knowledge existing within the learning community (Croft et al., 2010). Finally, there is no role more important in establishing a culture of JEPD than the building principal.

Skilled principals' familiarity with their learning community is essential to moving teaching and learning initiatives forward. Unfortunately, heavy reliance on external professionals for teacher learning is a cultural norm in many schools that challenges powerful research advocating for teacher JEPD. The more professional

learning facilitators understand the culture, perpetuate a community of collaboration, and connect to how individual teachers learn, the more effective professional development they provide (Stein et al., 1999).

When trained, principals cultivate professional learning cultures as instructional and transformative leaders. Principals who lead self-efficacious professional learning cultures cultivate conditions for improved instructional practices. However, principal training, both pre-service and in-service, varies in quality (Johnston et al., 2016). While principals note they receive some type of support while in-service, the size of districts and quality of those supports translates to inconsistent experiences for teachers Johnston et al., 2016). A better understanding of current learning conditions for principals provides insight into strategies for building cultures of collective capacity, collective teacher efficacy, and reciprocal accountability.

Preparing for the Principalship

Variability in the quality of initial principal preparation persists, partially due to ill-defined evidence informing best practices in developing school leaders (Mitgang & Gill, 2012; Murphy et al., 2009; Darling Hammond et al., 2007). Defining best practices proves challenging as principals' roles look different depending on the size and infrastructure of the districts they lead (Johnston et al., 2016). The uneven quality of leadership preparation programs, which often serve as the most concentrated professional learning for emergent principals, contributes to principal preparedness. Reducing variability in leadership program quality will reduce the inconsistent performance of beginning principals.

In tandem with an accredited college or university, leadership preparation programs often culminate with a certification or professional licensure representing a university's endorsement of prospective principals. However, how leaders are prepared to influence student achievement lacked consistency and explanation for decades (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). For these reasons, allocating resources to quality principal training may reduce the variability of principal quality, offering a more stable foundation for emergent school leaders.

Leadership Preparation Program Selectivity

A 2012 research synthesis by the Wallace Foundation identifies pathways to better training for aspiring principals beginning with a competitive selection of pre-service candidates (Mitgang & Gill, 2012). High acceptance rates coupled with poor recruiting efforts contribute to the talent pool quality in pre-service leadership (Young et al., 2002). However, passive understanding of candidates' intentions at

the time of program application presents the dilemma of matriculated students having little or no intention of becoming educational leaders post-program completion. As a result, even well-designed programs fail to meet their intended audience due to weak candidate selection criteria (Young et al., 2002).

Selection criteria across programs present vast inconsistencies and affect program quality (Murphy et al., 2009). Passive vetting of candidates is a disservice to the program and students alike. Contributing to the challenge of attracting the best candidates to the program is the absence of pre-requisites and entrance criteria that are rigorous enough to deter candidates not serious about the program. Passive selection results in program participants who are unlikely to pursue an educational leadership path, engaging in learning less likely to benefit the students they teach (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

Standardizing professional expectations that align with job performance expectations regarding what principals need to know and do should serve as the foundation for recruitment, application acceptances, curriculum, evaluation, and ongoing support (Mendels, 2016). In addition, selectivity of future principals is essential long before taking on the principalship. Candidate selection, however, remains at the discretion of colleges and universities where surrounding schools have little to no influence.

Standardizing Practice

Attempting to uncover attributes of program quality, *Building Principal Pipelines*, a study supported by the Wallace Foundation, engaged six districts in a large-scale longitudinal project to support aspiring and practicing principals. Key findings in pre-service training included a general need for standards and job descriptions (Mendels, 2016).

The absence of standards challenges program quality and consistency. Until recently, not only did programs lack standards when admitting students for study, there were often no standards once they arrived. As a result, aspiring leaders experienced preparation and curricula unique to the program, often reflecting the research interests of professors over required knowledge for success in the field (Murphy et al., 2009). However, the influence of the University Council for Education Administration (UCEA) has helped dismantle program inequities with a standards-based approach.

Large-scale failure to adopt rigorous standards not only limits principal training programs but also contributes to the lack of articulated expectations likely to

provide coherence between pre-service training and the challenges encountered in principalship. While school districts often articulate and communicate expectations for leaders through job descriptions, interviews, and evaluation practices, utilization of a mutual and clear standards-based language provides much-needed clarity and transfer across settings.

Mirroring this challenge at the local level, disconnected practices between the local university training program and the surrounding communities likely to employ their graduates presents an unnecessary barrier. Principals lacking preparation because of incoherence in program expectations easily addressed through the adoption of standards, are missing an opportunity for powerful collaboration with local communities likely to position graduates for jobs and success (Mitgang & Gill, 2012).

While schools in search of principals may have little or no influence on candidate selection at the time of pre-service application, well-defined standards would help reduce variability. Higher education institutions providing leadership preparation programs have expressed the desire to identify and adopt common leadership preparation standards as early as 1954. With a failed widespread adoption at the time, a 1982 revisit and a revision by a collaborative team of various stakeholders nudged the standards to work forward. These standards earned a subsequent revision in 1995 and support from the national Superintendents' association, AASA. In the end, these standards served as the foundation for national Superintendents' and principals' standards despite the shared feeling of ambiguity regarding attributes of high-quality leadership (LaMagdeleine, Maxcy, Pounder & Reed, 2003). In 1996, the Council of Chief State School Officers developed research-based standards specifically for educational leaders with a 2008 revision. Due to significant changes in education, technology, and society, an extensive process resulted in new standards for 2015 (Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, 2015).

The adoption of standards anchors professionals in high-quality practices connected to their discipline. Widely adopted standards influence leadership preparation, hiring, development, supervision, and evaluation of principals. With all of the demands principals experience daily, a clear connection to professional standards can help prioritize and rationalize practice. The 2015 standards also recognize the vital connection between school leaders and student learning. As a result, the most recent standards include a research-based approach recognizing

the multifaceted nature of the principalship (Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, 2015).

Professional standards are not synonymous with a standardized approach to instruction and learning. Grounding authentic and individualized learning experiences for aspiring principals that align to standards without being standardized is a worthy aspiration. However, program evaluation is challenged by the state and local policy variability, complicating adherence to broader standards (Orr & Barber, 2009). Developing emergent leaders requires clarity in success criteria set forth by standards that accommodate personalized learning needs. Pre-service programs that empathize with the needs of aspiring leaders by embedding the critical elements of active and individualized learning in service to provide a foundation for exemplary leadership (Rallis & Goldring, 2000).

Exemplary Practices and Critique of Principal Leadership Training

Leadership preparation programs considered exemplary consistently uphold higher selectivity and cost. More importantly, they train and graduate prospective leaders who intend to work in educational leadership (Mitgang & Gill, 2012). Exemplary programs routinely grow principal candidates' capacity to lead instructionally, foster organizational change, and manage schools by providing coursework that balances theory and practice (Murphy et al., 2009). However, leadership programs often receive critique due to their disconnect between coursework and professional practice, neglecting to include important related to ethics and social justice training, and a complete lack of focus through and across programs (Murphy et al., 2009). Additionally, pre-service leadership programs are often cited as the most important learning opportunity during pre-service training, however, observed clinical fieldwork remains absent in most leadership preparation programs (Levine, 2005).

Overcoming critique and learning from the achievement of successful leadership training programs serves as a practical starting place for sustainable improvement. Analyzing programs with a reputation for graduating pre-service and in-service school leaders provides an auspicious starting point in determining attributes of high-quality leadership preparation programs. Identification of these attributes advocates the development of curricula with shared leadership preparation standards. An in-depth study of eight pre-service and in-service principal

professional development programs examines the policies and financing systems of the organizations, determining common characteristics contributing to program effectiveness. Selected programs held previous exemplary recognition and met the criteria of a multi-stage selection process. Through interviews, observations, surveys, and cost analyses, data reveal effectiveness features, including coherent organization of cohort models, a collaborative team focus, and the opportunity to improve skills in field-based experiences with embedded opportunities for reflective practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Subsequent research validates these findings and further advocates for the importance of a coherent curriculum, knowledgeable faculty, and standards-based assessments for feedback (Orr, 2011).

Synthesized interviews and research of pre-eminent educational leadership scholars addresses what aspiring principals need to learn during pre-service training by asking 1) how should teachers in my school think about instruction? And 2) what do I need to know and be able to do to make that happen? This study by Brazer and Bauer (2013) offers a confluent model of management tools, leadership and organizational theory, content knowledge, and more. From a pedagogical perspective, however, this confluence of effective leadership knowledge and skills all rests in the instructional approach of problem-based learning. Brazer and Bauer advocate that 40% of leadership training focuses on principals' utilization of data and resources addressing potential real-life situations. Working to solve problems during pre-service provides some context in creative approaches to complex problem-solving.

The internship or practicum experience pervades among the most beneficial components of pre-service training (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Orr, 2011). While internship experiences vary in scope of duration, first-year principals who held internships were often more confident than those without an internship experience. Beyond confidence, principals with internship experience were superior in proficiency in supervision, evaluation, and collaboration than colleagues without the internship background (Jean & Evans, 1995). Internships and mentor relationships during the principalship appear in the following section.

Principals shared their perspective of attributes indicative of high-quality pre-service leadership programs. They endorsed career-oriented programs, communicated quality, have a core mission of leading for high-quality learning, address professional development needs, and use technology meaningfully (Peterson, 2001). School leaders who recently completed their leadership programs identified a need for additional training in effective communication, relationship

building, and conflict resolution as challenges in these areas emerged immediately. Many school leaders felt better prepared in instructional leadership than in other areas more dependent on relational capacity (Duncan et al., 2011). If school leaders identify future growth areas as pre-service programs conclude, addressing those needs through localized professional development programs or mentor partnerships creates the potential for a continuation of personalized professional learning. Programs that inspire prospective leaders to commit to continuous job-embedded professional learning will yield greater results with attrition once school leaders are in practice (Mitgang & Gill, 2012).

Concluding Thoughts—Principal Leadership Preparation

As a result of absent or haphazard adoption of standards, pre-service preparation programs endured critique for decades. While standards are not the only solution, they provide a compass that points practice in a similar direction. The 2015 *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders*, formerly known as ISLLC Standards, represent a collaborative effort providing stability and direction for leadership preparation programs and school districts alike. Not only do standards inform practice, but standards also inform policy. According to the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015), previous standards for educational leaders guided policy in 45 states and the District of Columbia, despite their inconsistent adoption in educational practice. However, the new standards clearly focus on student learning, reflect research-based understandings of school leaders' roles and responsibilities, and understand relationships' role in leadership. In addition, the new standards embrace the complexity of educational leadership while incorporating a broad base of educational research and clarity in language, reflecting a more current knowledge base.

Prioritizing standards through research and inquiry will help us understand best practices in programming and instruction. While research has emerged attempting to identify the pillars of quality embodied by highly regarded leadership preparation programs, there is little empirical research supporting the quality of those leaders when in the field (Davis et al., 2005). Universal understanding, practice, and measurement of standards would contribute to the research base with great potential to inform curriculum and instruction for pre-service programs.

While the 2015 update of standards was welcome, it is curious whether they can be long-lasting as we experience rapid changes in our practice. Murphy (1999) thoughtfully presents the idea of the shifting center of gravity in education, citing shifts from philosophy, to management, to social sciences, and school

improvement. Interestingly, student learning never made its way to the center in his educational leadership research. I posit this is the greatest flaw in our leadership preparation programs. While instructional leadership philosophy and a course in curriculum often play a part in pre-service training, little connection between leadership training, professional learning, and student achievement exists. This disconnect results in the need for high-quality professional development for principals while in-service.

Internships and In-Service Principal Training

Principals and teachers share a symbiotic relationship and responsibility to provide students with high-quality instruction. Teachers must express their learning needs, and principals must continually grow their own skills to meet the evolving needs of the teachers they lead. Supporting this shared responsibility, this review of in-service instructional leadership development literature explores how different experiences contribute to principals' and district leaders' learning and support their skills in developing and fostering a culture of high-quality professional learning. An extensive review of the literature revealed that professional development opportunities for practicing principals are sparsely researched topics and lack definition (Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Spillane, 2009). As a result, there is a need for ongoing support and development of principals as instructional leaders to provide a culture of high-quality professional learning for all while in-service.

Research and practices regarding principals' preparedness and efforts to function as leaders of a professional learning culture divided into the following categories: 1) mentor, induction, and supervision, 2) district-based professional development, and 3) professional development through outside agencies or professional organizations. Dissimilar to teacher professional development, quality professional development for principals lacks definition, attention, and clarity.

Internships and Mentor Partnerships

The previous section of this research cites the importance of professional capacity in a school. Professional capacity across school districts is equally important. While the work of DuFour and Eaker (1998) operationalizes inherent principles of teacher collaboration in schools, the importance and value of collegial learning transcend teacher teams. However, with only one principal in a school, replicating the team collaboration model beyond teachers presents a challenge. As a result,

relationships beyond the building are necessary for principals to experience similar dynamic learning experiences.

Reaching beyond school walls, internship and mentoring programs foster collaboration and serve as beneficial learning experiences fostering collegial collaboration (Barnett et al., 2009; Gross, 2009). Following pre-service programs, beginning principals report internships as time well spent during pre-service training (Duncan et al., 2011). Applying a historical lens, the clinical internship of principals dates back to 1940, frequently cited as the most useful learning for new and aspiring leaders (Barnett et al., 2009). Over time, internships for aspiring principals began to parallel student teaching models. Today, the internship serves as an indicator of high-quality preparation programs. The internship, aiming to merge theory, research, and practice, provides authentic learning experiences for leaders. Additionally, internships allow pre-service leaders to problem-solve with the support of practicing school leaders (Barnett et al., 2009).

Reviewing various internship programs results in categorizing three basic internship types, often experienced during pre-service. First is the common detached internship, a job or course-embedded internship that allows interns to maintain their full-time jobs while they train. The detached internship model requires current or prospective school leaders to work with a mentor for a specified amount of hours, complete specified tasks, and often provide a reflection journal or blog. Additionally, full-time job-embedded internships, the most authentic, are full-time learning experiences with the support of a mentor. Finally, course-embedded internships are most often like field experiences requiring specified field hours related to a particular course (Barnett et al., 2009).

