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Principals as Instructional Leaders as Opposed to School Managers

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Principals as Instructional Leaders as Opposed to School Managers

by

Lolita A. Rockette

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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February 2017

Abstract

In the Denver metropolitan area, many elementary school principals have been focused more on management than on instructional leadership issues, even though school administrators have been charged with overseeing academic achievement based on state and federal standards. According to research, participating in these 2 disconnected roles hinders principals' ability to achieve the academic and social success of their students. Guided by Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Hallinger's distributed leadership theories, this qualitative study explored factors that influenced 6 principals' adoption of the instructional leadership role to learn how principals might shift from managing the school to becoming its instructional leader. The selection criteria for the participants were that each principal was based in a linguistically and culturally diverse, low-income community and led successfully as noted in the School Performance Framework. Data from individual interviews and a focus group were triangulated with observational data (3 observations of participants in their work role at their individual school sites) and researcher field notes. Data analysis used open coding, from which 3 core themes emerged: voice, focus, and alignment of resources. Based on these findings, the proposed project, presented as a position paper, recommends the development of a district-level policy directed toward the building of a school-site infrastructure that supports elementary principals in the role of instructional leader. The implications for positive social change at the local level include providing recommendations that might enable administrators as the instructional leader to develop and oversee an infrastructure conducive to the academic and social success of the students they serve, thus increasing the number of successful schools throughout the district study site.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Many elementary school principals, particularly in highly impacted schools in the

Denver metropolitan area, are focused more on management than on instructional

leadership issues. School principals have more recently become inundated with

overseeing academic achievement based on state and federal standards as required in the

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2002 (O'Donnell & White, 2005). As a

result, for principals to assume the role of an instructional leader as opposed to that of a

managerial role, time spent on academic matters may need to take precedence (Catano &

Stronge, 2006; Provost, Boscardin, & Wells, 2010; Sahin, 2011). Walker (2009) pointed

out that managerial duties can consist of innumerable and diverse tasks beyond extensive

office work, such as supervision and discipline of both the students and the staff,

supervision of maintenance facilities, meetings with parents, and fund-raising activities.

However, Yavuz and Bas (2010) stated, "School principals should have basic

responsibility for improving education programs and planning, evaluating knowledge and

behavior that are required at school, and propounding the aims of the school" (p. 92).

Walker stated that the two very disconnected roles, the role of instructional leader and the

role of manager, could be responsible for extending principals' work week up to 80

hours.

Indeed, principals fulfill multiple roles, instructional and managerial. However, as

stated in the NCLB legislation of 2002, "Their primary responsibility…is to facilitate

effective teaching and learning, with the overall mission of enhancing student

achievement" (O'Donnell & White, 2005, p. 56). With this in mind, in this qualitative study, I explored how principals can shift from managing the school to becoming the instructional leader of it and can elicit the support that will inspire change.

Definition of the Problem and Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

One disgruntled principal of a school in the district study site, while looking over the number of students in her office for disciplinary issues, shared her concerns: "I thought I was hired for my instructional leadership skills; I feel as if I am being punked." She went on to explain that most of her day is spent supervising students during morning, noon, and afternoon recess, which generally takes 2 hours per day, and investigating student conflicts. Walker (2009) stated that "successful schools continue to suggest the relationship between strong school instructional leaders and higher student achievement" (p. 213). Conversely, Johnson (2008) found that 75% of principals surveyed would like to spend more of their time "working on the substance of teaching...curriculum, teaching techniques, mentoring, and professional development" (p. 75). In addition, Johnson stated that managerial tasks, including daily emergencies, took up much of the principals' time that could be better directed to academic issues. As educators are challenged, both locally and nationally, by mandates of the NCLB legislation to improve student academic achievement (Johnson, 2008), along with the results of researchers' studies that report principals' desire to have more time to devote to the instructional leadership role, it is crucial that principals receive the support necessary to fulfill the duties of being the school's instructional leader (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Walker, 2009).

The instructional superintendent at the district study site stated that the district-level administration regularly assesses its approaches to ensure that principals can participate in the important role of evaluating and supporting teachers in their schools. Observation and feedback provided by school principals continues to be an important aspect of teaching and learning in the district. The district study site adopted a new evaluation tool requiring training for principals based on the framework of valuable teaching and meaningful feedback. The newly adopted tool requires principals to provide teachers with feedback in areas of instructional practices for strength and growth opportunities. Based on the resources adopted by the district, the evaluation tool is providing opportunities for both administrators and teachers to develop their crafts as educators, particularly as it relates to student academic achievement.

However, elementary principals, particularly those in highly impacted schools, can become inundated with the responsibilities of managerial duties. Salient examples include student supervision, both student and staff disciplinary concerns, and oversight of maintenance of the interior and exterior structures on the school site (Provost et al., 2010). Walker (2009) stated, "Skeptics increasingly question if the principal's job is realistic and reasonable, with its new emphasis on instructional leadership and its multiple managerial responsibilities and conflicting time demands" (p. 213).

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Research conducted by Catano and Stronge (2006), Provost et al. (2010), Sahin (2011), and Yavuz and Bas (2010) confirmed that a quality school is characterized by the leadership of its principal in creating and maintaining an environment conducive to

instructional excellence. Principals are considered competent leaders if they are perceived by the teachers and the community as having a quality school, according to Harchar (1993) and McCurdy (1983) in their grounded theory studies. Similarly, Johnson (2008) shared that failing schools were turned around with principals who provided direction and drove positive change by means of exhibiting behaviors of an instructional leader. Johnson also affirmed that most principals saw instructional leadership as their key mission. Fortunately, in some cases, principals can focus on instructional leadership; whereas unfortunately, others have a hard time fitting instructional leadership into a busy day, due to managerial time-consuming duties (Johnson, 2008).

Mitgang (2010) stated that for principals to execute the role of instructional leader, they need the support of their communities and districts. Mitgang claimed that receiving support from the school-site communities and districts is one of the most serious hurdles facing principals. In the study, Mitgang reported that school districts must support the principals by developing and organizing a school in which the educational leader, commonly known as the principal, could flourish with this goal in mind. For principals to prioritize their practices as instructional leaders, Mitgang further stated they will need to receive quality training to become successful as the school leader, particularly as it relates to instructional change. In support of the instructional leadership role, both district and school-site educators must clearly understand what the role entails. With this in mind, this qualitative study explored principals' perspectives of their shift from managing the school to becoming its instructional leader and how they were eliciting the support of their stakeholders to support the instructional leadership role.

Definitions

District administrators: District-level administrators oversee all the schools within a particular school district or area. They direct the operations and activities in their particular subject area within their district. Their responsibility is to supervise coordinators and curriculum developers to insure that improved student achievement is occurring at each school (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010–2011).

Instructional leadership: Instructional leadership has been defined as setting clear goals, managing curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, allocating resources, and evaluating teachers regularly to promote student learning and growth. Quality of instruction is the top priority for the instructional principal. Instructional leadership is committed to the core business of teaching, learning, and knowledge, with staff members meeting on a regular basis to discuss how to do their jobs better and ultimately help students learn more effectively (Concordia University-Portland, 2013).

Leadership: Leadership, as defined by Stein (2003), is:

the ability to (a) create the environment where all members of a team or organization understand the ultimate work goal, (b) recognize the unique and critical contributions they each make toward accomplishing that goal, and (c) believe they have a support system that will do all possible to help each accomplish that goal. (para. 2)

Principals: Principals have been described as "educational administrators who manage elementary, middle, and secondary schools….They set the academic tone and work actively with teachers to develop and maintain high curriculum standards, formulate

mission statements, and establish performance goals and objectives" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010–2011, p. 2).

Stakeholder: In education, a stakeholder refers to anyone who has a *stake* in "the welfare and success of a school and its students, including administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councilors, and state representatives" ("Stakeholder," 2014, para. 1). Such individuals manifest "personal, professional, civic, or financial interest or concern" ("Stakeholder," 2014, para. 1).

Significance of the Problem

Based on recent research, the role of the elementary principal as an instructional leader with regards to improvement of educational programming and planning, evaluation of knowledge and behavior, and student academic achievement is becoming increasingly imperative as it relates to teaching and learning (Graczewski, Knudson, & Holtzman, 2009; Yavuz & Bas, 2010). However, recent research has also shown that principals are challenged by the managerial role; for example, staff and student disciplinary issues and maintenance of the interior and exterior of the school buildings may not be affording the time needed to attend to the instructional leadership role (Chenoweth, 2010; Johnson, 2008). Principals working in challenging schools, which often means those with demographics of high-minority students living in high-poverty areas, need to embrace the role of instructional leadership in order to oversee effective instruction and student engagement by focusing on priorities that are essential for school success.