Parallel to internship experiences for pre-service principals are mentoring programs for in-service principals. Mentoring programs which provide authentic learning opportunities for practicing principals are essential and lacking. Communities of practice for school leaders support their navigation of complex problem solving through peer support, socialization, and the need for professional mentoring. An in-depth program analysis determined a need for authentic experiences during pre-service, in-depth field experiences during pre-service, strong program participation during pre- and in-service, job-embedded professional development experiences, and transformative school leader mentoring programs (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004).

Grissom and Harrington (2010) provide additional support for mentor-type programs and examine the effectiveness of professional development for school leaders

through sample data analysis of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). First, these researchers selected teacher-level responses related to school operations to measure school leader performance. Then, through a multivariate regression framework, researchers measured school leader effectiveness connected to school leaders' self-reported professional development choices. Questions regarding school leader professional development specifically addressed participation in university courses, formal coaching/mentoring, and a principals' network through an outside agency. Researchers found that participation in mentoring/coaching programs had a greater impact on school improvement over university coursework or participation in an outside network (Grissom & Harrington, 2010).

Mentoring programs expand as the complexity of the principalship evolves. Commonalities of quality internship programs include a transparent process for selecting mentors and assigning mentees as the interdependent relationship of the mentor and mentee contributes to the success of the experience. While there is a need for additional research related to mentor program efficacy, there is widespread agreement that the relationship between the mentor and mentee provides an essential foundation to the partnership's success (Gross, 2009).

Internship and mentoring programs are positive contributors to principal success but face the significant obstacle of access to quality mentors. More often than not, mentors volunteer to support aspiring leaders in the absence of formal training associated with the responsibilities and skill of being a high-quality mentor. A requirement of formal training for mentors would attract and prepare high-quality mentors, but more than likely, there will not be enough mentors to serve the number of mentees interested in program participation (Gross, 2009; Barnett et al., 2009).

District-Level Professional Development

Beyond pre-service and mentoring programs, providing an array of high-quality professional development opportunities for principals is the responsibility of district leaders. District leaders have consistently identified teaching and learning as the most crucial standard for their school leaders. However, challenges related to human resources, time constraints, finances, and resistance to change continue to prevail as the areas where district leaders spend the majority of their time (Lewis et al., 2011). If district leaders cannot provide quality professional development experiences for school leaders, principals are attempting to improve their professional practice without guidance. Principals who participate in professional development activities that connect to their strategic plans and self-identified

needs not only engage in reflective practice but also foster personal connections to the goals associated with the professional development (Mizell, 2010).

Unlike research regarding teacher professional development, principals are often subject to internal meetings that lack an instructional focus or participate in self-selected workshops through an outside agency disconnected from identified needs. The *Principal Pipeline Initiative* examines six large districts' evaluation and support of novice principals. While providing one-on-one time to principals is evident, the focus was on the individual, with little attention paid to the group-based collaborative learning. Overall, school leaders did not rate their district-based professional development as a valued support. Additionally, school leaders consistently ranked the usefulness of district-based professional development significantly below that provided by a mentor or coach. Survey results yielded underwhelming results for district-based professional development regarding addressing pressing issues, addressing specific needs, deepening understanding of school leadership, and leading the school leader to make changes in practice. The group of school leaders categorized their professional development experiences as compliance-oriented and overloaded with information (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016, p. 47).

District-based professional development offerings for school leaders often fail to recognize the individual traits of the school leader and their learning community but instead offer a linear solution to challenges that require complex problem solving and thoughtful strategic planning (Duncan & Stock, 2010). This one size fits all model of growing leaders disregards school leaders' individual needs and fails to prepare them to lead professional development for teachers.

Professional Development from Professional Organizations

Professional development independent of a cohesive job-embedded system requires principals to rely on professional networks outside their school districts. While external professional development opportunities naturally lack the cohesion and collaboration that have become the hallmarks of high-quality job-embedded professional development, they present a variety of self-selected learning opportunities to keep school leaders current and connected with important issues related to policies and practices in education. Understanding how leaders access outside agencies and resources for professional development offers insight into how better connections might be made between external and more job-embedded learning opportunities within school districts.

Three organizations offer direct support and resources to building and district leaders. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) is the primary professional organization for elementary and middle school principals in the United States. NAESP aims to support school leaders to assist in achieving high results for students, parents, and their learning community at large. Similarly, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the counterpart to NAESP, not only networks principals in the US with 35 additional countries, NASSP connects research and advocacy with the everyday work of secondary principals. In addition to regulating practices surrounding the National Honors Society, NASSP improves secondary leaders' conditions by defining standards of practice and providing much-needed advocacy for principals. Finally, district leaders often rely on *The School Superintendents Association* (AASA) for a variety of publications, legal expertise and professional learning conferences and programs, leadership professional development, and advocacy.

Other organizations such as ASCD offer a larger network that reaches 128 countries and includes teachers, school leaders, and district leaders. Through periodicals, books, workshops, and a variety of professional conferences, ASCD provides a variety of learning opportunities in print, in person, and online. However, despite the success of these organizations in successfully enrolling many members, they represent a small part of the whole when considering all professional learning organizations for school and district leaders. Each organization offers a wide variety of resources and fosters a professional network but lacks specific connections to members' needs as individuals leading different districts or schools. Therefore, while there are benefits to professional networking through these organizations, the opportunities for job-embedded learning are inaccessible.

Concluding Thoughts: In-Service Principal Training

Existing structures for in-service principal learning lack opportunities for the collaboration, continuity, and coherence needed for effectiveness. With clear evidence that leadership matters, widespread systems to support practicing leaders are lacking. While opportunities to participate in additional coursework and professional organizations are available, these offerings vary in quality, ambiguity and often lack alignment with a principal's specific needs related to his or her district (Peterson & Kelley, 2002).

While there is diversity in the types of professional learning that principals experience, job-embedded professional learning, or opportunities to collaboratively focus on goals in day-to-day practice, it lacks consistency (Croft et al., 2010).

Additionally, access to learning opportunities varies based on the geography and resources of a school district. Principals require different professional learning experiences at different times in their careers. An exploration of in-service principal leadership programs around the country uncovered different focus areas for principals at the early and mid-stages of their careers. While the authors present several themes in their research, e.g., instructional leadership, culture, and problem-solving, there was no specific mention of leading a professional learning culture. If principals are not explicitly taking on the challenge of leading the professional learning culture of their school, creating a culture that values job-embedded professional learning is unlikely.

Literature Review Summary

This literature review examined the complexity and importance of instructional and transformative leadership and core components of high-quality learning cultures juxtaposed to professional learning opportunities designed to build the leadership capacity of principals. While ample research exists regarding high-quality professional learning for teachers, there is a dearth of research regarding principals and opportunities to build principals' capacity to lead professional development successfully for teachers. As a result, principals are often working independently while responsible for building and maintaining the professional learning culture of their schools.

While it is evident that principals matter and make a difference in student achievement, how principals affect student learning is not necessarily linear. A longstanding belief remains that principals affect instruction through effective feedback related to observed instruction and facilitated professional learning. However, the principals' ability to develop and maintain a culture that relies on 1) The collective capacity of those in the organization to skillfully get the work done; 2) The collective teacher efficacy shared belief of what they can accomplish together, and 3) The clarity in goals and the reciprocal accountability to support the achievement of those goals are pillars—defining what members within the organization do for each other to support the collective success of the school and district.

Working toward a coherent model of best practices for principals can support their efforts to be catalysts of learning for teachers and students alike. A crosswalk of validated frameworks reveals the importance of strong leadership models. When accounting for cultural conditions in addition to leadership actions, a true model of a professional learning culture may emerge.

My personal experiences as an educational leader support the research reviewed throughout this dissertation. Regardless of the particular leadership positions I have held, I was partially responsible for planning and delivering the professional development of teachers. However, I have never engaged in any professional learning opportunity intentionally designed to cultivate my skills as a planner, facilitator, or evaluator of professional learning. Exploring this topic also raised my understanding of the attributes of high-quality JEPD opportunities for teachers. While I welcomed this new learning, I was surprised that this vital knowledge was not part of my current practice. More than anything else, this process continues to

elevate my respect for the principalship and belief that a high-quality principal can make all the difference for a school.

Understanding perceived principal needs regarding their growth and development is a logical starting point to determine a direction for expanding the research base. However, getting at principals' needs requires understanding the larger system and the perceptions of others who work within that system. While principals are professionally developed beginning with their pre-service program, and there is explicit agreement that leading a professional learning culture is essential, what this looks like in practice lacks certitude. Chapter III offers a research design and methodology to explore principalship by understanding how a principal functions within a particular system.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study utilized an ethnographic qualitative design that examined strategic inquiry and alignment through the construction and analysis of a descriptive case study. By closely examining one school system, this research offers insight into a specific system and how identifying dissonance between perceptions and actions plays a role in bringing coherence to support teaching and learning in schools.

Even though principal leadership research evolves, analysis of the principal's role within the system is lacking by comparison to the principal's role within a school. Because principal leadership is a broad topic, this study accepted reciprocal accountability, collective capacity, and collective efficacy as influential cultural factors that support successful leadership. Therefore, those constructs played a critical role in the conceptual and analytic frameworks and the design, interpretation, and analysis of the research findings.

This chapter offers an in-depth explanation of the methodologies and research design developed for this study. The research plan of action categorically represents a framework for this qualitative case study along with the rationale for an ethnographic study, research question, participants and sampling procedures, instrumentation (semi-structured, open-ended interviews, initial participant inventory, analysis of documents, data collection, and data analysis procedures, limitations, verification of findings, and ethical considerations.

Rationale for this Ethnographic Case Study

Determining the quality of education and educators through quantitative measures continues to debilitate and misrepresent teaching and learning across the country. Qualitative research, however, provides opportunities to construct meaning by profoundly understanding the stories, experiences, and points of view individuals hold within or across settings (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). Education is complex within the smallest of school systems. A qualitative approach to understanding allows the researcher to account for the unique attributes of each setting and the nuances that contribute to decision-making and understanding (Freebody, 2003). Additionally, qualitative research relies on people and acknowledges that each individual's experiences, context, and point of view inform their beliefs and contributions to a study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

The need for a qualitative examination was due to the study's close look at the connection between human behavioral actions and perceptions. While shared

goals exist within most systems, how those with different roles support achieving those goals and whom they believe to be responsible for achieving them informs organizational coherence and strategies for communication. Education suffers due to assumptions and uncertainty. This method was chosen because qualitative research seeks understanding and provides space to construct an accurate narrative of a story that remains in progress (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). This qualitative design balances perceptions and practice to understand the complexities within a school system.

Qualitative research can be summarized through seven basic assumptions (Creswell, 2003, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2012), further supporting the design for this qualitative study:

1. Qualitative researchers are concerned more with process than findings and outcomes;

2. Qualitative researchers are interested in how participants make sense of their experiences in specific contextual settings and the meaning of phenomena;

3. Qualitative researchers, as human instruments, are the primary agent of data collection and analysis;

4. The qualitative process requires fieldwork, one in which the researcher observes the phenomena in the natural setting;

5. Qualitative research is descriptive and inductive;

6. Qualitative research allows the researcher to bring his views and beliefs to the writing of the study; and

7. Qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured.

While criticized for researcher bias, design, and subjectivity, qualitative research design best meets the need of a current gap in educational research (Rossman & Rallis, 2016).

Addressing the research question through in-depth interviews and review of experiences, an ethnographic approach to this qualitative study provided an

opportunity to describe the specific school community and cultural phenomena within the school system. As the ethnographer, the intent was to bring meaning based on data collected from a variety of sources and by juxtaposing participant perceptions and actions across the system.

This overall design allowed for the completion of an initial participant inventory, interviews, and a document review. However, the initial design aimed to spend time in the actual learning environment but was limited due to a global health crisis preventing physical engagement within the learning community. The study adhered to sound research methodology, despite the absence of fieldwork and in-person interviews as originally designed.

Case Study

A case study approach allowed the researcher to understand individuals' perceptions and actions related to a small and specific context (Creswell, 2007). While case studies may focus on a particular person, group, or event, this study focused on the perceptions of several individuals within one learning community. Point of entry often challenges case studies as beginning and endpoints can be difficult to determine (Stake, 2000). Robust case studies integrate a variety of evidence and data points to inform a researcher-constructed narrative. Furthermore, this study examined how individuals within a community understand and make sense of the learning culture. A case study method allows for deep exploration of the issue complexity considering the contextual conditions presented by this particular school district (Yin, 2003).

While a case study approach is appropriate for this study, there are limitations. Because this case study closely examined select personnel within one particular school district, the results are limited to that specific environment, and generalizability is therefore limited. Still, details of the particular case may be informative as analogies for similar situations. The researcher hopes that the analytic and conceptual framework transcends this study for application to school districts seeking a similar understanding of professional learning cultures. Furthermore, case studies have been criticized due to researcher bias, research methods that lack rigor, and oversimplification of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Hamel et al., 1993). Since this case study uniquely takes a look at the role of the principal from a variety of perspectives, it makes studying these phenomena worthwhile despite these limitations.

Research Question

The literature review first examined how principals affect schools through their leadership approach. Next, considering leadership approaches, the review explored how principals cultivate professional learning cultures. Additionally, the review of literature investigated how principals are prepared to lead. This examination of literature contributed to the refinement of the research question explored through this study. Finally, due to the lack of research regarding the role of the principal within a system, this study answered the question: How does a vertically connected team of educators within a system perceive the principal's role in building a learning culture with high levels of collective capacity, collective efficacy and reciprocal accountability?

Participants and Site Selection

The leadership decision-making structure of school districts varies by location. Purposeful site selection was necessary because this study relied on the relationship between perceptions and actions. The selected site required a robust infrastructure that included positions between the principal and superintendent and between the principal and teachers. If the leadership infrastructure was narrow, the variance in role ambiguity would be reduced and would oversimplify the research findings. The methodology and research design reflect the following assumptions.

1. The District has a leadership infrastructure that includes positions between principals and teachers and principals and the Superintendent.