The daily managerial issues principals are engrossed in seem to decrease and have a negative impact on time better spent on the instructional leadership role, particularly in high-poverty, high-minority schools (Chenoweth, 2010; Walker, 2009). Based on their study findings, Yavuz and Bas (2010) suggested salient components that should exist within school organizations for principals to be able to function in the role of instructional leader: (a) The right conditions in schools should be put in place that enable principals to demonstrate behavior conductive to effective instructional leadership, and (b) in-service training opportunities should be available so principals can become skilled in effective instructional leadership in regard to both procedures and techniques as well as theoretical considerations. In addition, research concerning the principal as an instructional leader should be understood by the school community stakeholders in order to support principals in effectively implementing this role and minimizing the managerial duties of the principals (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Dowell, Bickmore, & Hoewing, 2012).

Although both roles are important to the everyday functioning of the school, researchers have articulated that principals desire to spend more time on instructional leadership roles (Bush, 2009; Walker, 2009). One cause for the principals' desire to spend more time on the instructional leadership role is the accountability for student academic achievement (Dowell et al., 2012; Grigsby, Shumacher, Decman, & Simieou, 2010). Provost et al. (2010) stated that in regard to student success, although educational researchers continue to view the relationship between student achievement and teacher quality as a major focus, increasing attention is being given to the importance of instructional leadership in the equation.

Current researchers, such as Dowell et al. (2012) and Grigsby et al. (2010), have suggested that the instructional leadership role performed by the principal contributes to the success of student academic achievement and school improvement. Provost et al. (2010) also confirmed that the traditional roles of the school principal related to managerial and disciplinary tasks have been expanded by expectations that the principal is considered the one who provides instructional leadership as well as facilitates rapport between home and school. Anthes (2002) pointed out that "the newly reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) both reflects and reinforces a major shift in thinking about the roles and responsibilities of school board members, district superintendents and principals" (p. 3). With this shift in thinking regarding the significance of the principal's role of instructional leadership, along with recent studies articulating the support that the instructional leader's role lends to teaching and learning, the managerial duties may need to be minimized, particularly as it relates to student academic achievement, validating the significance of this study's research question.

Highlighting some examples of the extent of the problem explored in this research study, Provost et al. (2010) pointed to Catano and Stronge's observation that national and state expectations for how principals should behave may not coincide with those of school stakeholders, which may result in "a significant amount of role conflict and role overload" (p. 533). Munoz and Barber (2011) also stated assistant principals are witnessing disciplinarian issues, distracting so much time away from their desire to work as an instructional leader that it has impacted their desire to become a principal. On the other hand, Chenoweth (2010) shared the example of a principal's outlook related to

focusing on the instructional leadership role: Addressing managerial issues, such as a "lunchroom crisis or seeing that the ceiling got fixed 'was someone else's job'; every problem fell under the purview of a staff member" (p. 17) who could solve the problem, thus allowing the principal to focus on student achievement.

Guiding Research Question

It is becoming increasingly evident that the role of an elementary principal must be that of an instructional leader; subsequently, the managerial duties of the principal may need to be minimized so that time can be devoted to the principal's role as an effective instructional leader (Graczewski et al., 2009; Seid, 2010; Yavuz & Bas, 2010). In addition, research concerning the principal in the role of instructional leader should be understood by members of the school community in order to gain their support (Provost et al., 2010). The one overarching research question that guided this case study was: What factors influence the adoption of the instructional leadership role by elementary principals?

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Principals are moving to the forefront of educational reform in the role of instructional leadership, both nationally and globally (Provost et al., 2010). The several reasons triggering this movement include the positive influences the role has on instructional practices and student academic improvement. In this study, the conceptual framework regarding the instructional leadership role included Bandura's construct of self-efficacy, which is "grounded in social cognition theory… [consisting of] personal

self-efficacy and outcome expectancy" (Bandura as cited in Sindhvad, 2009, p. 19), as well as Hallinger's (1993) distributed cognition and activity theories, which address how cognition is distributed based on the physical environment and socially through collaborative actions. More specifically, I explored principals' self-efficacy in this study based on Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory, which states that without a sense of professional or personal self-efficacy, an individual cannot effectively execute his or her job to the fullest potential. People manifest self-efficacy through a strong belief in their own capabilities to organize information and implement a plan to effectively manage a particular situation; and because it is not particularly an inherent characteristic, personal and professional self-efficacy could evolve as individuals experience the world and develop judgments about their capabilities (Bandura, 1982).

In addition to infusing distributed theory into the conceptual framework of this study, I focused on leadership practice instead of specific leadership roles: practices that transpire when the person in an authoritative position interacts with another or others in a subordinate position (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). I also addressed how the principal-agent problem could arise based on social context: a situation where "the principal (e.g., central and division official, school principal) is interested in particular outcomes (such as good quality education), but has to rely on agents (e.g., teachers) to obtain these outcomes (Chapman, 2008)" (Sindhvad, 2009, p. 3). The principal-agent problem becomes a possibility whenever principals delegate a task or service to another (the agent) but cannot fully monitor the results (Sindhvad, 2009).

Elementary Principals' Sense of Self-Efficacy: Mastering the Instructional

Leadership Role

Based on Sindhvad's (2009) study, principals gain mastery of the instructional leadership role through time and practice. Discernment of the principal role as it relates to the overall academic success of the students continues to be researched from the perspective of essential skills principals require (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013; Hallinger & Lee, 2014). Therefore, mastering the skills associated with the instructional leadership role may be connected to the ways in which principals feel equipped to employ what current researchers are now calling the principal's contemporary leadership role (Bush, 2009).

According to social psychologist, Bandura (1982), people manifest self-efficacy through a strong belief in their own capabilities to organize information and implement a plan to effectively manage a particular situation consisting of individuals' attitudes, abilities, and cognitive resources. With the fundamental goal of increasing student achievement, enacted by the NCLB legislation of 2002, in conjunction with the principal's central responsibility of promoting effective teaching and learning, principals' abilities related to "defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning climate" (Hallinger, 2005, p. 4) are crucial. Sindhvad (2009) shared that discerning self-efficacy in school principals has the potential for shedding light on whether they have both the confidence to provide the instructional supports necessary for improving teacher performance as well as the confidence as to whether those supports will actually lead to such improvement and, in turn, student

academic achievement. In addition, Luthans and Peterson (2002) indicated that the

principals' perceived sense of self correlated with the performance abilities of their

subordinates, commitment to the tasks, and engagement with their work in overcoming

obstacles to change. Basically, self-efficacy in leaders has been shown to impact their

team's performance and attitude (Paglis & Green, 2002; Watson, Chemers, & Preiser,

2001).

As mentioned earlier, Bandura's (1982) social theory also states that self-efficacy

is not solely an inherent characteristic but also one that is acquired. In Sindhvad's (2009)

study, principals shared that time working on the instructional leadership role as well as

successfully completing a task increased their belief in their ability to conquer that task.

Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) concurred that time devoted to the instructional leadership

role developed a higher quality of human relationships among the staff whom the

principals supervised at their school sites. The principals articulated that their level of

control needed to be clearly established to provide instructional support in order to

implement effective instructional leadership at the school site (Sindhvad, 2009).

Sindhvad also stated that this level of control must be connected to distributed leadership

"in order to ensure all vested stakeholders provide necessary support, [concluding that]

such a mandate would strengthen principals' perceived capacity in providing instructional

support" (p. 98). In effect, leaders' efficacy beliefs determined how they "evaluated new

events and opportunities and influenced their willingness to implement new programs,

procedures, and practices in their schools" (Sindhvad, 2009, p. 33). Clearly, both

Sindhvad and Wahlstrom and Louis have provided significant evidence in support of this

study's research topic regarding the importance of principals being instructional leaders as opposed to school managers.

Because the principal's role has been reformulated under a decentralized educational system, that is, school-based management, which also embodies the role of instructional leadership, collaboration among stakeholders plays a critical role in meeting the goal of student academic success and school improvement (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001, 2004). Camburn, Spillane, and Sebastian (2010) found that "substantial participant contact time and strategic conferencing achieved strong cooperation and yielded high response rates" (p. 708) in regards to principal, teachers, and district-level collaboration. These findings contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which principals divide their time among various leadership tasks.