2. The District has a reputation for a commitment to professional learning.

3. The District values collaboration and continuous improvement.

4. The District would be willing to engage in educational research.

5. The District is large enough to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants.

6. The District is large enough to find willing participants for the study.

Located in central Connecticut, The Learningville Public School District has enrolled nearly 10,000 students. The Connecticut District Profile and Performance Report shows a student population that is 58% Caucasian, 18% Hispanic, 11% Asian, and 8% African American. The District employs approximately 775 certified teachers and 65 certified administrators. Learningville was chosen as the case study site due to its strong leadership, commitment to professional learning, and ongoing efforts toward continuous systemic improvement.

Learningville was also chosen because the large student and staff populations require a complex leadership infrastructure. Due to the number of students and schools, there are Assistant Superintendents, curriculum leaders, department chairs, principals, and assistant principals who all have a role in shaping the learning culture of schools and the larger district. In order to understand how the principal functions within the system, not just their school, it was necessary to choose a district with an infrastructure similar to Learningville.

As a participant in the study, the Superintendent and central office administration collaborated with the researcher to facilitate communications soliciting volunteers for the study. Once the researcher identified the volunteers and contacted them, they received additional information regarding the scope of the study. Once agreeable, volunteers received and completed informed consent waivers. Finally, participants were contacted to schedule interviews through Zoom on a mutually agreed-upon date and time.

Participation in this study required minimal risks. Physical, emotional, legal, or employment-related risks were not posed to participants at any time during the study. As a prerequisite to research completion, I completed the Internet-based "Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)" in November 2010 and was recertified in 2015 and 2020 (see Appendix C). Additionally, all participants were made aware of confidentiality and their right to withdraw their participation at any time. Throughout the study, pseudonyms were in place of the district name, school names, and the names of individual participants.

Instrumentation

Incorporating various data sources strengthens the credibility of case study research (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). Prior to the interviews that serve as the primary data source, all participants completed an inventory that reflects their perceptions and attitudes toward the larger research question. Additionally, guiding documents were reviewed and analyzed to inform the interview questions to make meaningful connections between written district goals and stakeholder understanding and integration of those goals in daily practice. Also, informal conversations were held with the central office administration to offer clarification where needed. Researcher notes captured reflections and proved meaningful with data organization. Notes included written reflections, clarifying questions, observations, notices of physical gestures or irregularities, references to resources and guiding documents within the district, and notes of any responses that seemed

disconnected or misaligned from district core values. Research notes materialized from virtual observations but proved valuable in data organization and analysis.

Semi-structured, Open-Ended Interviews

Semi-structured interviews served as the study's primary data source. In-depth interviews are commonly relied upon to understand how subjects view the world in qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). While questions for each participant followed a similar structure, questions were open-ended, inclusive of initial participant inventories, and welcomed conversation. The Superintendent of Schools, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, director of elementary curriculum, elementary principal, curriculum specialist, and a teacher completed interviews.

An interview guide approach (Appendix D) was utilized based on the research question and participants' initial inventory responses. This guide offered a structure for each interview while allowing for flexibility to incorporate the unique contributions of each person interviewed. The interview guide was designed to include the domains of collective capacity, collective efficacy, reciprocal accountability, and leadership moves. Three of the four domains are drawn directly from the study's conceptual framework. The fourth domain, leadership moves, attempts to understand participants' understanding of their actions and a principal's actions intentionally aiming to build a learning culture. Each domain consisted of two open-ended questions and probes to remain closely connected to the research question. Interviews were recorded through Zoom and transcribed using confidential software. Participant responses were analyzed and coded to address the research question.

Initial Participant Inventory

A participant inventory was created to gather general background information and insight, illuminating the feelings and perspectives of each participant to support the interoperability and triangulation of data against the design framework. In addition, brief written responses to these questions helped the researcher ascertain participants' attitudes related to the key ideas and the associated theoretical constructs that uphold the study (Appendix G). The participants completed the inventories one week prior to their scheduled interviews.

Document Review and Analysis

Review and analysis of guiding district documents supplemented participant interviews and initial inventories. In addition to serving as an essential data source,

these documents provided a foundation for questions using the district's language. This process corroborated participants' responses, reflecting a reliable research design (Yin, 2009). Due to the study's limited timeframe, the detailed documents provided critical information that tells the story of the district and its values. In addition to the inventories and interviews, the following documents were collected and analyzed:

1. District Development Plan

2. Curriculum and Staff Improvement Documents

3. Teacher Evaluation and Development Plan

4. Administrator Evaluation and Development Plan

5. Board of Education Goals

Each of these documents provided data directly aligned to the research question and offered insight into the expectations of various stakeholders within the organization. The Board of Education Goals are not shared in detail as they are identifiable and unique to Learningville.

While the documents varied in uniformity, they offered a comprehensive description of established systems within the district. Additionally, the documents offered insight into organizational values reflecting the importance of a learning culture. Finally, incorporating these documents as data sources provided an opportunity to align interviews with already existing data that bring coherence to the organization.

Methods of Investigation for the Research Question

Overarching research question: How does a vertically connected team of educators within a system perceive the principal's role in building a learning culture with high levels of collective capacity, collective efficacy and reciprocal accountability?

Table 3.1

Methods of Investigating Data Sources

	Methods of Investigation		
	Participant	Researcher Participant	Document

	Inventory	Notes	Interviews	Review
Reciprocal Accountability: What goals are shared between district leaders, building leaders, and teachers, and what role do varied stakeholders play in achieving learning goals?	√	√	√	√
Collective Capacity: How do individuals within the school work together to achieve individual and shared learning goals?	√	√	√	√
Collective Efficacy: How do members of a school community perceive their contributions to developing and maintaining a learning culture?	√	√	√	√

Data Collection Process

Rossman and Rallis (2016) compare qualitative research to an artists' craft. Through data collection, researchers discover and interpret data using a variety of techniques. The way the data are synthesized and reported is the performance (Rossman & Rallis (2016). The actual collection of data involves formal and informal processes that are intentionally selected to capture a performance reflecting a high level of training and technique.

Data from personal interviews with the superintendent, assistant superintendent, curriculum director, principal, curriculum specialist, and teacher were gathered with Zoom recordings. Additional data included researcher notes that followed each interview, participant inventories, and a thorough document review. Data collection and analysis occurred over six weeks in the fall and winter of 2020–2021. The following process indicates data collection and analysis procedures.

1. Sent a descriptive electronic letter articulating the purpose of the study and participant requirements to the Superintendent of Schools four weeks prior to launching the study;

2. Sent a descriptive e-mail to solicit volunteers for the study;
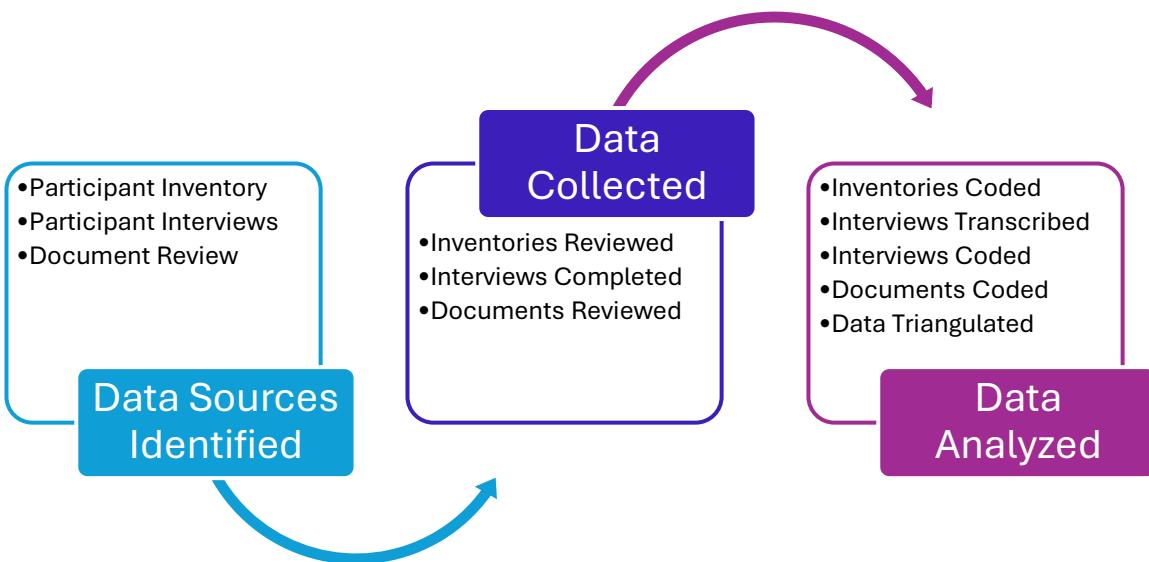
3. Sent a formal request to the Superintendent to obtain updated materials for document review;

4. When participants were selected, an informed consent form was distributed prior to the study beginning;

5. Once informed consent forms were returned, participants received an initial participant inventory;

6. Participants were contacted to schedule virtual interviews at a time conducive to their schedules;

7. Participants received a confirmation e-mail confirming date, time, and link for the virtual interview;

8. Participant interviews gained a deep understanding of experiences and perceptions using a semi-structured open-ended questioning process. All interviews were recorded with Zoom;

9. After obtaining appropriate confidentiality waivers, the recordings were transcribed through confidential software;

10. Where necessary, participants participated in follow-up interviews for verification purposes;

11. A document review supported the triangulation of data.

As an organization tool, I created analytic notes aligned to the analytic framework (Figure 2.1) to capture key ideas and themes that emerged through the interviews, the initial document reviews, and the participant inventories. Notes were taken during and immediately after each interview. In addition to reflecting on participants' information, the researcher integrated procedural reflections and the development of follow-up questions into analytic notes. As a result of personal connections with some participants and empathy for their work based on experience, I noted my personal reactions and feelings to maintain transparency and avoid researcher bias whenever possible. Analytic notes proved invaluable during data analysis.

Upon receiving transcribed recordings, documents were reviewed for accuracy to provide a foundation for valid interpretation and organization (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). Each transcript was read initially with analytic notes in the margins to identify reoccurring ideas and themes. In addition to notes on the transcripts themselves, triangulation indicators were employed to reference initial participant inventories and the document review.

Figure 3.1

Process of Data Collection and Analysis

Data Analysis and Analytic Framework

Conceptual ordering of evidence contributes to understandable qualitative data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Analysis should reflect the thoughtful synthesis of multiple data sources, an explanation of coding processes, and how themes emerged (Peterson, 2019). Failure to do this well could result in superficial and disconnected findings. This study's analysis was constructed carefully with sensitivity to the complexity of participant perceptions and the critical theme of shared responsibility. The concurrent process of data collection and analysis

allowed for real-time adjustments to interviews in addition to several opportunities to verify data.

Thoughtful analysis of qualitative data required meaningful connections between the data collected and the emergent theory that supported the story of the data (Emerson, 2001). Because the interview protocol was closely aligned to the conceptual framework and research question, data were ultimately reviewed through the lens of collective capacity, collective efficacy, and reciprocal accountability. An analytic coding approach was employed to support the thorough analysis of the research data based on these themes. Coding provided a path for commonalities to emerge through words, phrases, and ideas that illuminated patterns and frequently reoccurring ideas (Table 3.2).

Organizing data from all sources while utilizing the structure of an analytic framework was intended to guide clarity in themes and patterns of participants' responses and connections to district practices that emerged through the document review. Beyond the close analysis of the data sources individually, interactions between those sources reduced ambiguity and offered credibility to the overall research design. Approaching analysis through a general analytic strategy (Yin, 2009), Creswell's (2009) three-step process of organization, review, and categorization of themes provided a general structure aligned with the analytic framework. However, the organization of the data to the analytic framework lacked the depth and breadth needed to address the research question adequately. As a result, the analytic framework served mainly as a high-level organizational tool for initial data review.

Figure 3.2

Analytic Framework

As previously stated, interviews were recorded through Zoom with the participants' permission and then transcribed through confidential software—this process allowed for conversation with attention paid to the participant during their response. While not being able to interview in person, Zoom still allowed some attention to tone and body language. When the transcriptions were received, they were analyzed several times for specific purposes. First, to reacquaint me with responses; second, to gain insight regarding prominent themes; then several times for analytic coding and constructing the story of the data.

Table 3.2

Identified Codes

Collective Capacity	Reciprocal Accountability	Collective Efficacy
A. Collaboration	K. Trust	X. Empowerment
B. Structure	L. Conditions	Y. Investment
C. Purpose	M. Time	Z. Listening
D. Flexibility	N. Organization	AA. Confidence
E. Success Criteria	O. Equity	BB. Positivity
F. Identity	P. Priorities	CC. Responsibility
G. Contribution	Q. Visibility	DD. Connection
H. Autonomy	R. Feedback	EE. Restoration

I. Curriculum	S. Evaluation	FF. Capability
J. Team	T. Differentiation	
	U. Leadership	
	V. Availability	
	W. Approachability	

Qualitative researchers are often challenged in this area by oversimplifying coding. Adhering to thoughtful protocols supported the emergence of distinct themes cognizant of bias toward a researcher-developed conceptual framework. Initial codes considered when applying the analytic framework oversimplified the diversity of data collected. When analyzing data with the themes aligned to the conceptual framework, codes clearly emerged, and adjustments were made with the best qualitative data analysis and coding research practices. Following the organization of data by theme and code, three overarching principles emerged, each with two key findings that reinforced the conceptual framework and addressed the research question.

A review of the school district's guiding documents, especially those related to goals, instruction, professional learning, and evaluation, was critical. Analysis of these documents provided clarity of procedural expectations and a look forward to where the district is headed. This was most evident in allocating and using time for professional learning purposes across the system. Having reviewed these documents prior to the participant interviews, these guided questions and were strategically integrated when seeking clarity in participant responses.

Limitations

The global pandemic, COVID-19, challenged this study. While many were affected by this health crisis, educators faced unprecedented circumstances, challenging the pedagogy they have come to know while simultaneously worrying about the health and safety of themselves and others. This current reality will impact participants' responses. As such, I am drawing upon a case study shared by Heath and Heath (2010) in their New York Times bestseller, *Switch*. The case study profiles a small village in Vietnam facing a health crisis with high levels of child malnutrition. While identifying the problem, the researchers focus on all that was wrong with the conditions instead of what was right. For example, what were parents of healthy children doing differently from those who were not? This question uncovered critical

practices that dismantled the malnutrition problem in Vietnam one village at a time. As a result, Heath and Heath advocated for finding the bright spots and the value of assigning language to effective strategies and shaping the path so those practices could be perpetuated. I share this story because it will be necessary to frame interviews with bright spots, helping educators see what is bright during this dark time in education.

This study was limited to one school district in Central Connecticut. Therefore, generalizability to other school districts is limited. However, with Connecticut's limited geographic span and education serving as a small network within that limit, the researcher has met or previously worked with some study participants. Creswell (2007) advocates that researchers work as closely as possible with participants in the study. Prior exposure to some participants allowed for in-depth exploration of a variety of topics and willingness to share personal positions. While confidentiality and anonymity were protected, prior relationships may result in participant bias.

The data collection timeframe for the document review and interviews was the fall of 2020, reflecting an additional limitation. In addition to drawing upon data within a limited timeframe, the interviews took place during a global health crisis that has contributed to high levels of uncertainty for educators. While the research and the research question are relevant, more important than ever, it is necessary to acknowledge that these conditions may have partially shaped participants' responses.

The researcher, formerly a teacher, department leader, assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent, relates, connects, and empathizes with the different roles of most participants. However, those previous experiences may contribute to researcher bias. Morrow (2005) explicitly states that qualitative researchers are instruments and must provide full transparency of their relationship to the study and the associated findings (Hunt, 2011). Therefore, the discussion of findings will include reactions to narratives that may reflect researcher bias based on previous experiences (Peterson, 2019).

While the researcher fulfilled necessary course requirements, an exhaustive literature review, and has years of experience in the related field, this is the researcher's first study of this scale. As a result, being a novice researcher is a limitation to this study.

The previously mentioned global health crisis also necessitated aspects of the research design. For example, non-participatory observations were initially included as a data source, as were in-person interviews. However, accessibility to actual

school buildings and an inability to conduct interviews in person created unique limitations related to the health and safety of participants.

Verification of Findings

Accurate analysis coupled with thoughtfully aligned conclusions presents the greatest challenge for qualitative researchers, questioning the reliability of findings (Yin, 2009). Both conceptual and analytic frameworks mitigated this challenge and supported a trustworthy design that fosters reliable data. Even though a qualitative case study of this nature may not yield similar results if replicated, the frameworks may support a design and approach, creating conditions for systematic review for organizations. Furthermore, replication is not emblematic of reliability; the goal is findings supported by the data collected (Merriam, 2009).

The qualitative inquiry nature of this research requires the verification of data. For this study, data are verified through data triangulation, checking assumptions through participant checks, the use of thick descriptive data, and peer debriefing and review. As a result of this approach, along with systematic checks and alignment to the analytic framework, the research design reassures accurate findings.

Testing data consistency in qualitative studies through data triangulation is a common approach to assuring trustworthiness and reducing bias. Triangulation refers to the process of utilizing data from more than one source, such as interviews, document reviews, and observations (Peterson, 2019). This study triangulates data through an initial participant inventory, document review, and participant interviews. This triangulation process strengthens findings by testing one data source's potential weakness or vulnerability juxtaposed to the others. When data from multiple similar sources support a research question, the findings are strengthened, allowing the researcher to draw more robust conclusions.

The strength of qualitative findings is greatly enhanced through participant member checks. This process allowed participants to clarify, elaborate, correct, or disagree with the researcher's conclusions in areas of ambiguity (Rossman & Rallis, 2010). Beyond providing more accurate findings, engaging in this process decreased false conclusions and provided credibility to the research design and associated findings. Member checks were completed with each participant through summarization during the initial interview and follow-up interviews when necessary or in writing to validate and indicate initial analysis.

Case study research utilizes multiple data sources within a specific context or bound case while collecting in-depth data over a period of time (Creswell, 2007). Striking a balance between breadth and depth challenges researchers as they work to deeply understand and make connections to the research questions (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Providing rich descriptions offers detail that contributes to the validity of findings (Yin, 2011). Rich descriptions offer specific accounts from the field and provide a rich and deep understanding of the specific context of the research experiences.

Because this topic is relevant to the daily practice of the researcher, peer review is a natural place to discuss ongoing findings, question bias, and assumptions, and mitigate the possibility of drawing conclusions that do not reflect the data. Through close work with the dissertation advisor, committee members, and critical friends who have completed the program, peer review played a critical role in designing a study and drawing conclusions that accurately portray the story of this case study. In addition, peers offered questions related to clarity and different perspectives that illuminated findings that positively contributed to the research.

Ethical Considerations

Taking a stance may be necessary for qualitative researchers (Creswell et al., 2007). For example, Creswell (2003) advocates for researchers to engage with an inquiry through their philosophical assumptions (ontology), how they have come to (epistemology), their values (axiology), and their methodology.

Among the many factors that affect the research questions, study, and overall findings, is acknowledging the researcher's beliefs, values, perspectives, and experiences are (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Trustworthiness is among the hallmarks of high-quality qualitative research (Peterson, 2019). Respecting the participants' personal needs, rights, and contributions to the study reflects expectations that pervade quality research from initial design to the reporting of findings (Creswell, 2009). How the researcher communicates their findings reflects their standards of practice through presenting salient literature, respectful protocols, and detailed analysis. The design and findings reflect competent and ethical practices that contribute to the idea of trustworthiness (Peterson, 2019; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Additionally, the study relied upon descriptive validity, interpretive validity, and theoretical validity to support factual accuracy, researcher understanding, and connection to theoretical constructs that support the overall design (Creswell, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

The nature of this study presented minimal risks to participants. Obtaining informed consent required an initial written communication to prospective participants that included a description of the study, requirements for participation, right to withdraw, and planned use for findings. All protocols required by the University of Massachusetts Institutional Review Board were followed and approved by the IRB. Following approval from the IRB and successful defense of the dissertation proposal, I contacted the district's Superintendent, who was willing to participate in the study. Great attention was given to the questions to invite conversation and offer safety while remaining connected to the research question.

As a novice researcher, working with peers in the field, designing and implementing an ethical study is paramount. The data analysis and reporting of findings aligned with communications shared with participants at the onset of the study and did not violate their trust; they were made aware of how their participation would be reflected in the study and assured that their identities would be protected.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the purpose, design, and methodology related to this study. While this ethnographic qualitative case study design is not necessarily generalizable, this particular research design acknowledges the unique infrastructure within a system that plays an integral role in organizational success. Further studies of this nature or internal program evaluation processes could lend valuable insight to identifying barriers to establishing high-quality professional learning cultures in schools and districts.

This research examines constructs of effective leadership, but this study also recognizes and names school districts as unique and complex organizations. While school districts deserve individual attention, they often succumb to the national narrative of failing organizations. However, engaging in in-depth conversations with various stakeholders can expose barriers to organizational productivity and help shape the path for systemic improvement. Clear goals coupled with conditions that support high-quality learning cultures can serve as a foundation that may transcend the status quo and defy the national narrative of public education.

Chapter 2 reviewed leadership frameworks and theoretical constructs that served as pillars of organizational success in education. Chapter 4 provides research findings with a detailed description and discussion of those frameworks and constructs collected as described in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS, KEY FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Purpose of the Study

This study employed an ethnographic qualitative approach to describe existing research related to instructional leadership and transformational leadership and the influential factors of reciprocal accountability, collective capacity, and collective efficacy to understand better the complex challenges of building a culture of learning. A descriptive single case study approach examined the principal's role within an organization and how interactions with others across the system affected a principal's ability to shape the culture of a school. Findings are organized through an epistemological construct examining the relationship between evidence-based truth and educators' beliefs within a school system.

Data were collected through a review of district guiding documents, a participant inventory, and individual interviews that included semi-structured open-ended questions. This chapter provides results, key findings, and implications of the principal's role in shaping the learning culture of a school and what conditions contribute to their ability to do so successfully.

While this study examines only one principal, understanding their specific leadership moves and nuanced decision making while simultaneously seeking to understand others' perceptions of those moves presents an opportunity for a different means of understanding the principalship. While key findings are not necessarily generalizable, concepts and ideas discussed are arguably ubiquitous to educational practice and may be helpful to practitioners. While a principal's immeasurable attributes might always be more significant than research can account for, or training can provide, removing some ambiguity is a helpful strategy in moving forward to improve what we know about the challenges of principalship.

Overview of the Learning Community

The Learningville School District has a reputation of being a true community of learners. A great sense of pride radiates from employees within the system, and surrounding communities see the district as visionary and successful in making a difference in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Collaboration is a core value supported through a weekly early release time allowing teachers and leaders to work together to improve instructional practices that positively influence learning and student achievement. In line with state statute, the district has a professional learning committee that not only supports the planning of professional learning but also offers insights into the alignment between teacher evaluation and feedback and the

alignment of professional learning to support teachers in their needed areas of growth. Learningville is truly a district committed to job-embedded professional learning. The expertise and professional capacity within the district are evident.

Shared goals across the district send a clear message that people matter in Learningville. Goals are centered on high levels of student achievement for all, students' well-being, and attracting and retaining high-quality staff. The district's vision, mission, and core values align to clearly articulated goals and metrics that encourage regular progress monitoring for internal accountability and ultimate goal achievement.

Participants Summary

Key findings shared in this chapter reflect the participation and contributions of six school and district leaders interviewed for this research. Participants included the district superintendent, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, director of elementary curriculum, one building principal, one building-based curriculum leader, and one teacher. In addition to interviews, participants completed a brief survey that offered background information and informed questioning. Guiding district documents were reviewed to determine levels of organizational coherence and internal consistency across the district. Two district-level curriculum coordinators were invited to participate but did not respond to invitations.

The Principal

Matthew's experiences as an educator span 27 years as a teacher and leader in a variety of settings. After seventeen years of experience as a high school teacher, department leader, and assistant principal, Matthew made a career move to elementary school leadership. During his tenure in elementary education, he served for three years as an assistant principal and seven years as a principal. Matthew is completing his fourth year as a K-5 elementary principal in his current district.

Matthew describes himself as dedicated, strategic, and supportive. His self-reflection aligns with how colleagues interviewed for this research describe him. Additionally, Matthew notes his ability and belief that establishing relationships is paramount to successful leadership. He believes this is a natural area of strength that he has "honed over time to build a positive culture." As a leader committed to his own professional learning, Matthew relies on his colleagues for feedback to support his success. Matthew sees his cohort of elementary principals as a collaborative network that regularly provides opportunities for calibration and support.

Matthew is approachable and perceived as a stabilizing presence in the school following several transitions of principal leadership over a short time. Notably, despite the past five years reflecting several leadership transitions, a well-respected principal led the building for over two decades prior to that time.

The Superintendent

Andrea has spent her entire career as an educator in her current district. While serving as superintendent for the past seven years, Andrea began as a student teacher and experienced a variety of positions, including teacher, department chair,

high school principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. Her career spans a total of 25 years in education. Andrea's long tenure in the district represents her commitment to the community as well a desire to see her vision come to fruition.

Andrea is bold, direct, and a fearless advocate for equity and access for all students among district leaders. While her district colleagues view her as a strong leader, Andrea is known as a strong, student-centered leader by her colleagues across the state. Andrea describes her style as adaptive to the needs of those she is leading at any given time. While maintaining a clear vision of the district's needs, Andrea shapes district and building leaders to meet their departments' and their schools' unique needs. When asked directly about her bold-style perceived fearlessness, she said it comes from "years of experience and perhaps a little bit of ego."

The Assistant Superintendent

Colton is completing 27 years as an educator in the same district where he is currently the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, a title he has held for six years. Additional roles during his tenure include high school math teacher, high school department chair, high school assistant principal, and secondary curriculum leader. Colton is self-described as fair, patient, and hard-working. According to the superintendent, "Colton is one of the hardest working people I know. I trust him to lead in his area, and I know when he comes to me, the need is sincere."

Colton relies on collaborations with the executive team to guide the district's decision-making. As the visionary for instructional leadership across the district, Colton collaborates with a team of curriculum leaders to guide the implementation of robust curricula across content areas and grade levels. Colton shared that he is fortunate to be surrounded by "good people to do the work." During his tenure, Colton has advocated for equitable instructional practices and the development and expansion of innovative programs like computer science.

The Curriculum Director

As a veteran educator of 28 years, Evelyn is beginning her tenth year as Director of Elementary Curriculum. Evelyn's knowledge of teaching and learning is impressive. She uses her vast knowledge of pedagogy and content to evoke the talents of

teachers and leaders across her district. While she sees herself as caring, hard-working, and visionary, her colleagues give her the time and space she needs to utilize her talents and do her job with skill and finesse. As a catalyst for curriculum change in the district, Evelyn intends to balance big-picture thinking and clarity in explaining the "why" behind changes and strategic moves in teaching and learning.

As a central office team member, Evelyn also has the challenge of serving as a bridge between the central office, building principals, and other curriculum leaders. As a true lifelong learner, Evelyn is currently pursuing a doctorate in education to gain new theories, models, and perspectives on leadership and professional learning beyond what her district can offer. As a member of several professional organizations, Evelyn has a vast professional network that helps her define a strong sense of purpose with her work.

The Curriculum Specialist

When reflecting on his current role, Grayson shared, "I think I've grown a lot—the trust and rapport I've built with staff ... it's a dynamic group of people. Relationship building is the foundation of all of my work." With twenty years of experience, thirteen in his current role, Grayson sees himself as collegial, resourceful, and skilled. In addition, Grayson works diligently to support teachers and encourages them to broaden their lens to see themselves as leaders within the school.

Grayson's role and title are situated uniquely as a teacher leader in his school. However, due to the combination of responsibilities and established relationships within the building, colleagues often view him as a de facto assistant principal. Although he does not evaluate other teachers or have responsibilities with student discipline, he is very much seen as an instructional leader in the building and described by his principal as his "right instructional arm." The principal sees Grayson as collaborative, proactive, and successful in breaking down barriers, a view shared by the teachers in the school.

Grayson provides oversight and support of grade-level curriculum implementation, especially in mathematics, among his many responsibilities. In many ways, Grayson is a hub of the professional learning culture and is always striving for continuous growth and improvement.