Although most principals would agree that "instructional leadership is critical in the realization of effective schools, it is seldom prioritized… [and] only one-tenth of the principal's time" (Stronge, 1988, pp. 32-33) is focused on the instructional leadership role. Reasons for placing less emphasis on the instructional leadership role include "lack of in-depth training, lack of time, increased paperwork, and the community's perception of the principal's role as that of a manager" (Flath, 1989, p. 47). Grissom and Loeb (2011) communicated that school context also influences principals' practice, adding that principals may face greater demands in challenging school environments.

In a 3-year structured observation study, approximately 10 years after Stronge's (1988) study, principals were cited as still spending "more time on management, personnel issues, and student affairs and less time on instructional leadership than

advocated by leadership scholars and professional standards" (Camburn et al., 2010, pp. 707–708). In contrast, Sindhvad (2009) showed that 25% of the principals in the Philippines reported spending over 50% of their time on instructional leadership roles, such as mentoring teachers, observing classes, and following up on those classroom observations. These principals concluded that the instructional leadership role has made a significant impact on their ability to influence student achievement.

A principal's day is challenged by standards, accountability, and many other forces impacting it. Solving many students and adults' disciplinary concerns, maintaining safe schools, stretching limited budgets, and countless competing claims on the principal's time all serve to negatively affect instructional leadership, supervision, and professional development (Leonard, 2010). Principals described a typical work day as filled with a series of reports, phone calls, student discipline problems, parent visits, personnel problems, and requests that surface in handling the management-related tasks, in addition to leading the school's instructional program (Camburn et al., 2010).

The available instruction-engaged time poses a significant dilemma for conscientious principals, according to Leonard (2010). This researcher explained that "the twenty-first century school leaders are finding it difficult to keep up with the pressures brought to bear on their profession" (p. 1). When principals were asked in Leonard's study about the number one challenge they faced in the principalship, they responded that it was not the mandate of the NCLB policy, student discipline, campus security, or paperwork. Principals responded they simply did not have time to be the instructional leader they knew they could and should be (Leonard, 2010). Leonard also

revealed that principals are asking for support and for more effective resources that can be used to redirect their time and energy. Sindhvad (2009) pointed out that "if principals spend a limited amount of time on instructional leadership tasks, then the opportunity for regular and direct practice is limited" (p. 82). The evidence provided by these researchers emphasizes the need to better understand how to effect a shift in the balance between the principal's role as instructional leader versus that of manager.

Self-efficacy and its potential to reveal insights into principals' gaining mastery of the instructional leadership role could be the cornerstone for how school principals judge their capacity in providing instructional supports at their school site. The more principals are able to engage in tasks related to supervision and professional development, the more they will gain the experience needed to impact the academic achievement of students and school improvement (Camburn et al., 2010; Graczewski et al., 2009; Provost et al., 2010). Bandura's social theory maintains that "the most influential source of efficacy information is derived from mastery experiences and performance attainments because they are based on authentic experiences" (Sindhvad, 2009, p. 36). Actually performing a task is the most influential form of self-efficacy. How self-efficacy is perceived by the principals is a prerequisite to how they "assess their capacity to perform activities for improving educational quality" (Chapman & Birchfield as cited in Sindhvad, 2009, p. 3).

Education Stakeholders' Perspective of the Instructional Leadership Role: A Principal-Agent Problem

As stated earlier, principals are administrators responsible for their school's academic tone, high curriculum standards, mission statements, and performance goals

and objectives of their schools, working closely with the teachers to accomplish this (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010–2011). Within this definition, instructional leaders place high priority on adult learning, set high expectations for performance, and obtain the community's support for school success (Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, & Sebastian, 2010; Blasé & Blasé, 2000). Distributed theory addresses this concept by focusing on leadership practice instead of specific leadership roles: Leadership practices transpire when the person in an authoritative position interacts with another or others in a subordinate position (Spillane et al., 2004). Because principals are removed from the classroom, "the effects of principal leadership [are] largely indirect. Principals appeared to impact student learning by creating conditions in the school that would have a positive impact on teacher practice and student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996a, 1996b, 1998)" (Hallinger, 2012, p. 10).

Additionally, stakeholders' understanding and orchestration of programs, people, and resources are ways in which principals, as instructional leaders, can effectively advance schools' improvement (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Spillane & Kim, 2012). Shared district and teacher support for principals as instructional leaders has been established through research to have a strong impact on peer relationships and higher student achievement (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Sindhvad (2009) studied over 300 principals' perceived capacity to deliver the role of instructional leader as well as to elicit the support needed from their school community stakeholders to exercise this role. In this study, the principals' perceived support included (a) stakeholders who held vested interest in school improvement, (b) political relationships

between stakeholders to enforce the current model of school-based management, and (c) policy mandates that support principals' providing instructional support. These findings regarding the importance of stakeholders' support have direct relevance to my study's exploration of the factors influencing principals' adoption of the instructional leadership role.

Recent researchers reported that the community's view of the role of principle as manager influences principals' practices; these researchers shared several perspectives from parents, teachers, and principals in regards to perceiving organizational management as being a strong factor in supporting school improvement (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Quinn, 2002; Siens & Ebmeier, 1996). Organizational management skills were defined as managing the school budget, handling personnel matters, accounting for school progress, maintaining the physical plant, and responding to little irritants in organizational life (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). Grissom and Loeb (2011) argued against limiting the principal's focus solely to the monitoring of daily instructional practices and the observation of teachers in the classroom "at the expense of managing key organizational functions, such as budgeting or maintaining campus facilities" (p. 1119). In contrast, Yilmaz (2009) reported that "supervision is an indispensable process for organization effectiveness; being unsupervised causes organizations to remain isolated, disorganized, impenetrable, and unstable" (p. 19). Therefore, Yilmaz added, school administrators' primary role should be that of instructional leadership.

Furthermore, how leaders enact their roles within these new organizational structures and new leadership roles matters to instructional innovation (Barnes et al.,

2010; Spillane et at., 2001). Kelly and Peterson (2007) stated that the daily work of principals is little understood and extremely complex and that the principal's work suggests the need for schools and districts to consider ways to substantially reframe or restructure it to enable principals to accomplish the tasks at hand. In addition, Gray and Lewis (2013) wrote that "recent literature on school leadership expectations is built on accrediting agencies, consortiums, and educational boards; these researchers stated that effective principals are oriented less toward managing things and more interested in leading learning communities" (p. 140).

Rice (as cited in Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013) pointed out that recent findings "do not necessarily contradict the body of research arguing for principals as instructional leaders, but this new evidence does help nuance [*sic*] that argument by broadening the definition of instructional leadership to include organizational management skills" (pp. 5–6). For this purpose, educational stakeholders and the school-site community's perception of the principal's practices as a leader and manager is crucial to the work principals are expected to do (Lasky, 2004). Honig (2012) shared that in some districts, central offices are beginning to shift their priorities regarding school principals from "occasional professional development… [to] ongoing, intensive, job-embedded support…to help them improve classroom instruction" (p. 734). However, Honig also shared that some central office staff, selected to support the principals, may lack understanding of the behaviors associated with instructional leadership that principals need to employ. This insight speaks directly to the complexity involved in the necessary

shift in emphasis, proposed in my research study, of the principal's role from that of manager to instructional leader.

The challenges of instructional leadership are rooted in Sindhvad's (2009) definition of the principal-agent problem, which refers to a situation that may occur whenever principals delegate a task or service to another (the agent) but cannot fully monitor the results. Sindhvad, noting that this conflict affects a large part of the educational reform, stated, "The principal is interested in particular outcomes (such as good quality education) but has to rely on agents (e.g., teachers) to obtain these outcomes (Chapman, 2008)" (p. 3). Johnson and Chrispeels's (2010) study regarding relational and ideological linkages—resource and structural—also addressed this concern by stating that resource and structural linkages needed to be in place to ensure that the instructional focus was cohesive and comprehensive, and that organizational learning would be encouraged at the school site, thus creating a collaboration effort between stakeholders. Johnson and Chrispeels cited Lasky's definition of resource linkages as consisting of "materials, and technological and human capital brought to the system to enhance reform" (p. 750), whereas structural linkages, as defined by Lasky, refer to policies related to reform at the district, state, and federal level. The three community stakeholders in Johnson and Chrispeels's study consisted of the central office, the principal, and the school-site instructional staff. The teachers viewed many central office linkages as limiting their efforts to provide the best instruction possible, although the principals and school leadership team recognized the importance of the district's attempts to improve teaching and learning (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). The two opposing views

about organizational change created dissention regarding the best approach in moving forward.