The Teacher

With 18 years of experience as a classroom teacher, Abigail is an educator with integrity, highly respected among the staff. Abigail shared that her colleagues would describe her as fair, ethical, and sweet, aligned to her self-description of being

incredibly focused and a true rule follower. Early in her career, a principal advised Abigail to make sure the students are happy, then the education will come. This advice has been an important part of her journey.

Being the rule follower she is, Abigail has been influential in moving along instructional initiatives while also influencing the culture of the building. The transition of leadership over the past several years has been challenging to the staff, but Abigail sees the current principal as someone who has positively shaped culture, partially due to his honesty, integrity, and empathy. In addition, Abigail regularly referred to trust as an important attribute in making a difference for teachers and students in her school.

Summary of Guiding Documents

Several guiding documents were reviewed to gain an understanding of organizational planning and alignment of leadership moves that support articulated goals connected to the strategic plan. Each of the guiding documents reviewed is briefly described here and integrated into the interview discussions and key findings throughout the remainder of the chapter.

The **District Development Plan** serves a similar purpose to a document many educational leaders might classify as a strategic plan or a district improvement plan. Including a clear statement of mission, vision, and goals, the District Improvement Plan includes a series of three goals with clearly articulated priorities, actions, and indicators of success. The outcomes are measurable and look to student achievement, leadership and staff quality, and family engagement as determining factors in the district's success.

The **Curriculum and Staff Improvement** document provided an overview of the district's deeply engrained philosophy and approach to adult learning. Learningville's approach is sustained professional learning throughout the year in place of isolated days, workshops, and conferences that teachers often endure. A distribution of time each week creates conditions for attention to district, school-based, and self-directed learning. The district approaches professional learning as a "process rather than an event," allowing teachers to apply, reflect and determine the effectiveness of instructional strategies. Collaborative inquiry is part of the culture in Learningville.

Learningville's **Teacher Evaluation and Development Plan** reflects the district's "holistic and comprehensive process" to ensure high levels of teacher quality across the system. The plan contains guiding principles undergirding a framework of

a vision for best instructional practices, including multiple measures to determine performance; emphasis on growth over time; fostering professional judgment, encouraging dialogue about instructional practices; supporting professional learning and feedback; and aligning to continuous improvement. In addition, this plan aligns with a model set forth by the state department of education.

Similar to Learningville's Teacher Evaluation and Development Plan, the **Administrator Evaluation and Development Plan** defines effective leadership regarding administrator practice and teacher effectiveness as determined by student achievement, stakeholder feedback, and perceptions regarding the administrator's leadership. This framework aligns with a plan set forth by the state department of education. Additionally, this plan is designed to support and ensure effective leaders who will build capacity across the system to help others realize their potential for excellence. The guiding principles in the plan include leaders directly affecting student success; evaluation strengthens practices to improve learning; evaluation is grounded in improvement; collaboration and reflection are required for growth, and observations and feedback can positively influence individual and collective efficacy.

Key Findings and Discussion from Research Question

The primary research question was designed to gain an understanding of how a vertically connected team of educators perceive a principal's role in building a learning culture with high levels of collective capacity, collective efficacy and reciprocal accountability.

By exploring the constructs of reciprocal accountability, collective capacity, and collective efficacy, insight into the practices, perceptions, and expectations within a single system offers insight into specific leadership moves. A series of codes were developed to align with the theoretical framework that organized the data and determined key vocabulary reflective of each domain.

1. What expectations for professional learning are shared between district leaders, building leaders, and teachers, and what role do varied stakeholders play in creating conditions for high-quality adult learning? (Reciprocal Accountability)

2. How do individuals within the school work together to achieve individual and shared learning goals? (Collective Capacity)

3.   How do members of a school community perceive their contributions to

developing and maintaining a learning culture? (Collective Efficacy)

Overarching Question: How does a vertically connected team of educators within a system perceive the principal's role in building a learning culture with high levels of collective capacity, collective efficacy and reciprocal accountability?

A conceptual framework was developed to discover principal leadership actions relating to the overarching research question, identifying the constructs of reciprocal accountability, collective capacity, and collective efficacy as the pillars of a professional learning culture. The learning that occurs within the organization across these pillars contributes to the changes and actions in adult behaviors that make a difference in student learning. A series of codes were developed in alignment with the conceptual framework that organized the data and determined key vocabulary reflective of each domain: reciprocal accountability, collective capacity, and collective efficacy.

Principle 1: Individuals who positively work together to achieve individual and shared learning goals demonstrate high levels of collective capacity.

When high levels of collective capacity exist, there is space for both collaborative and autonomous decision-making. When actions related to those decisions are sound and connect to the organizations' shared purpose and goals, the team's collective capacity is evident (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Examining how educators within a school work together to achieve individual and shared learning goals revealed key findings representing both the value of collaborative decision-making and the importance of autonomy. Defining collaboration and autonomy on the surface represent a dichotomy. However, considering these terms along a continuum of meeting individualized adult learning needs represents organizational flexibility in working together and independently to build the capacity of the learning community. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe independent work, or teacher autonomy, as "a license to be brilliant, but also abominable or just plain bland" (p.110). Levels of teacher and administrator autonomy require differentiation to meet learners' varied needs within the organization.

Key Finding 1: Differentiated Levels of Autonomy Build Individual and Collective Capacity Within an Organization

The Learningville School District is a community reflecting transparency between articulated goals, actions, strategies, and results. Teacher perspective suggests there are clear criteria for success and awareness of instructional focus areas and goals for the school. "When you have a meaningful instructional focus, it's never … *this again?* But instead, it *just is* … the work is meaningful and makes a difference in instruction, It's the structure of what you are doing and why" (Abigail, personal interview, January 26, 2021).

Curriculum oversight is centralized with leadership affirming that the district goals are commonly understood, the teaching and learning areas of focus are also clear, "even when they are not in writing" (Evelyn, personal interview, January 22, 2021).

Enhancing the shared understanding of the larger goals is a high level of leadership autonomy at the school level. As a principal, Matthew experienced some initial challenges resulting from a great deal of individual leader autonomy with the school's six different principals over six years. As a result, the school was "suffering from the lack of an instructional identity" (Matthew, personal interview, January 7, 2021). While the consistency of shared instructional focus areas connects all schools in the district's guiding documents, transient leadership contributed to

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varied approaches to working toward the same goal over a short period. Grayson (personal interview, January 22, 2021), the curriculum specialist, confirmed that while schools have significant autonomy within clear parameters, changing principals made that level of autonomy a challenge.

Superintendent Andrea and Assistant Superintendent Colton believe that principals are critical players in the organizational structure who are expected to lead their buildings toward the shared District goals using strategies and actions that suit their building's needs. "I would say with great confidence that principals have autonomy to lead their schools" (Colton, personal interview, March 10, 2021). Andrea reflected on her own time in the District as a high school principal, remembering times when standardizing leadership practices seemed desirable by a former Superintendent; this did not work well with her leadership style. Instead, Andrea believed that leaders should be aware of the goals and then utilize their talents to guide people to that destination. This core belief she maintained as principal is significant as that same belief is evident as she now leads the District she has known for her entire professional career.

Autonomy, mastery, purpose, and belonging are four feelings that contribute to the basic human desire to contribute and succeed. Among these four feelings is one that dominates the individual, their drive (Pink, 2009). Pink argues that individuals who sense autonomy perceive freedom to do their job well because they have agency of choice and voice without being controlled. Jackson (2013) suggests that individuals shut down when autonomy is one's "driver" and becomes threatened by a perceived loss of control. District leaders and principals are challenged to differentiate appropriate levels of autonomy so teachers and leaders can be successful and avoid shutting down. While some teachers and leaders are well-positioned to make independent decisions, others require the support of a team. When this is the case, the collective professional autonomy of a team, not the autonomy of the individual, helps shape the best path forward (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). A shared desire for autonomy of leaders exists in Learningville by the central office team. How the central office forges the collective professional autonomy of the organization and the individuals within supports their practice of differentiating over a top-down leadership approach (DeWitt, 2022).

Many educators greatly desire teacher autonomy. However, due to the standards movement, what teachers teach has become more defined, resulting in inflexible curricula and tight pacing guides directly threatening the idea of teacher autonomy. In Learningville, however, there appears to be a healthy balance. "There is not a neat

curriculum in a package; there is freedom and autonomy to get the work done. We're held accountable through the benchmarks" (Abigail, personal interview, January 26, 2021). While teachers collaborate with their teams and share practices, the pressure to conform does not persist if students grow appropriately as learners. "We have the autonomy to create the professional development for our school. Other schools might have the same focus, but they are getting there in a different way" (Abigail, personal interview, January 26, 2021).

Those who desire higher levels of autonomy must demonstrate high levels of self-discipline to be afforded that opportunity. "I am here because I believe in the work we are doing. This is a community where everyone is welcome, and anyone can be anything. We work hard, hopefully on the right things" (Evelyn, personal interview, January 22, 2021). Celebrating successes, new approaches to learning, and effective strategies at work are part of the practice. When a teacher does something differently and experiences success, it is far from a secret; it is diffused. "When someone has something to offer the faculty, they are featured in front of their peers so we can learn together" (Matthew, personal interview, January 7, 2021). Getting the right work done, even if getting it done differently, is at the heart of the culture in Learningville.

Key Finding 2: Collaborative Decision Making is Valued

The success of educational leaders is often the result of their organization and collaboration. Rarely is their success determined by solitary acts of leadership (Reeves, 2006). Reeves likens leaders to architects, designing the structures and connections that can meet current environmental demands, anticipate changes, and endure surprises (2006). Similarly, Elmore (2000) espouses a theory of distributed leadership, where the talents of others must be considered as leaders cannot do their job alone. The need for collaborative decision-making is not only something needed but also valued.

The central office team in Learningville are architects who benefit from their many years working as a team. Whether teaching colleagues, principals, assistant principals, or superintendent and assistant superintendent, their relationship has endured many collaborative decisions over time. These circumstances are unique because, together, these district leaders made many changes and decisions that shape the current district learning culture by deciding who is selected to lead in Learningville. "What we created together is a functional team where each person was selected based on skills that would complement the executive leadership

team. We are always looking at whom we need to round out the team" (Colton, personal interview, March 10, 2021).

The culture of collaborative decision-making transfers to curriculum leadership: "We have completely transformed curriculum and balance, who is pulled to work on projects representing all schools and grade levels" (Evelyn, personal interview, January 22, 2021). Learningville's curriculum is largely homegrown, aligned to the standards while representing the voices of teachers across the district. "There is opportunism for all third-grade teachers from across the town to work together. We are accountable to the curriculum for the town, not just our own students and school" (Abigail, personal interview, January 26, 2021). Teams of teachers work together diligently, making collaborative decisions regarding what to teach so they can work with their principal and team to best determine how.

Principal Matthew knew that inheriting a position where there was a lack of an instructional identity offered an opportunity to create conditions that would support more democratic practices, transparency, and collaborative decision-making in his school. Supporting these efforts, Matthew created a school-based leadership team representing grade levels and content areas across the school. Members of this team are not only there to represent stakeholder groups across the school, but they are also responsible for messaging back essential items related to the four-part agenda. As a result, what is happening in the school is known and partially planned by members of this group.

Partially through the work of this school-based leadership team, the structures and cultures of collaborative decision-making make their way into classrooms affecting how teachers teach, and students learn. "It's a mixed bag. The majority of the teachers want to grow and learn, but you need the time and create the conditions. Everyone wants to feel like they are doing their best, but those structures need to be in place, so they do" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021). For years teachers wanted to feel heard, and now they do. "The principal can leave the meeting or leave the room, and the work is still the work because it's ours" (Abigail, personal interview, January 26, 2021).

Transforming the culture in the school over a short period was a significant leadership lift resulting in teachers feeling confident in their work. Leaders within the school are acutely aware of the high expectations they put upon teachers and, as a result, make sure they regularly solicit feedback as they work with teachers. "When we ask for their time, we ask for their feedback; that's how we get better" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021).

As a reflective leader, "One of the most important things I've learned through the last five years is the importance of building the capacity of teachers in the building. I realize with just a curriculum specialist and a principal, we can't do it all, nor should we. We need each other, and we need to do it together" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021).

Building leaders expressed that giving teachers opportunities for leadership builds their self-esteem and confidence and helps them focus on the work they need to prioritize. In addition, providing teachers with the time to do that work during the school day has been a critical leadership move. "If the work we are doing is important, then the work deserves time. Having a principal who recognizes this is critical. In my role, helping people feel like professionals and giving them the time they need is one of the best things I've done in terms of building capacity and supporting instructional practices in our school" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021).

Principle Two: Principal leadership and allocation of time represent the importance of professional learning and reciprocal accountability within a learning community.

Both implicit and explicit expectations for professional learning are shared between district leaders, building leaders, and teachers in Learningville. Stakeholders across the organization play varied roles in creating conditions for high-quality adult learning. Findings from this study identified time and the role of the principal as key areas in supporting reciprocal accountability. Leading a culture of reciprocal accountability requires leaders to understand their role, implicitly and explicitly, in what they are asking of teachers and subsequently providing them with the learning and resources they will need to experience success (Marzano, R., Warrick, P., Rains, C., & DuFour, R., 2018). District and school leaders need to think about what others need to do and what others need to learn to do that work successfully (Stevenson &Weiner, 2021), the key to reciprocal accountability.

Key Finding 3: Leaders Spend Time Where There is the Greatest Need

Principals have the opportunity to create conditions for teachers to access one of the most critical resources in education: time (Rallis & Goldring, 2000). Allocation of time by school and district leaders sends an explicit message of importance that teachers notice. While using time for learning that is connected, collaborative, and consistent is established through this literature review, accomplishing this continues to challenge educational leaders. Freeston and Costa (1998) discuss

time in value-added, necessary, or wasted domains. Wherever possible, leaders should focus time on value-added work making a difference for students. The remaining time should be used to complete necessary work and avoid tasks that ultimately waste time. The principal is responsible for creating these conditions (Freeston & Costa, 1998). While resources supporting time management and organizational strategies are regularly sought after by educational leaders, presence in classrooms resoundingly persists as good use of time. Visibility in classrooms provides value in the moment and informs where time should be allocated moving forward to support those with the greatest needs (Marshall, 2008).

A shared understanding of what is most important is foundational in allocating time appropriately. The Superintendent is clear as she expressed, "All of our efforts need to be focused on elevating learning for everyone around social justice and antiracism" (Andrea, personal interview, March 23, 2021). The Assistant Superintendent articulated this as well as he shared, "We've taken on cultural competence, and we're glad to see the momentum and the support that is building at the State level" (Colton, personal interview, March 10, 2021). This message is also clear as the building principal shared, "We've pressed pause for a moment to calibrate and refocus on equity and access for all students. When we are in a good spot, we can proceed applying an equity lens to all of our work" (Matthew, personal interview, January 7, 2021).

Time for the work to get done is clearly defined in Learningville. With a weekly early release time dedicated to staff professional learning, there is ample space to focus on a balance of building and district priorities. Not only are those priorities given time, but they are also connected. "District goals should be integrated into building goals—the principal needs to make those connections for clarity and purpose. Everything centers around our three Board of Education goals that understanding is shared" (Colton, personal interview, March 10, 2021).

Principal actions to make those connections for their staff are critical. To do so, however, principals need to know their staff. Matthew prioritized instruction as a principal new to the school and had a clear desire for staff to create and contribute to a more instructionally-focused culture. After interviewing members of the learning community as part of his entry plan, it was clear. "There were a lot of players with an instructional role that weren't the principal—getting into classrooms as much as possible, even when ... or I should say especially when it was non-evaluative, was important to me and to people. My goal was to visit often and early so I could know the players—who would need my time, who needs help, and who

could help me" (Matthew, personal interview, January 7, 2021). As a result of getting to know the staff, it was clearer where time needed to be spent. Sending a message of "we are a learning school," coaching is for everyone, defining what high-quality instruction looks like; incremental change over time was the path Matthew shaped for his staff.

Requiring significant time of administrators and teachers, the teacher evaluation and feedback plan is a guiding document designed to develop teachers in Learningville. Matthew's perspective is that the plan itself is well aligned to the instructional focus, though it sometimes feels clerical. As a teacher in Matthew's school, however, Abigail articulated clear connections to the instructional focus, timely and thorough feedback, and a consensus among staff that the plan can be useful when you trust in the person that provides you with feedback. Unfortunately, hearing any positive comments regarding teacher evaluation and feedback plans is a rarity. However, if this sentiment shared by Abigail is representative of other teachers in Matthew's school, that is an amazing feat and time well spent on his part.

An additional element of time that is often overlooked is leaders' learning. How is time dedicated to their learning needs to create conditions for those they lead to do their jobs successfully? "I am mostly a professional development provider, not a receiver. There are meeting structures that bring different groups of leaders together … principals once a month, administrative council four times a year … we also have a summer retreat where we plan using our spring data. Depending on what is happening, it's not necessarily focused on our learning" (Evelyn, personal interview, January 22, 2021). Given the conditions at the time of the interview, Matthew shared, "COVID hasn't moved us forward; it's moved us differently. Every school is unique; we've stayed focused on fidelity to curriculum and instruction with numeracy, literacy, and science. This has forced our learning to focus on what is most important, and ultimately we needed to do whatever we could to address the social and emotional learning needs of our kids" (Matthew, personal interview, January 7, 2021).

Grayson's role as one of two building curriculum specialists in his school allows him to network with other colleagues across elementary schools and share that learning with teachers. That network, along with guidance from the curriculum office, connect back to the goals achievement, a safe learning environment, and commitment to building the professional capacity of staff. As a teacher in the building, Abigail respects the time and focuses on learning targets. "Our

professional development time needs to be practiced and positively affect my students. Theory is great, but I need to know how it's going to help me and my kids. Our time together is limited, and what I have to teach doesn't match the time. As a staff, we are trying to bring the real world into our classroom to make sense of success criteria. That takes time" (Abigail, personal interview, January 26, 2021).

Key Finding 4: School Districts Pivot Around Principal Leadership

This research proposes a theory of action that when principals clearly understand their role in building and maintaining professional learning cultures within a system, they can make decisions with thoughtfully aligned strategies and actions to participate in and support professional learning. Principals who see the possibility of what could be, while leading with intentionality to make that a reality, exemplify why leadership matters (Hall, Childs-Bowen, Cuningham-Morris, Pajardo, & Simeral, 2016). The central office team in Learningville sees the possibility of what new principals bring to the organization and selects leaders with intentionality that will make a difference in the learning culture of every school. Throughout the interview process for this research, high expectations of the principal and awareness of principal actions were common themes in conversations. In addition, a shared understanding that principals play a pivotal role in the learning culture of a school was a common understanding of all participants. Therefore, how principals are selected to lead in Learningville offers further insight into the overall learning culture of the district.

Andrea considers principal selection among the most critical parts of her job as Superintendent of Learningville. When asked what she is looking for in the process, she responded very quickly, "It's never the same thing. Principals have to show that they can work themselves into the culture of the building I am looking for them to lead. I want to know that this person is going to lose sleep over wanting kids to succeed because they know what they do makes a difference in that happening. I want intellectual ability over experience because I know smart people can figure it out. They need to make sure everyone who steps foot in that school is welcome … hardworking and kid-centered are just a couple of obvious things. I pretty much want them to see their job as an epitaph, is that asking too much"? (Andrea, personal interview, March 23, 2021). Andrea's statement illuminates the challenging demands of the principalship while reinforcing the research base regarding the complexity of the role (Rallis & Goldring, 2000, Elmore, 2002).

As the Director of Curriculum, Evelyn relies on principals and building curriculum specialists to "do the work." Early in her tenure, in past conversations, she heard,

"As a principal, I have nothing to do with curriculum" (Evelyn, personal interview, January 22, 2021). Evelyn made it her personal goal never to hear that again, and if she did, she knew it was on her. As a result, she makes every effort to connect with principals when in their buildings and engage with them during professional meetings. Evelyn's close professional relationship with Matthew benefits the teachers and students in his school.

As a principal focused on the instructional culture of his building, Matthew knew that addressing morale was necessary. When discussing his strategic cultural moves, he reflected on several informal moves like 1:1 meetings with all staff, onboarding new teachers with intention and care, and high visibility and availability. In addition, noticeable shifts in collegiality occurred during faculty meetings upon introducing games with movie props, embedding 80s music, and sharing post-its when wanting to offer a colleague a "shout out." Including opportunities for these types of celebrations are faculty norms that bring positivity to meetings. "If I wanted my faculty to focus on instruction, I needed to do this first. This way I could create a map. Before they had no map and without a map, you don't have a good sense of direction" (Matthew, personal interview, January 7, 2021).

The building curriculum specialist plays a crucial role in navigating Matthew's map and ensuring his success. "Different people create different opportunities for us to learn. With Matthew, accountability feels different, and it doesn't feel like it's coming from central office" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021). Having a principal like Matthew has not been the staff's experience for several years. "One principal tried to grow the staff as learners without growing relationships first. [For me] Trying to stay aligned to a principal without compromising my relationships with teachers was challenging" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021). Grayson respected the role of the principal regardless of who it was, as did the staff. "Through all the transition this staff has experienced, everyone and I mean everyone rose to the expectations of the principal whether or not they agreed. When the building leader changes, how teachers perceive the changes being implemented is palpable" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021). When discussing principal effectiveness with Grayson, he shared that "Effective principals make sure everyone else sees their role as important and that usually makes them more effective. Our principal is a strong instructional leader. He is very structure-oriented, and his follow-through is exceptional" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021).

As a teacher in Matthew's school, Abigail shared, "I remember during the principal search just wanting someone that will hold us accountable" (Abigail, personal interview, January 26, 2021). After working with Matthew [now], "There is so much follow-through it's hilarious; he must sleep at school. That's all I wanted. I follow the rules, I follow the curriculum, I just want follow-through, and now I have it" (Abigail, personal interview January 26, 2021). When discussing the school's learning culture, Abigail stated, "I feel so lucky that he is here. I thought we [Matthew and I] were really close, and then I realized he's like that with everyone. However, he isn't all pleasantries ... he will throw down the hammer when he needs to ... I've heard it" (Abigail, personal interview, January 26, 2021).

Looking to understand specific principal moves from the teacher's perspective, Abigail notes, "There is no haphazard with him; it's not in his vocabulary to just make something up because we know he is such a planner. You know the intentionality, so you don't question, you trust that it was thought out and planned ... because it was" (Abigail, personal interview, January 26, 2021). The teacher evaluation feedback framework briefly mentioned under the time finding also presented more positively from the teacher perspective. "The teacher evaluation instructional framework is important because he references it during evaluations. It's transparent; it's connected. It doesn't feel cold and evaluative; it feels like the instructional framework is useful ... it's what it should be, it's what we're working toward" (Abigail, personal interview, January 26, 2021). Additionally, "You don't hear whisperings about evaluations ... none of that *you won't believe* ... because when there is transparency and approachability, you can talk about what you think is unfair and unjust to the person instead of talking around them (Abigail, personal interview, January 26, 2021). If Abigail's feelings regarding the use of teacher evaluation are pervasive in her school, there is great potential to shift the learning culture using the known entity of the teacher evaluation plan.

Principle Three: Leaders Can Foster Collective Efficacy When They Understand the Members of Their Learning Community

Principals who empower teachers to make decisions create cultures where educators feel heard, trusted, and empowered. Teams of teachers who have the freedom to make individual and collaborative decisions regarding their professional practice demonstrate high levels of collective efficacy (Donohoo, 2017). There is a simple theory of action implied that when someone believes in us, we believe in ourselves. Unfortunately, a principal's investment in building the capacity and efficacy of others to make sound decisions does not often happen without intent.

Working toward a more efficacious culture requires a relational leader who makes complex decisions look easy because they are well studied on the factors related to their school or district.

Leaders who do this involuntarily and naturally are leading with automaticity. While this term is not regularly associated with leadership or education research outside of mathematics instruction, it seems to describe the leaders in this case study accurately. Leaders appear to make decisions easily and confidently because they know the community. These leaders also demonstrated self-awareness regarding their empathic nature. As a result, this finding is referred to as conscious empathy. These two findings reflect leaders who create highly efficacious cultures where groups of individuals share common goals and beliefs that their collective actions can positively influence outcomes.

Key Finding 5: Understanding Leadership Automaticity Can Inform How We Define Successful Principals

Situational awareness was identified by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) as the leadership responsibility, among twenty-one others, having the highest correlation to student achievement. A leader's ability to apply their knowledge of the details and "undercurrents" of the school to avoid, address and solve problems reflects a leader's situational awareness (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Leaders with high levels of situational awareness know what is going on in their school and can predict, inform, and avoid situations as necessary. While skillful leaders appear to do this automatically, their decisions are based on much more than instinct. The skill of making decisions with high levels of awareness relates to Gladwell's (2005) work on unconscious adaptation. Gladwell describes this phenomenon as thin slicing, making decisions with what appears to be minimal information. The argument he makes of connecting the idea of automaticity to situational awareness is that quick decisions are not necessarily based on limited information. Instead, they are rapid conclusions drawn from accumulated experiences, knowledge, and skills of the individual making the decision. As leaders may appear quick to act, they are doing so based on their bank of previous experiences.

Making decisions is a regular part of the workday for educational leaders and teachers alike. "Not only am I the lead learner, I have the responsibility to manage the politics and policy needed to run the place. This requires me to be available to manage my Board while the people I know and trust make teaching and learning decisions focused on students" (Andrea, personal interview, March 23, 2021). With

each leader's many required responsibilities and decisions, maximizing their time on the most critical areas will contribute to higher levels of situational awareness and automaticity in decision making.

Curriculum leaders make many decisions that directly affect classroom teaching and learning system-wide. These decisions are often based on deep knowledge of the standards, knowledge, and skills that students need to experience academic success as a learner. However, depending on how any particular curriculum role functions, the results of those decisions are challenging to track. As the Director of Elementary Curriculum, "I influence, but I can't necessarily see what's happening. I think being an instructional leader is the most important thing a principal has to do. I have to trust that the decisions I am making with teachers and leaders who are developing units are going to be happening in classrooms because of principals" (Evelyn, personal interview, January 22, 2021).

Principals have regular opportunities to shape teaching and learning in classrooms based on the feedback they give. "Honest feedback and targeted conversations are the hardest part of the leader's job. It's actually pretty easy to identify the problems, just not always easy to talk about. Our principal makes decisions every day, and they aren't afraid to talk about it" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021). This repeated theme of principal availability, decision making, and follow-through represent Mathew's collective experience, consistency, and judgment allowing him to make many difficult decisions appear easy to his staff.

As an Assistant Superintendent, Colton has experience building leadership as a department chair and assistant principal. However, Colton's lack of experience as a principal could be perceived as a gap by those he leads. "I recognize when I don't know something; then I may need to backfill because I just don't have that experience. What I do know is we can learn a lot from the strategies we are using to improve and whether or not that is making a difference with the data. I am not afraid to look in and say this isn't working … leadership matters; our decisions matter … we are not jealous when someone does it better. Our shared job is to help the organization be successful no matter what. That is the military in me; find the person that could complete the task" (Colton, personal interview, March 10, 2021).

Key Finding 6: Conscious Empathy Empowers Efficacy

Empathetic leaders can establish connections with others due to their ability to connect and relate to the thoughts and emotions of those around them. Through listening, demonstrating vulnerability, and exhibiting compassion, empathetic

leaders create conditions where people feel safe and work with higher productivity levels (Center for Creative Leadership, retrieved 1/9/22). Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010) describe empathy as "respectful, no-fault understanding and appreciation of someone's experience; as such, it is an orientation and practice that fosters radically new change possibilities" (p.21). The empathy of leaders interviewed for this research pervaded conversations. Noticeably, awareness of individual and group needs in different circumstances resulted in leadership adjustment of empathy based on the situation. In addition, the high level of leader situational awareness affected their consciousness of empathy. This level of conscious empathy allows leaders in Learningville to appropriately relate to their staff without letting unfortunate situations of colleagues negatively affect their own work.