Chapman and Miric (2005) stated that attention to the principal-agent problem directs more concern toward the educational process that is occurring in the classroom where the actual learning takes place. With this in mind, the importance of integrating relational (particularly communication) linkages became the tool that developed trusting relationships among the aforementioned stakeholders. Johnson and Chrispeels (2010) cited other researchers (e.g., Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Datnow et al., 2006; and Hubbard et al., 2006) in support of their findings that trusting professional relationships throughout the system represent an essential component of any reform efforts. School reform is a muddled and complex process; therefore, "goodwill, cooperation, and willingness to participate positively by all individuals involved are critical to successfully moving reform efforts forward" (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010, p. 766).

Hallinger (1993) described distributed leadership by many names: team leadership, shared leadership, and democratic leadership; and Spillane (2006) cited several researchers as stating that work on schools reveals how the circumstances surrounding leadership impact not only what leaders do but also the effects on followers of what they do. Sindhvad (2009) also shared that the instructional leadership role is influenced by workplace factors, some of which include "teachers' job satisfaction, sense of professionalism,…collegial trust, and opportunities to collaborate" (p. 19). Therefore, circumstances, such as district office support, staff composition, leadership teams, and social committees, all have a direct impact on how leaders lead effectively. A school

could have multiple leaders, making educational stakeholders' collaboration critical in

supporting the principal in the role of instructional leader (Grissom & Loeb, 2011;

Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010).

The school effectiveness movement (U.S. Department of Education, 2008)

provided the incentive for measuring the quality of leadership regarding student

achievement in schools, and research substantiated the fact that there was a clear

correlation between principals as educational leaders and the success of students

(Goddard, Neumerski, Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Successively, beginning when the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report was released, academic

standards and accountability became the topic of focus for elected officials,

administrators, and teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The 1980s and 1990s

witnessed the onset of academic standards and standards-based assessments at the state

and local levels, with federal legislation mandating that all states that were recipients of

federal aid for education implement such standards and assessments at certain grade

levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The NCLB Act of 2002 not only

augmented the grade levels that were to be assessed, but also enhanced accountability

regarding test results (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Consequently, standards-

based education reform was noted for emphasizing the principal's instructional leadership

role and its close correlation with student achievement as the measure of leadership

(Dowell et al., 2012). In the words of Dowell et al. (2012), "instructional leadership has

been operationalized through professional leadership standards" (p. 7) because the years

after 2002 were characterized by increased accountability via federal legislation,

resultantly accentuating instructional leadership roles for principals.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the administrative literature stressed the positive

contribution the principal's instructional leadership role made to student achievement,

school effectiveness, and overall school improvement (Dowell et al., 2012). And

similarly, policy makers and practitioners in Hallinger's (2011) empirical study claimed

that the principal in the position of instructional leader "makes a difference in school

performance" (p. 274). Principals' implementing the role of instructional leader is being

advocated by leadership scholars and driven by professional standards (Camburn et al.,

2010). As stated throughout this section, leadership practices become manifest when the

person in an authoritative position interacts with another or others in a subordinate

position (Spillane et al., 2004). Moreover, both student academic success and school

improvement seem to depend on the educational stakeholders' advocacy of the principal

instructional leadership role and how the support is provided (Camburn et al., 2010).

Instructional Leadership Role in Practice for Elementary Principals

True stories of practices based on the interaction of individuals and context will

surface when leadership is studied in action through distributed practice, thus building

legitimacy for the work principals do as instructional leader (Spillane et al., 2004). The

role of principal has been redefined under a decentralized educational system and school-

based management that embodies the role of instructional leader (Spillane et al., 2001,

2004). In addition, Sindhvad (2009) reported that in a 1986 study by Hallinger and

Murphy, it was found that "socioeconomic status moderates in-school processes, such as

patterns of organization and emphasis on basic skills, as well as principal's exercise of instructional leadership" (p. 25). Despite the fact that school-level conditions, newly established organizational structures, and newly formulated leadership roles are relevant to innovation in the instructional domain, *how* leadership practice is carried out on a daily basis is most critical (Spillane et al., 2004).

Distributed cognitive and activity theories focus on leadership practice instead of specific leadership roles; the focus is on thinking and action in position (Hallinger, 1993). Therefore, leadership activity is the manifestation of interaction between leaders, followers, and situation in regard to the carrying out of designated leadership tasks (Spillane, 2006). From a distributed perspective, "the unit of analysis is shifted from the individual actor or group of actors to the web of leaders, followers, and situation that give activity its form" (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 13). As a result of this shift in perspective, according to Spillane et al. (2004), investigations of practice will encompass far more than the mere listing of strategies used by school leaders in their work. Moreover, these authors suggested that a distributed leadership framework could frame inquiry into leadership activity so that the distributed leadership perspective can move beyond leaders and teachers' account, thus developing an integrative understanding of leadership as a practice.

Spillane et al. (2004) pointed out that "investigating purposeful activity in its 'natural habitat' is essential for the study of human cognition" (p. 9). They added that "an individual's cognition cannot be understood merely as a function of mental capacity, because sense-making is enabled (and constrained) by the situation in which it takes

place" (p. 23), creating understanding of *how* school leaders interpret, present, and

execute their tasks (Hallinger, 1993). Individual and environmental interactions are

linked and become essential in developing the framework for studying principals'

leadership role in practice. Spillane et al. (2004) posited that "the research challenge for

understanding leadership practice is to reconstruct, through observation and interview,

whatever links exist between the macro-functions and the micro-tasks of school

leadership" (p. 17). As the researcher of the current study, I have taken up this challenge

proposed by Spillane et al. by interviewing and observing principals experienced in the

instructional leadership role. The links between the macro functions and micro tasks that

were uncovered in the process suggested factors that influenced the adoption of the

leadership role by these elementary principles, thereby addressing the study's research

question. In light of this evidence, a discussion of the linkage between macro functions

and micro tasks of school leadership is provided below.

Several examples of functions, synthesized and identified as macro school-level

functions in literature studies, have been suggested by Spillane et al. (2004) as follows:

- "Constructing and selling an instructional vision" (p. 16);

- "Developing and managing a school culture conducive to conversations about
  the core technology of instruction by building norms of trust [and]
  collaboration…among staff" (p. 17);

- "Supporting teacher growth and development, both individually and as a
  faculty" (p. 17);

Within this framework, Spillane et al. emphasized that the identification of micro tasks

that are needed for the execution of the macro tasks must also be analyzed. In

explanation, Spillane et al. gave the following two examples: The micro tasks of

providing teachers with opportunities to both work together during the school day and set

aside time for shared planning support the macro function of "building norms of

collaboration" (p. 16); and the micro tasks associated with observing classrooms

frequently, "distinguishing summative and formative evaluation, and establishing

professional relations between the observer and the observed" (p. 17) help achieve the

macro functions of the monitoring of the teachers' instruction and supporting their

growth.

Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) suggested that the cognitive skills of

framing and deciding which tasks take precedence over others differentiate highly skilled

principals from novice principals. However, researchers have also stated that in any

organization, clarity of the core technology—instruction, in the case of schools—can

influence the manager's behavior (Hannaway & Sproul, 1979; Peterson, 1978). A clearer

understanding of instructional practices enables school leaders to supervise teachers more

closely, which reflects back to Spillane et al.'s (2004) statement that it is important to

analyze leadership tasks in depth because it may turn out that tasks that superficially

appeared similar in nature may, upon closer scrutiny, be quite different. Later, Spillane

(2006) added, "Aspects of the situation, including the complexity and uncertainty of the

work performed by the organization, its size, and the complexity of its environment,

influence the organization's structural arrangements and performance (Scott, 1995)" (p.

20). As mentioned earlier, circumstances, such as district office support, staff composition, leadership teams, and social committees, all have a direct influence on how leaders lead effectively.

Seid (2010) worked with the Wallace Foundation, which created a project called the School Administration Manager to learn how principals use their time, and based on this information, develop strategies that enable them to focus more of their attention on instructional leadership matters. Seid reported that the person representing the school administration manager position, placed at the school site, oversaw many of the managerial duties and supported the principal in assuming more of an instructional leadership role, which in turn increased time spent on the instructional leadership role from 32% to 74% within 1 year. Along with having the support of some of the educational stakeholders, by infusing human resources to administer various managerial duties, school principals may also have to adapt their behaviors to the characteristic of each constituent listed.

Contingency theories contend that "the most effective or appropriate organizational structure depends on the nature of the work being undertaken by the organization and the environmental demands the organization has to negotiate" (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 26). Inversely, the distributed theory treatment of situation varies in several respects from that of the contingency theory: "the positioning of the situation vis-a-vis leadership activity, the relationship between situation and leadership, the aspects of the situations that are critical, and aspects of leadership that merit attention" (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 27). The distributed conception of leadership practice is built on four main

ideas: "leadership tasks and functions, task enactment, social distribution of task

enactment, and situational distribution of task in organizations" (Spillane et al., 2004, p.

5), all emphasizing that the investigation of leadership practice—the *how* and *why*—is a

necessary component in understanding leadership in an organizational environment.

Leadership tasks refer to the interdependencies between leadership activities or

practices. Spillane et al. (2004) asserted that the analysis of principals' practice should be

"tied to an understanding of the task structures that, over time, inform and guide their

work" (p. 15). As mentioned earlier, researchers have noted that managerial tasks and

imperatives frequently take precedence in school leaders' work, leaving limited time to

focus on instructional activities (Spillane et al., 2004). Yet, the actions that principals

undertake regarding managerial activities, as well as in the political realm, are often

indirectly related to positive change in some component of school life, and therefore

represent an integral component of leadership, particularly instructional leadership (Lee,

Hallinger, & Walker, 2012). According to Spillane et al. (2004), the distributed

framework examines "how social interaction and situation simultaneously constitute

leadership practice rather than focusing chiefly on social interaction among individuals"

(p. 16). As stated earlier, the macro functions and micro tasks combined may help to

identify and analyze leadership practices that contribute to the success of school

improvement.

Enactment of leadership tasks refers to the way in which leadership tasks are

carried out, which moves beyond the act of merely identifying and analyzing tasks; how

these tasks are carried out may be of special significance in regard to influencing

teachers' performance and behavior (Blasé & Kirby, 2000; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996). Day-to-day practices of school leaders' instructional role are thought to be essential for innovation and their effect on teachers' work (Spillane et al., 2004). The analysis of leadership practices, as stated above, involves understanding how school leaders interpret, present, and execute tasks (Spillane et al., 2001). Therefore, as suggested by Spillane et al. (2004), in regard to executing tasks related to instructional innovation, "school leaders' subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, coupled with their beliefs about teacher learning and change, may influence how they present and carry out these tasks" (p. 19). Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) also established that those principals who are recognized as "experts" are more competent in the regulation of their own problem-solving efforts and show more sensitivity to the demands inherent in the tasks themselves as well as in the surrounding social context.

Social distribution of task enactment, another key concept from distributed theory, is based on tasks being undertaken by a multiple number of formal and informal leaders, which is consistent with scholars who purport that leadership extends beyond persons in formal leadership positions (Gronn, 1983, 2000; Leithwood et al., 1999). According to Spillane et al. (2004), the focus is on how the practice of leadership is:

> distributed among positional and informal leaders as well as their followers….The understanding of how leaders in a school work together, as well as separately, to execute leadership functions and tasks is an important aspect of the social distribution of leadership practice. (p. 20)

These authors continued by stating:

The collective cognitive properties of a group of leaders working together to enact a particular task leads to the evolution of a leadership practice that is potentially more than the sum of each individual's practice [p. 25]….Leaders not only influence followers but are also influenced by them. (p. 19)

Likewise, Spillane et al. explained that teachers have knowledge particular to classroom practice with which they can influence leaders in position; moreover, followers may find subtle or creative ways of resistance or insubordination that influence leadership strategies. From the distributed theory perspective, followers represent a necessary, constituting component of leadership activity (Spillane et al., 2004).

Situational distribution of task enactment refers to how leadership practice is situated; it represents an acknowledgement of the mutuality of people and their environment, according to Spillane et al. (2004). Similar to that of activity cognition theories, the distributed perspective posits that situations are not outside of the realm of leadership activity, but rather represent one of the integral constituting components of it (Spillane et al., 2004). In the words of these scholars, "Situation or context does not simply 'affect' what school leaders do as some sort of independent or interdependent variable(s); it is constitutive of leadership practice" (p. 28). The situation approaches in Spillane et al.'s study are as follows: "[a] the positioning of situation vis-a-vis leadership activity, [b] the relations between situation and leadership, [c] the aspects of the situation that are critical, and [d] the aspects of leadership that merit attention" (p. 27). Situation as the essential and constituting element of leadership practice is particular to organizational structures and language. Because the particulars of the structure will vary, the ways in

which leadership practice is carried out will also vary (Spillane et al., 2004). Spillane et al. also pointed out that organizational structure within the distributed activity and cognition theory greatly influences the broader societal structure, including such components as race, class, and gender; and therefore, "the manner in which these manifest themselves in the interactions among leaders and followers in the execution of the leadership tasks" (p. 21) is of major significance.

To reiterate and bring this section to a close: Distributed cognitive and activity theories focus on leadership practice instead of specific leadership roles; the focus is on thinking and action in position (Hallinger, 1993). These theories are concerned more with leadership activity on a daily basis, reflecting the mutuality of people and situation, than with the broader focus on organizational structure and roles. As stated earlier, the purpose of investigating principals in the current study in regards to their implementation of the instructional leadership role was to identify the true stories of practices based on the interaction of situation, leaders, and followers, thus building legitimacy for the work principals do as instructional leader (Spillane et al., 2004).

Saturation of the Literature

In doing the comprehensive literature review for this study with the intent to reach saturation, I searched the EBSCO data base, using the Walden University Library database and the Google Scholars search engine. I used the following terms relevant to my topic for my search, particularly while using the Boolean Operators: *principals as instructional leaders, principals as managers*, and *instructional leadership*. I used databases that were considered the best avenue for locating scholarly journals (peer

reviewed) in the field of education and within the 5-year time period of my dissertation completion date with Walden University, such as Education Research Complete, ERIC, *SAGE Journals,* and Academic Search Complete. Each database provided not only recent research studies but also historical information regarding the role of elementary principals, leading up to the present. In the review of literature, I presented historical background, frameworks, and theories regarding my topic, which in turn helped me develop my conceptual framework and interview protocol, as well as support the guiding research question: What factors influence the adoption of the instructional leadership role by elementary principals?

Implications

The purpose of this case study was to gather information from principals who had knowledge of the instructional leadership role as well as experience working in highly impacted schools. Each one of the principals was to have demonstrated success regarding school improvement based on student academic achievement, utilizing the instructional leadership role. The results of the analysis of data gathered from individual interviews, a focus group, and observations may have the following implications: (a) inform key stakeholders how principals perceive their role as an instructional leader, (b) inform key stakeholders of the support principals perceive they need to implement the role of an instructional leader, and (c) inform key stakeholders of the tools principals perceive are necessary to help accomplish the instructional leadership role effectively. The overall goal of the study was to help the district site develop a policy that will support the elementary principal's role of an instructional leader based on the school-site's needs.

The support from key stakeholders may enable principals to develop and oversee an infrastructure conducive to academic and social success of the students they serve.

Summary

The inquiry particular to this research is based on the principals' primary responsibility of facilitating effective teaching and learning. The problem identified in this study was that some principals in the Denver metropolitan area are more focused on management than on instructional leadership duties. These are two very disconnected roles and have extended principals' work week up to 80 hours (Walker, 2009). This initiated my guiding research question: What factors influence the adoption of the instructional leadership role by elementary principals? Therefore, based on the aforementioned, the conceptual framework for the literature review consisted of both Bandura's (1982) construct of self-efficacy, which is grounded in social cognition theory that encompasses personal self-efficacy and outcome expectancy, as well as Hallinger's (1993) distributed cognition and activity theories, which address how cognition is distributed based on the physical environment and socially through collaborative actions. Within the literature review, I made several key points that could support or impede the principal's ability to effectively carry out the role of an instructional leader. My purpose for doing this study was to inform key stakeholders what principals perceive as the support needed to fulfill the instructional leadership role.

In Section 2, I will transition into the methodology of my study by describing the intrinsic case study design I used. This particularistic design focused on elementary principals as they related to their role as an instructional leader. Through the qualitative

study process, I conducted individual interviews, a focus group, and several on-site observations. The particulars of the methodology, including how participants were selected and protected, how data were collected and analyzed, and finally, how meaning was made from the data, will be included in the following section. The resultant findings of the study will conclude the methodology section.

Based on these findings and the literature review, in Section 3, I will present the project in the form of a position paper. Beginning with a description of the project, including its goals and rationale, I will provide a literature review relevant to the project. Topics covered will include policy formulation, considerations for policy implementation, professional development and training, and management of change. In the final section, I will share my reflections, particularly in regard to the project's implementation, strengths, limitations, and recommendations. I will then discuss the lessons learned from this study project in terms of myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer, followed by an analysis of leadership and change as well as a discussion of the project's potential impact on social change. My reflections will continue with a discussion of implications, application, and directions for future research, ending in a brief conclusion.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

Many elementary school principals in the Denver metropolitan area, particularly

in highly impacted schools, seem to be focused more on management than on

instructional leadership issues; however, principals both nationally and globally are

moving to the forefront of educational reform in the role of instructional leadership

(Provost et al., 2010). For principals to assume the role of an instructional leader as

opposed to a managerial role, time spent on academic matters needs to take precedence.