As previously mentioned, the central office leadership team benefits from years of positive work experience together. When vacancies occur, the leadership team intentionally seeks new members who will fill a void and contribute to the overall organizational strength of Learningville. The Superintendent shared, "I'm not the easiest person to work for, but people that know me don't doubt my intentions" (Andrea, personal interview, March 23, 2021). When asked where the confidence and assertiveness she is known for comes from, she shared, "Years of experience and the right amount of ego, I guess" (Andrea, personal interview, March 23, 2021). Andrea's history in the District and her high level of empathic leadership contribute to the overall positive culture in Learningville. Andrea is among the first Superintendent to offer her kid-centered opinion to the world because that is where her moral compass guides her.

The global pandemic resulting from COVID 19 highlights the need for empathic leaders. In addition to demanding jobs in education, managing the health and safety of others has become a fundamental part of the job description for school leaders. At the same time, compromised health and safety, meeting the needs of remote and in-person students, and persisting high-stakes testing continue to be high stressors for educators. When discussing culture and organizational management with the Assistant Superintendent, it is clear that he believes the people within the organization make a positive difference for children and adults every day. "There is so much in every position that you can't possibly see unless it is your position. I am not busier than you; my busy is just different. When someone wants to talk, even if it's against the direction the District is heading, it is my job to listen. If you want to give voice to the voiceless, you have to work with them" (Colton, personal interview, March 10, 2021).

Principal Matthew has made a conscious effort to model mindset at the building level. To restore a culture of trust and create an instructional identity, "Many individual conversations were needed to keep the ship heading in the right direction. Now we are good, but we could be better, and we will be" (Matthew, personal interview, January 7, 2021). When talking specifically about Matthew's leadership with Superintendent Andrea, she shared, "You need different types of principals for different schools. Matthew was the right person for that school, and he is doing great things. I get regular updates that I don't ask for, and I see great work when I do ask. I have to push principals differently to do the work they need to do. If I worked with Matthew like I have to work with some other principals, he would probably never come back to work" (Andrea, March 23, 2021). Andrea knows her people.

Gauging where teachers are and what they need to feel like they contribute has moved the school forward. From the curriculum specialist perspective, Grayson shared, "There's definitely a tie between culture and what's happening in the classroom. The more teachers feel heard, the more their confidence grows, and we see changes in the classroom. We've done a lot to identify teachers as leaders and build their capacity" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021). While it is not uncommon to consciously build the instructional capacity of a teacher to affect student learning, these leaders are fostering that through leadership. "We want teachers to see themselves as leaders. This also increases their ability to work more effectively as teams. That way, they are not isolated" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021). How teachers feel about their work requires the care of leaders as well. "Our teachers are happy when they are valued, treated as professionals, have opportunities to lead, are recognized for the work they do and are shown gratitude. I've seen our teachers becoming better through honest conversations from the principal; their teaching is more effective" (Grayson, personal interview, January 22, 2021).

Through each interview, it is clear that a high level of empathy appears to be among Matthew's greatest attributes as a leader. Offering his time, in ways seemingly unprecedented, is contributing to the staff's feeling of safety and stability. Regular feedback through a formal evaluation and casual conversations have contributed to a culture where feedback is not only welcome but expected and put into action. Celebrating and appreciating the staff is also embedded in the culture, thanks to Matthew. Shoutouts, thank you, notes, encouraging gifts, a shoulder to cry on, and laughs have seemingly transformed a school in a short amount of time. Matthew has made a difference as a principal in Learningville and will continue to do so in the eyes of those around him

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Study and Findings

Professional learning cultures are created by principals who foster conditions for high-quality teaching and learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012). Despite the many high accountability responsibilities and demands principals experience daily, establishing and maintaining professional learning cultures is paramount (Elmore, 2000). Developing cultures of professional learning challenges principals because shaping cultural conditions is the sum of many complex parts. Whether principals rely on their pre-service training, leadership experiences, professional networks, or mentors, there is no playbook for a one-size-fits-all learning culture transformation.

This research posits that creating a learning culture requires a foundation of leadership talent that balances and reflects both instructional and transformative leadership attributes. When those leadership talents are maximized to foster conditions for collective capacity, collective efficacy, and reciprocal accountability, the leader has built a school that relies on its most valuable resource, its people. The conceptual framework suggests that building the talent (collective capacity), encouraging the talent (collective efficacy), and maintaining mutually high expectations for the talent to perform (reciprocal accountability) are critical cultural elements of a school's learning culture. Investing in the people and operating this way is a human resource-centered approach to organizational management. This approach is not only an investment in people but also a value in shared decision making, communication, and a shared belief that the leader serves as a catalyst to help everyone meet their human needs and goals. This approach relies on the importance of fit and the credence that humans need each other for organizational success (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Retaining leaders when the fit is right poses a challenge to building and sustaining positive learning cultures. With a national principal turnover rate of 25% annually and 50% of principals not remaining in their positions for more than three years (New Teacher Center, 2018), cultural change seems insurmountable. Change associated with leaders typically takes five years (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). With the steady turnover of leaders, not only is the learning culture affected, but their contributions to that school may never take hold, even when those contributions were positive. Principals are leaving schools as a result of workload, feelings of isolation, their physical and psychological well-being, and feelings of being

powerless in moving their schools (New Teacher Center, 2018). Slowing down the turnover of principals requires that these feelings be eradicated or at least reduced so district leaders can shape the path for principals, just as principals are shaping the paths for their teachers.

Freire (1993) suggests that we should look at instruction with a lens of reciprocity where teachers and students simultaneously share each other's roles. Therefore, teachers are teaching and learning simultaneously, as are the students. Applying Freire's suggestion of reciprocity across an entire learning organization suggests that all members of the larger district could regularly learn from each other regardless of their position within the leadership hierarchy. At times this is done haphazardly or coincidentally but could be transformative if approached with intentionality. In addition to thinking about what needs to get done, all leaders must consider what people need to know to successfully complete the work they are being asked for (Stevenson & Weiner, 2021).

I spent virtual time in a relatively large school district in Connecticut with a population of nearly10,000 students across schools. In addition to a participant inventory and becoming acquainted with the guiding documents of the district, I had the opportunity to interview six members of the learning community that had a connection to one elementary school principal whose leadership is at the heart of the key research question of this study. Time in the district revealed some insights into shaping a school's learning culture.

Principal Matthew's reflections of his own leadership moves, and the perceptions of others across the system contributed to six key findings related to how professional learning cultures are established: 1) Differentiated levels of autonomy builds individual, and collective capacity within an organization, 2) Collaborative decision-making is valued, 3) Leaders spend time where there is the greatest need, 4) School districts pivot around principal leadership, 5) Understanding leadership automaticity can inform how we define successful principals, and 6) Conscious empathy empowers efficacy. These key findings reinforced the pillars of the conceptual framework of collective capacity, collective efficacy, and reciprocal accountability. In addition, several leadership moves contributed to the current learning culture of Matthew's school in Learningville during this research.

District Leadership Moves

1. Establish broad district goals to provide autonomy in school-based goal setting

   and leadership.

1. Build a district leadership team that complements the talents and deficits of each other.

2. Hire principals who have the skill to meet the needs of a specific school and shape the desired learning culture.

3. Create a culture where people want to stay; transiency hurts, and stability matters.

Principal Leadership Moves

1. Define an instructional identity for your school.

2. Allocate time for teachers to work hard on the right things.

3. Spend time (be visible) where people need you most.

4. Celebrate and recognize what is worth celebrating.

5. Provide feedback expeditiously.

Leading in Learningville is not Matthew's first principalship. His previous experiences contribute to his style, beliefs, and approach to transforming his school. Matthew understands his role in shaping the learning culture and knows his planning and attention to detail are noticed and valued. While Matthew's personal leadership theory of action was not discussed throughout the interview process, through observation, I would propose that Matthew believes that when principals model empathy and invest in developing the talent of teachers, then teachers develop the will to learn and grow in order to meet the learning needs of their students, when Matthew was a principal in another district, his theory of action was very likely the same. However, the transferability of his theory from one district to another likely required a different playbook due to the nature of the learning culture.

Matthew's moves were intentional, beginning with identifying the need to establish an instructional identity for his school. While teaching and learning were the focus of his goal, he knew that establishing relationships was a prerequisite. Not only were relationships established by getting to know one another, but Matthew's time was also spent where teachers needed to see him, and he allocated time where

teachers needed it most. As a result, change was happening by taking the time to celebrate and provide thoughtful feedback, even when it meant engaging in challenging conversations.

This change is possible in part due to the district leadership's willingness to find a principal who was the right fit for the school. Andrea and Colton knew that welcoming Matthew would complement the needs of the district leadership team; he would also provide the type of leadership that was longed for by the teachers in Matthew's school. Consequently, the district leadership team matched the talent to the school's needs, and Matthew is doing the same as he develops his staff and welcomes new teachers to the culture he has helped shape.

Contributions to Research

Understanding the complex role of the principalship continues to challenge district and school leaders despite years of research. Further contributions to the discourse and the existing body of knowledge that offers a new perspective and insight are necessary. This study offers a conceptual framework that maximizes the principal's ability to grow a learning culture through building the collective capacity, collective efficacy, and reciprocal accountability of individuals and teams within a school. This research offers the less examined perspective of the principal's role and function across the system rather than their role and identity exclusive to the school they lead. In addition, this research can be helpful to school and district leaders alike as they work to construct highly-effective leadership teams that include principals who meet the unique needs of a school. This study identifies six key findings that are both actionable and adaptable to a school leader's unique skills and attributes.

Key Research Findings

1. Differentiated levels of autonomy build individual and collective capacity within an organization.
2. Collaborative decision-making is valued.
3. Leaders spend time where there is the greatest need.
4. School districts pivot around principal leadership.
5. Understanding leadership automaticity can inform how we define successful principals.
6. Conscious empathy empowers efficacy.

Principals serve as models of continuous commitment to professional learning for their staff. Fullan (2014) suggests that a common attribute shared among good leaders is their willingness to change when evidence suggests that they do so. This research sparks the need for some change as a gap persists between the professional learning that leaders receive and the professional learning experiences they are expected to provide. While school systems are no stranger to change efforts, measuring the success of any change across the organization ultimately relies on the same performance measure, student learning.

As principals work to create conditions in schools that will influence capacity, efficacy, and accountability, the same must be done across the system. However, principals, curriculum leaders, assistant superintendents, and superintendents all contribute to what happens in the classroom. As leaders across the system are further removed from the students, their influence in classroom practice increases in power while there is less accountability for their professional learning systemically. This systems view of the principalship raises more questions about the larger learning culture and how that inspires the work of the principal in a school.

Discussion of Unanticipated Findings

In 2018 I attended a conference that focused on the research and contributions of Marzano and his research team titled the *High-Reliability Schools Summit*. Bob Marzano was the keynote speaker on day one of the conference, and he made a comment that resonates with me daily. His comments suggested that we know all we are ever going to know in our lifetime about effective teaching and how we learn. Now that we know all of the parts, we need to spend time putting them together in a way that works best. Marzano operationalizes this idea in *High-Reliability Schools* by identifying leading indicators known to be attributes of success across domains, including safe and collaborative learning environments, highly effective teachers in every classroom, and a challenging curriculum. School leaders are tasked with developing a series of lagging indicators to demonstrate competency in each area. The leading indicators are non-negotiable as they indicate a destination, while the lagging indicators include items from the vast menu of what we know to be highly effective instructional practices.

Marzano's comments have influenced my thinking significantly. There are, however, two key findings from this study that challenge this idea that we know all we are ever going to know. The first relates to leadership automaticity. I drew on Marzano's own situational awareness research to explain this finding. Throughout my interviews

and data analysis, I noticed that responses not only demonstrated the situational awareness of leaders but something even more natural, seemingly automatic in most cases. There was definite skill in situational awareness, but there is an additional wonder of what experience, instincts, judgment, and sound logic play in having strength in this area. Pairing situational awareness with the psychological research of thin slicing is causing me to question how we might better understand the decision-making process of school and district leaders. Additionally, how should district leaders factor previous experience as a prerequisite to obtaining a principal role?

The idea of conscious empathy also emerged as a somewhat unanticipated finding as it does not fit neatly in any leadership domain. I wrestled with language a great deal asking myself how empathy is different from conscious empathy. My research suggests that empathy is considered a positive leadership attribute from my review of the literature to interview responses. There appears to be a difference between being an empath and responding empathetically. An authentically empathetic person responds with empathy naturally and consistently. Responding empathetically can also be a leadership move. For example, the theme of differentiated leadership appeared throughout the research. Leaders give their time and attention to where it is needed most. When they give their time, they certainly maintain who they are, but they shape the path differently to maximize the strengths of those they are supporting.

A final wonder I have related to unanticipated findings can be oversimplified when considering the idea of fit. Having interviewed and hired many teachers and leaders throughout my career, I can attest that fit matters and often is why successful candidates earn a position. When speaking with unsuccessful candidates in the process, I often talk to them about fit. Unfortunately, the rationale often seems unscientific and unhelpful to those searching for a job. However, in the case of this study, the principal was definitely the right fit for the school at the time. That does not mean another candidate would not have experienced success; it just suggests that the leadership team made a successful decision based on their information.

Implications for Practice

This study offers a conceptual framework that emphasizes the importance of human capital in building and sustaining professional learning cultures. While the principalship is often examined in educational research, studies often look exclusively at the principal within a school. This study contributes to the current empirical research by viewing the principal role within a larger system. The results of

this study have important implications in creating conditions for principals' success. First, district leaders must support principals in their own professional learning journeys as they work to grow cultures of professional learning for others. Second, this research suggests principals can create optimal conditions for their staff through building collective capacity, fostering collective efficacy, and modeling reciprocal accountability. Third, beyond being skilled as an instructional and transformative leader, the principal must be the right fit for the school. This implication is most significant as it challenges the notion that principals must be skilled in all areas. Instead, this finding suggests that schools have specific needs, and a person with a particular non-standardized skill set might be the best person for that school.