In this study, the conceptual framework I used regarding the instructional leadership role

was based on self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1982), which stressed the importance of

principals' sense of both professional or personal self-efficacy, and distributed theory

(Hallinger, 1993, 2005), which focused on leadership practice as opposed to specific

leadership roles (Spillane et al., 2004). As a result, the compelling question that guided

this research case study was: What factors influence the adoption of the instructional

leadership role by elementary principals?

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

In this qualitative study, I employed an intrinsic case study design involving

multiple methods of collecting data, including interviews, a focus group, and observation.

According to Baxter and Jack (2008), "The term intrinsic…suggests that researchers who

have a genuine interest in the case should use this approach when the intent is to better

understand the case" (p. 548). Agreeing with the intent of this approach, Hancock and

Algozzine (2006) added the point that researchers who use the intrinsic case study

approach are not interested in establishing general theories or generalizing their findings.

More specifically, under the umbrella of this intrinsic case study, I employed

particularistic design. Merriam (2009) explained that the particularistic design focuses on

a specific phenomenon, situation, program, or event, with the case itself being of

importance for what it can reveal about the phenomenon and what it represents. The

inquiry particular to this research was based on the principal's primary responsibility of

facilitating effective teaching and learning.

The case study, as defined by Hancock and Algozzine (2006), is "a detailed

analysis of a person or group, especially as a model of medical, psychiatric,

psychological, or social phenomena" (p. 85). This case study did not have a historical or

ethnographic element to it because, as the researcher, I was neither trying to describe the

evolution of organizations, programs, or events nor dealing with a scientific study.

However, because my study focused on a particular question, a single unit of interest

(factors that influenced principals' adoption of the instructional leadership role), I was

interested in what the data would reveal at the local level. I gathered data through the use

of individual interviews, a focus group, and observations in hope of answering the

guiding research question.

Participants

Criteria for selecting participants. According to Merriam (2009), a typical

sampling is one which is selected because it reflects the average person, situation, or

instance. Furthermore, Glesne (2011) explained that information-rich cases refer to

"those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the

purpose of the research" (p. 44), through thoughtful selection of the participants.

Therefore, my research question influenced my selection of the participants. The

selection criteria for participants was that individually, they had knowledge of the

instructional leadership role, experience working in highly impacted schools, and had

demonstrated success at their school site using the instructional leadership role. I also

targeted principals at the elementary level. I used the district-study-site rating standard,

the School Performance Framework (SPF), to determine which principals had

demonstrated academic success at their respective school site. In its own words, the SPF

is:

> a comprehensive system that helps schools focus on strengths and areas for
>
> targeted improvement. A wide range of measures is used to calculate ratings of
>
> how well each school supported student growth and achievement, and how well it
>
> served students and families.

There are five SPF levels; however, I recruited participants only from the Distinguished

and Meets Expectations levels (see Appendix H for a comprehensive description of each

level).

Six elementary principals comprised the optimal number selected for my research

study. Glesne (2011) pointed out that the smaller the sample size, the more in-depth the

interview with each participant can be, giving both breadth and depth concerning my

guiding research question (Merriam, 2009). Purposeful sampling for all participants was

based on the knowledge each participant had on the subject of the instructional leadership

role, as well as their experience of working in a highly-impacted school. With the number

of principals selected, I accounted for time and scheduling, individual interviews, a focus group, and observations at the school sites**.**

Procedure for gaining access. To gain access to the participants, I secured a letter of permission from the district to conduct the research (see Appendix G). Once permission was established from the district, I contacted principals who had knowledge on the subject of the instructional leadership role as well as experience working in highly impacted schools with a demographic of high-minority students living in high-poverty areas. With each potential participant, I (a) scheduled a person-to-person meeting to discuss and provide a follow-up summary of my intent; (b) provided a time line for individual interviews, observations, and the focus group; and (c) got an informed consent agreement signed.

Measures for ethical protection and establishing research-participant relationship. Communication is of utmost importance involving humans (participants) in a study; therefore, I addressed ethical consideration early in the process. According to Glesne (2011), the Institutional Review Board (IRB) suggests providing a lay summary along with the consent form as one way to address risk concerns. Research summaries include both a written and verbal presentation of the study that researchers give to the participants to help explain who they are, what they are doing, and the role the researcher wants the participants to play in the study (Glesne, 2011). Therefore, in addition to the purpose and overview of the study, my summary included how the study site and participants were selected, possible benefits as well as risks to the participants, the promise of confidentiality of participants and sites, and how often and how long I would

interview and observe along with requests to record observations and words (see Appendix E).

I took measures to protect the participants' rights by receiving IRB approval from Walden University (approval #07-23-14-0156928) and subsequently obtained their informed consent, which meant acknowledging that they had been advised of any risks due to the research, their participation was voluntary, and they could remove themselves from the study whenever desired (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). They were also informed of the use of pseudonyms throughout the research. Pseudonyms help to protect the identity of the participant, especially in the midst of qualitative research where direct quotes are added to provide a realistic and in-depth look at the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). I also provided each participant with a confidentiality agreement in which I stated that all information obtained during the study would remain confidential (see Appendix E).

To build researcher/participant working relationships, I spent time discussing my role as researcher. Furthermore, I informed the principals that I would be interviewing and observing them. I also explained the reciprocity of the project to the participants and how the results of the data might help the district determine what type of support could be beneficial for the principal's role as an instructional leader.

Qualitative Data Collection Methods

The process of triangulation was a means I used throughout data collection in this qualitative research to increase the credibility and validity of the results (Glesne, 2011). Glesne (2011) stated that this process is used to get at the deeper, more complex

understanding of the issues. To figure out which techniques to use, Glesne recommended carefully contemplating what needs to be learned by eliciting data critical to gaining an understanding of the phenomenon that contribute different perspectives on the issue and make effective use of the time available. I used the following techniques that dominate qualitative inquiry: one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and school-site observations. My resolve was that each approach would allow multiple perspectives to give both breadth and depth concerning the research question explored.

Individual Interviews

The primary purpose of an interview is to gain a specific kind of information that tells the researcher what is "in and on someone else's mind" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Therefore, my interviewing process accounted for those things that I, as the researcher, could not learn from direct observation, such as intentions, thoughts, and feelings (Patton, 2002). According to Merriam (2009), a semistructured interview with each participant is guided by a self-created protocol. My semistructured approach included a mix of interview questions that were more and less-structured (see Appendix B); all questions had flexibility, although specific data were required of each respondent. The greater part of the interview was guided by this list of questions I had developed. My guiding research question was instrumental in helping me frame the process for the investigation of this intrinsic case study.

For the open-ended questions presented to the interviewees, I used Glesne's (2011) Grand Tour question technique: a request for the respondent to verbally take the interviewer through a place, a time period, or a sequence of events or activities (see

Appendix B). Furthermore, the Grand Tour question technique provided a good place to start developing trust and helping the interviewees relax as I asked experiential particulars that the participants could easily and readily answer (Glesne, 2011). The Grand Tour technique worked for me, as a novice interviewer, because the questions helped me understand the interviewees better as professionals, as well as let me know I had selected the right participants.

In interviews that seek open-ended responses, Hancock and Algozzine (2006) suggested the structured approach of having "specific wording and sequence of questions [that] are predetermined" (p. 43), with each participant being asked basic open-ended questions in the same order. These authors pointed out that some of the strengths of following their approach to the structuring of open-ended responses are that responses are comparable, the data for each participant tend to be more complete, and there is less chance of incurring the effects of interviewer bias. Some of the weaknesses of their approach to using open-ended responses are that "flexibility is limited for relating the interview to specific individuals and circumstance, [and] the standardized wording of the questions may limit variation in answers" (p. 43). Taking these pros and cons into consideration, I settled on a semistructured approach to developing my interview questions, as stated earlier, leaving room for flexibility in many of the open-ended responses.

Focus Group Interview

Another method of data collection I used was through conducting a focus group, which has been defined as a group interview on a particular topic with people who are

knowledgeable about that topic (Merriam, 2009). Relevant to my study, Merriam (2009)

pointed out that because the data from a focus group are "socially constructed within the

interaction of the group, a constructivist perspective underlies this data collection

procedure" (p. 94); unlike participants in the one-on-one interviews, in the focus group,

participants are able to hear each other's responses, subsequently making "additional

comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to

say" (Patton as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 94). In the focus group that I conducted, I

made it clear that people did not need to be in agreement, reach consensus, nor did they

need to disagree. I also obtained a confidentiality agreement from the focus group

members because each would be having access to information from fellow participants

that would be considered confidential and therefore should not be disclosed (see

Appendix I). In accordance with Patton, my objective in this study was to "get high-

quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context

of the views of others" (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 94).

Purposeful sampling for participants in the focus group (as with all participants)

was based on each participant's knowledge of the instructional leadership role and their

experience as a principal in a highly-impacted school. The setting for the focus group

interview was determined by what was best suited for my interviewees. Communication

of purpose, the approximate amount of time needed, the importance of confidentiality,

and my contact information for questions or concerns that might arise later were shared

with participants verbally and in written form. The questions for the focus group elicited

opinions and values on the instructional leadership role for elementary principals through the use of open-ended question techniques (see Appendix C).

Observation

Observation was a third means of collecting data in this qualitative research, offering what Merriam (2009) referred to as "a firsthand account of the situation under study" (p. 117). According to Merriam, when observation is complemented by the gathering of data through interviews and document analysis, it is possible to achieve a holistic understanding of the topic under study. As a researcher, my approach to observing at the site was to solicit permission at the first person-to-person meeting from participants to be observed at their school site. As stated earlier, I communicated both verbally and in writing to gather data through observation; gaining access to the observation site took place at the initial meeting where the informed consent agreements were signed. As the researcher, I visited each of the school sites approximately three times at various times of the day. As suggested by Merriam, each observation was short in duration: no longer than an hour. The rationale for short durations was related to the amount of time it took to transcribe each session, particularly for a novice researcher like me. Each experience allowed me to develop and enhance my observation and transcribing skills (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). I conducted the observations after the person-to-person interviews, because the process of building a trusting and respectful relationship with each principal was crucial (Merriam, 2009). Consequently, before visiting the school sites, I addressed questions and concerns the participants had regarding the process.

I used several measures to protect my participants' rights during observations. As explained earlier, this included receiving IRB approval and obtaining informed consent (e.g., discussion of risks, measures to ensure confidentiality, the voluntary nature of participation, and the freedom to withdraw at any stage of the study). Before the final write up, I shared written transcripts of the observations with each participant for clarity purposes.

The five steps I used regarding observations were based on Hancock and Algozzine's (2006) suggestions:

- "Identify what must be observed in order to shed light on possible answers to the research questions" (p. 47);

- "Create an observation guide—a list of features to be addressed during a particular observation" (p. 46), including times, dates, location, names and positions of those being observed, as well as activities and events relevant to the research question, accompanied by on-the-spot impressions and interpretations of the observations (see Appendices D-1 and D-2);

- Gain access: "Anticipate that participants in the setting may be suspicious of the researcher's goals…[thus be] prepared to explain why, how, and for whom the investigation is occurring;…seek the trust of the participant; and strive to be as unobtrusive as possible" (p. 47);

- "Recognize the personal role and biases related to the researcher" (p. 47); because of the immersion of case study researchers in their work, maintaining distance from the activities and setting, most of the time, is not an option;

- "Follow all ethical and legal requirements regarding research participants" (p. 47).

Moreover, I took into consideration the federal mandate that requires researchers to minimize the risks, but when unavoidable, inform the participants of them and try to balance such risks with possible benefits of the research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Procedures and Processes for Data Collection

Fieldwork, as defined by Glesne (2011), is "research that takes place in real-life situations rather than laboratories, usually involving participant observation, conversations, and interviews" (p. 280). The tools used during fieldwork are equally as important as the site for generating, collecting, and recording the targeted information, as well as creating a data tracking system (Glesne, 2011). As the researcher, I had several tools that enabled me to be proactive in this endeavor: (a) a journal in which I recorded observations of selected participants, places, events, activities, and conversations, and where I held written accounts of my reflections, hunches, notes about patterns that emerged, and my personal reactions; (b) recording devices that ensured what was being said was not missed during distractions of any kind; and (c) interviewing and observation skills learned through administrative professional experience. As I gathered information from individuals, group members, and observations, as Glesne suggested, I made sure my notes were both descriptive and analytical. Therefore, as the researcher, I wrote my information with a nonjudgmental focus. Glesne's rationale for being descriptive was to help form a visual picture of the moment, people, and setting, thus constructing beginning

theories of what took place to help shape the direction for more questions and observations.

The amount of time I devoted to the field study work was based on the methods used: (a) individual interviews - 1.5 hours, transcribing notes - 3 hours; (b) group interviews - 2 hours, transcribing notes - 4 to 5 hours; and (c) observations - 1.5 hours, transcribing field notes - 5 hours. I transcribed my work within 24 hours. I found this to be the best approach during my professional years as an administrator. The number of participants was six. There were six individual interviews, one group interview, and three observations per participant at different intervals of the day. I devoted a total of approximately 75 hours to this part of my study.

Role of the Researcher

During the study, I did not have a working relationship with any of my participants. I have, however, worked at school sites for a private non-profit Summer School/Afterschool Program that served students in the district from which I had previously retired. I have been with this organization for approximately 15 years: the first 5 years as a teacher; presently, and for the last 8 years, as a principal during the summer months; and for 2 years as a tutor during the traditional school year. I worked for the district study site as a teacher for 15 years and in the role of an administrator for 10 years before retirement. I worked as an administrator in four different elementary schools that were highly impacted, for an average of 3 years at each school site. Some of the study participants were former colleagues and some were new to the district school site. What

participants had in common was that their school sites fit the criteria of the school's demographic I was targeting in my study.

During observation sessions, my role as a researcher fit well with what Merriam (2009) described as the "complete observer," wherein the researcher is "either hidden from the group or is in a completely public setting" (p. 125). I was at a public school, in a completely public setting. Also, I was infused into the setting because the manner in which I observed the participants was to shadow them during the allotted scheduled time of my visit. Merriam pointed out that models of research using the quantitative approach traditionally aim to be as detached and objective as possible in order to minimize biases that could influence the findings. However, as Merriam also detailed, "in qualitative research where the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, subjectivity and interaction are assumed. The interdependency between the observer and the observed may bring about changes in both parties' behavior" (p. 127). How the researcher identifies the effects and accounts for them in interpreting the data, then, becomes the issue. As the researcher, I used the method of self-reflection during the process of collecting data for my study (Merriam, 2009).

Reflexivity or researcher's position is defined by Lincoln and Guba (2000) as "the process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher, 'the human as instrument'" (p. 183). Therefore, as the investigator, I explained any assumptions, biases, or dispositions I might have in regard to the research. This process, according to Maxwell (2005), is "not to eliminate 'variance' between researchers in values and expectations they bring to the study, but with understanding how a particular researcher's values and expectations

influence the conduct and conclusion of the study" (p. 108). My bias revolved around my strong belief in the instructional leadership role being implemented by principals and the research that concurred with the instructional leadership role as having a direct influence on academic achievement for students. Through my research question, I hoped to discover why the role of instructional leader was or was not being adopted by principals currently working at the school sites.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involves giving meaning to the data by preparing it "for analyses, conducting different analyses, and moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, [for the purpose of] representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2009, p. 183). As discussed earlier, gathering information for my study consisted of one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and school-site observations. My intent was that each approach would allow multiple perspectives, thus giving both breadth and depth concerning the guiding research question explored (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, my qualitative case study involved gathering an in-depth description of the participants and the setting, from which I performed a data analysis to uncover issues and themes. Supporting the analysis process I used throughout the study, I engaged in continual reflection regarding the data about which I asked myself analytic questions, accompanied by the writing of memos (Creswell, 2009). As pointed out by Creswell (2009), this was in concurrence with the ongoing gathering and interpretation of data, and in turn, the writing of reports. Simply

put, an analysis of the data from the interviews involved an analysis of the participants' responses to the open-ended questions posed to them.

Prior to beginning the coding process, I tape-recorded and transcribed the individual and focus group interviews in order to facilitate the process of coding the data according to categories (Creswell, 2009). In addition, I transcribed the observations based on my predetermined observation guideline of things observed (see Appendices D-1 and D-2). I also transcribed my tape-recorded sessions. I felt doing the work myself, without the use of a hired transcriber, helped me tune into information that guided my coding process and later, analyze the overall data. Three steps were ongoing throughout the process in order to triangulate my findings: transcribing, coding, and analyzing, each building and intertwining to develop the meaning of themes and descriptions (Creswell, 2009). This triangulation process took up to approximately four months in duration.