Direction for Future Research

This research addresses principal leadership moves that build and sustain professional learning cultures from a systemic view. Beyond the principals' actions, various stakeholders within a learning organization play a role in allowing principals to shape the path for their school. More studies are needed to understand how to determine the right fit when selecting a principal to lead a school. While skills and attributes of successful leaders are well defined, the current learning culture of a school suggests context and conditions that may benefit from a very specific skill set. Therefore, the specific needs of a school will likely transcend a generic job description and mass-produced list of desired skills. While working with members of a school community to identify what is needed in the next principal has become procedural in principal searches, those lists of desires usually look the same from school to school. However, schools have unique needs based on their culture. How principals are selected and supported on the job is the foundation of what the learning culture can become.

Whether examining pre-service learning or in-service support of principals, it is clear that continuous learning is important. Specifically, studies are needed that examine how creating culture-specific job descriptions may assist school districts in finding school leaders who can manage change successfully for a school. Experience cannot be manufactured, personalities cannot magically change, and resources will always be finite to a given school district.

The principal participating in this study appeared to be the right fit as significant positive changes to the learning culture were. However, it would be beneficial to conduct this study in other districts to examine if the conceptual framework holds

up in a district where the infrastructure of support is not apparent, and the fit is questionable even when the leader's skill set is exceptional.

Conclusion

Heath and Heath (2010) distill change leadership and operationalize the change process by engaging distinct leadership actions. Utilizing an analogy first presented by psychologist Jonathan Haidt, the authors suggest leaders must first control the rider or the rational mind by clearly articulating a plan and a destination. At the same time, leaders must consider and appeal to the elephant or the emotions of individuals to manage and show care for the feelings of others during the process. Finally, leaders must shape the path by removing the environmental interference so individuals can focus on what is most important and reach the clearly articulated destination.

Haidt's analogy overlaid with the conceptual framework presented in this research reveals a parallel relationship. For principals to build professional learning cultures, they must first build a team with a high level of capacity to do the work. Then, the leader must create conditions where teachers are motivated to do the work well because they know and believe they can. As principals support teachers in accomplishing their goals in the classroom, they are communicating, providing feedback, and collaborating while holding each other mutually accountable. Principals are shaping the path.

This research aimed to support the hypothesis that principals make a profound difference in the learning culture of a school. As a principal invests in the people within an organization, they develop, inspire and model to build capacity, efficacy, and accountability within their schools. Moreover, when reasonable autonomy is granted to principals by district leaders, they have the freedom and choice to make decisions that meet the specific needs of their school, all while remaining connected to district goals. Therefore, I posit that the theoretical framework presented in this research will help principals develop plans capable of shifting the learning culture of the schools they lead.

The importance of principalship has been reinforced throughout this research; the notion that the role is complex has been exhausted. The systemic approach to this study positions the principal differently than other research. Typically, the principal is viewed as the head of the school with an eye on accountability for learning. This study takes a step back and examines the principals' role in the school and within the system. This view places the principal at the heart of the organization rather than

the head. Figure1__ displayed the principal along a hierarchical ladder as one might typically expect between central office administration and leaders within their own building. Upon reflection and analysis of my research findings, I argue that principals are more of a cog at the center than a rung on a ladder.

My conceptual framework focuses on the dynamic relationship between collective capacity, collective efficacy, and reciprocal accountability. This framework is about human capital and people. The framework assumes leaders have different skills as instructional and transformative leaders. While this framework is transferrable to any school or district leader, their leadership assets as instructional and transformational leaders influence how the framework is operationalized. How leaders use their assets to develop, inspire, and model for others can shape the path for those they hope to lead.

Appendix A

Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

By signing this letter of informed consent, you agree to participate in a research study, *Professional Learning Cultures at Work: How Principals Serve as Catalysts for Learning*. As a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, research from this study will culminate in my doctoral dissertation.

Following an extensive review of literature, I am working to complete a study to gain an understanding of the principal's role in establishing a professional learning culture. Educational research offers great insight into leadership styles, and complexities surrounding the role of school principals. However, research often looks at the principal within a school and not necessarily within the larger school system. Your participation in this study would be of great help to me both personally and professionally.

Through my research, I am exploring how principals align their planning, actions, and decisions within a system to establish cultures of professional Learning. Specifically, I am examining four areas: (1) What expectations are shared between district leaders, building leaders, and teachers, and what role do those expectations play in achieving learning goals?, (2) How do individuals within the school work together to achieve individual and shared learning goals?, (3) How do members of a school community perceive their contributions to developing and maintaining a learning culture?, and (4) What structures are available for informal and formal feedback regarding instructional practices?.
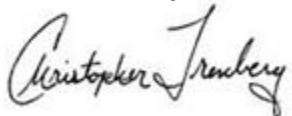
Participation in this research requires one interview (not to exceed 90 minutes) with me through a recorded Zoom video conference. Recordings will be permanently deleted following the successful completion of this study unless you grant permission for those recordings to be used for future research and/or presentations. Following the analysis of interview data, you may be asked to participate in a follow-up conversation that will not exceed 30 minutes. The total duration of this study from start to finish will not exceed 180 days. You are one of seven participants invited for this study because of your position, the demographic population you lead, years of experience as an educator, and the belief that you have much to contribute to the discourse on this topic.

While the information you share by participating reflects your professional experience over time, you will remain anonymous in all reporting and analysis of data throughout the study. This study will maintain confidentiality and not provide geographic specificity beyond referencing a Connecticut school system and the associated demographics of the system. Should you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time without penalty. Your participation is voluntary, and your participation provides no direct benefits.

If you choose to withdraw participation, please contact me directly using the contact information found at the top of this page. If at any point during the study you have questions or concerns that I am unable to answer, please contact Sharon Rallis, Chairperson of my Dissertation Committee at sharonr@educ.umass.edu, (413) 545-6985, or Jennifer Randall, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at jrandall@educ.umass.edu, (413) 545-7125. If you feel you need no further information, please complete the information on the following page indicating your decision to allow me to schedule an interview in order to complete the research associated with this project.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by The University of Massachusetts IRB, a committee who is tasked with making sure research participants are protected from harm. The Human Research Protection Office at UMass Amherst can be contacted at (413) 545-3428.

Sincerely,

Christopher Trenbery

Appendix B

Participant Statement of Voluntary Consent

When signing this form, I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I

use. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I have been informed that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me."

_____I agree that segments of the recordings made of my participation in this research may be used for conference presentations, as well as education and training of future researchers/practitioners.

_____I agree to have my recordings archived for future research in the field of (*insert area/field of research for which the recordings will be used).*

_____I do not agree to allow segments of recordings of my participation in this research to be used for conference presentations or education and training purposes.

_____

Participant Signature: Print Name: Date:

By signing below I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.
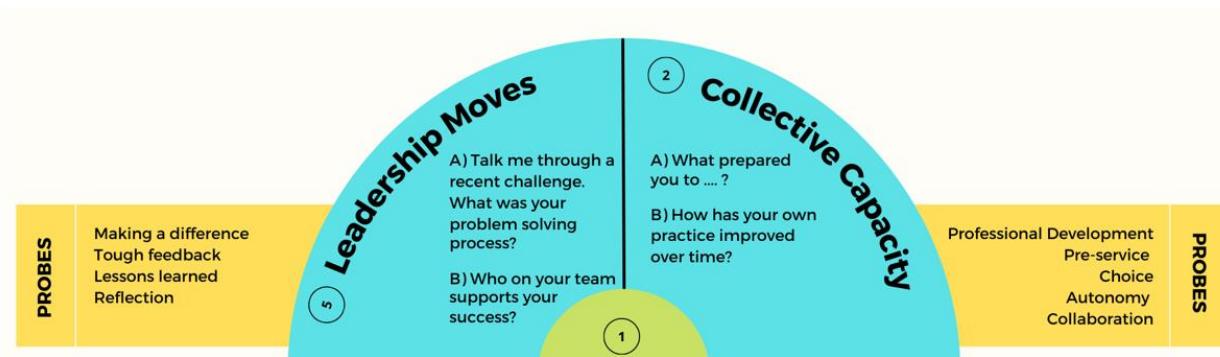
_____

Signature of Person   Print Name: Date:

Appendix C

CITI PROGRAM

This is to certify that:

Christopher Tranberg

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Completion Date	29-Nov-2020
Expiration Date	28-Nov-2025
Record ID	38173068

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Research
(Curriculum Group)
Group 2 Social and Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Massachusetts Amherst

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w563ef510-664c-4130-b0f8-e3439cec4fd6-38173068

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Leadership Moves

A) Talk me through a recent challenge. What was your problem solving process?

B) Who on your team supports your success?

PROBES

Making a difference
Tough feedback
Lessons learned
Reflection

Collective Capacity (2)

A) What prepared you to .... ?

B) How has your own practice improved over time?

Professional Development
Pre-service
Choice
Autonomy
Collaboration

PROBES

(1) Initial Inventory

Appendix E

Participant Interview Schedule

Principal   January 7, 2021   1:30 p.m.

Curriculum Director   January 22, 2021   8:00 a.m.

Curriculum Specialist   January 22, 2021   3:00 p.m.

Teacher   January 26, 2021   9:45 a.m.

Assistant Superintendent   March 10, 2021   3:00 p.m.

| Superintendent | March 23, 2021 | 9:30 a.m. |
| Principal (follow up) | April 13, 2021 | 8:00 a.m. |

Appendix F

Coding

Collective Capacity

A. Collaboration	B. Structure	C. Purpose
D. Flexible	E. Success Criteria	F. Identity
G. Contribute	H. Autonomy	I. Curriculum
J. Team		

Reciprocal Accountability

K. Trust	L. Conditions	M. Time

N. Organization	O. Equity	P. Priorities
Q. Visibility	R. Feedback	S. Evaluation
T. Differentiation	U. Leadership	V. Availability
W. Approachability		

<u>Collective Efficacy</u>

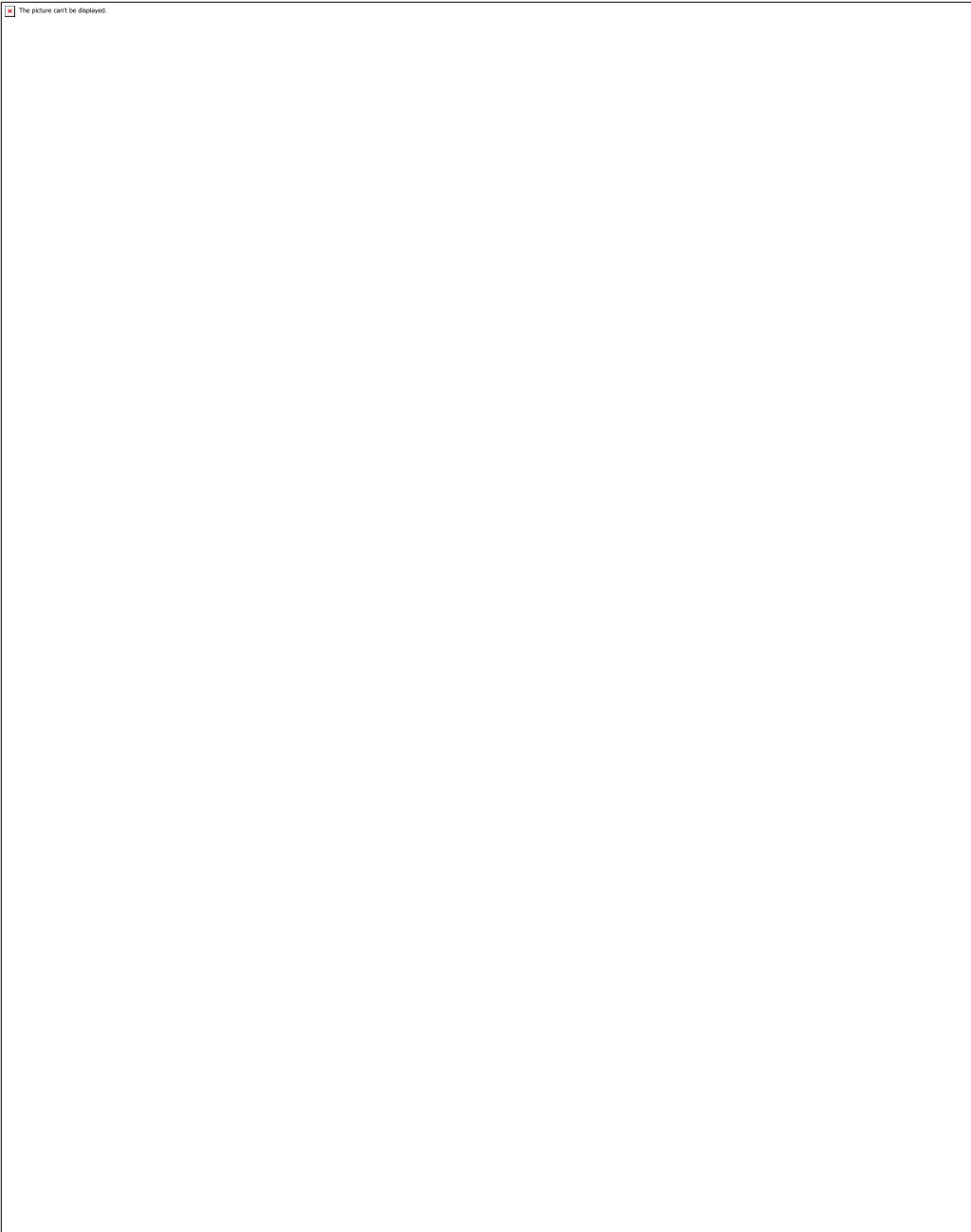| X. Empowerment | Y. Investment | Z. Listening |
| AA. Confidence | BB. Positivity | CC. Responsibility |
| DD. Connection | EE. Restoration | FF. Capability |

Appendix G

Participant Inventory

1. E-mail

2. Name

3. How many years have you been an educator?

4. What areas of certification or professional endorsements have you earned in education?

5. What positions have you held in education, and how long did you serve in each?

6. Share three words you would use to describe the 2020-2021 school year so far.

7. Share three words your colleagues would use to describe you?

8. Provide a specific instance when someone offered you feedback that shaped you professionally or personally.

9. What is the role of the primary person you expect to provide you with professional feedback?

10. How many people make up your collaborative team at work? What are their roles?

11.   Briefly describe your role in planning professional development for those you supervise.

12.   Briefly describe your process in seeking professional development for yourself. What factors contribute to your decision?

Appendix H

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