I then started the coding process. Coding refers to the process of sorting through the data to uncover and identify relevant ideas, categories, and themes (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). In alignment with Taylor and Gibbs (2010), in this study, I found that "coding the data made it easier to search the data, to make comparisons, and to identify any patterns that required further investigation" (para. 1). I started my coding system with themes identified from my theories and concepts discussed in the literature review, which had been the foundation for forming my open-ended questions. This process is called *a priori* (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). I organized and prepared the data for analysis, read through all data to get a "general sense" (Creswell, 2009, p. 185) of its meaning and reflected on its "overall depth, credibility, and use of the information" (Creswell, 2009, p. 185).

Accordingly, I wrote memos: information detailing what the code was about, what the text code revealed, and why a code might be changed or renamed (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). The use of my coding system enabled me to create an in-depth description of both the individuals participating in the study as well as the setting, and in turn, facilitated the identification of themes for analysis (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010).

Subsequently, I used the themes to create the narrative. The narrative conveyed the findings of the analysis: detailed discussion of several themes based on the literature review and participants' perspectives (i.e., tables, visuals, multiple perspectives from individuals, and quotations). My final step in analyzing the data was "making …meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2009, p. 189), that is, providing an overall interpretation of the information gathered and analyzed. Creswell (2009) explained that such meaning could also be uncovered by comparing the study's findings with the information derived from an analysis of the literature reviewed for the particular study or from theories. Creswell dubbed this final step as "What were the lessons learned?" (p. 189). My interpretation was based on comparisons of findings from the literature review theories with themes uncovered from participant information from interviews, the focus group, and observations, as well as unforeseen data analyzed through the qualitative gathering process. I also included in this interpretation an integration of my personal interpretation and understanding formed from my background and experiences as a principal in the field of education.

Credibility

The credibility question was addressed by Glesne (2011) when asking, "How can you know your interpretation is the right one?" (p. 211). As the researcher, I supported my credibility by using several avenues: (a) member checking, the process of obtaining participant feedback on the draft of the study as it pertained to the participants, for the purpose of verification of my reflections of their perspectives; (b) support from friends and colleagues, by asking them to help me develop codes, apply my codes, or interpret field notes to widen my perceptions; and (c) feedback from Walden University committee members, the auditors of my study (Glesne, 2011). I also continued to refer to my guiding research question as well as my theoretical framework to ensure that the focus of my study was being addressed accordingly (Glesne, 2011; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Using the sources noted above helped me to develop new ideas and interpretations (Glesne, 2011).

The factor of time was also a source used. Glesne (2011) described two sources of time: (a) *prolonged engagement* - the spending of sufficient time in the field to provide scope, and (b) *persistent observation* - the focusing in detail on those elements that are most relevant to the study. In this study, the time I spent on interviewing and on the research site, as well as time spent building relationships with participants, helped contribute to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne, 2011). Moreover, use of the triangulation process (individual interviews, focus group, and observations), along with the identification of my biases regarding the study, supported the credibility of my work as it related to interpretation of the findings. My maintaining of thorough record keeping

of recorded transcripts and organized files of data for a number of years will similarly help support the credibility of the study (Glesne, 2011; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 2009).

Limitations, Assumptions, and Delimitations

Trustworthiness of data is the realization of limitations, assumptions, and delimitations (Simon & Goes, 2013). Therefore, detailing the circumstances to help the readers understand the nature of data, such as documents, people, and places that were not available, in addition to what is unique about the site and the respondent selection, supports communication of the phenomenon of interest in some light but not in others (Glesne, 2011; Simon & Goes, 2013). Descriptions of the study's limitations, assumptions, and delimitations help set the context of the study, which in turn helps readers know how they can read and interpret the work (Glesne, 2011). This also confirms that the communication of studies is always negotiable and incomplete (Schram, 2006). The focus of my study was based on factors that influenced principals' adoption of the instructional leadership role. The participants were elementary school principals in the Denver metropolitan area who worked in highly impacted schools and demonstrated success using the instructional leadership role. Although case studies may be suggestive of what may be found in similar organizations, the purpose of this study was not to generalize elsewhere. The purpose was to share the results with the principals and district leaders in the Denver metropolitan area. Additional research is needed to verify whether findings from this study can be generalized.

Merriam (1998) pointed out that the core philosophical assumption in qualitative research is that "reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. It is assumed that meaning is embedded in people's experiences and that this meaning is mediated through the investigators' own perceptions" (p. 6). To address this assumption, I conducted an interview with each participant, at the first scheduled meeting, to ensure that everyone met the criteria stated earlier. To reiterate, the summary consent form (see Appendix E) was shared both verbally and in hard copy, which included the following: Participants will have knowledge on the subject of the instructional leadership role as well as experience working in highly impacted schools. Six principals were selected for the research study based on the criterion that they had demonstrated success at their respective school site using the instructional leadership role. I also used member checking, personal reflection notes, and memos to decrease the use of my own personal judgment. To protect the participants' rights, I obtained informed consent. They were also informed of the use of pseudonyms throughout the research.

The delimitations of this study were those characteristics that arose from the limitations, purpose of the study, and "the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions made during the development of the study plan" (Simon & Goes, 2013, para. 8). The study's conceptual framework encompassed several theories and themes: (a) principal's self-efficacy based on Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory, which is grounded in the belief in a person's capacity to organize information and implement a plan to effectively manage a particular situation; (b) Hallinger's distributed theory as a focus on leadership practice instead of specific leadership roles: practices that transpire

whenever there is interaction between the person in an authoritative position and another or others in a subordinate position (Spillane et al., 2004); and (c) the principal-agent problem, related to how problems could arise based on social context, which may occur whenever principals delegate to another (the agent) a task or service that cannot be fully monitored (Sindhvad, 2009).

Summary of Methodological Approach

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the guiding research question: What factors influence the adoption of the instructional leadership role by elementary principals? Regarding the methodology, as the researcher conducting the study and based on my guiding research question and theoretical framework, I conducted individual and focus group interviews using open-ended questions, thus allowing for flexibility of answers for the purpose of gaining in-depth responses. I also conducted several on-site observations at different times of the day, again for the purpose of gaining a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon as it related to the guiding research question and the theoretical framework of my study. The participants consisted of six elementary principals, currently working at school sites that met the demographic status of highly impacted schools and who demonstrated success at the school site using the instructional leadership role. The time frame of each individual interview was no more than 90 minutes, the focus group was no more than two hours, and the observations were no more than two hours. The interviews were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed in order to facilitate the process of coding the data according to categories (Creswell, 2009). The interviewing, observing, and transcribing time factor took up to four mouths in duration

for the purpose of analyzing data, using the triangulation process. To establish the credibility of my study, I used member checking, solicited support from friends and colleagues, and communicated biases and limitations of the study. The overall implication of the study was to help the district site develop a policy that could support the elementary principal's role of an instructional leader based on the school-site's needs. The subsequent support from key stakeholders could enable principals to develop and oversee an infrastructure conducive to the academic and social success of the students they serve.

Findings

The participating elementary principals' years of administration ranged from 8 to 28 years. Five of the participants received administrative license within the study site by taking part in its leadership program. Three of the participants have specialized degrees at the master's level, one of which has a Ph.D. Each participant worked as a classroom teacher and in other roles of an educator, such as special education teacher, literacy coach, district math coach, instructional superintendent, and assistant superintendent. Four of the six participants worked only at the district study site. One of the participants had worked numerous years in two other districts within the metropolitan area prior to the study, and one participant left the district study site to work closer to home upon the start of the study.

Data Collection, Analysis Procedures, and Emerging Themes

I scheduled and met one-on-one with each of the participants to discuss the purpose of my case study and why I felt they would be good candidates for the qualitative

study. Upon each person's deciding to take part in the study, I scheduled an individual

interview and left each of them a hard copy of my Selection of Participants Summary

Letter, which described the purpose of the study and the overall process (see Appendix

F). I emphasized that participation was voluntary in both written and verbal

communication and told each person that three modes of involvement would take place:

an individual interview, one focus group session, and several on-site observations. The

comfort level of building relationships was evident immediately. I believe this was

because of my past association with them as a colleague as well as my understanding of

what takes place at the school-site and district levels within the study site.

The process of data analysis took place simultaneously over the course of 4

months of data collection. Noteworthy themes and subthemes began to emerge as data

were triangulated. Uniqueness of how and why the elementary principals oversaw their

schools materialized instantaneously, as I reflected, coded, and interpreted the data within

hours of completing their individual interviews, observations, and the focus group. As I

worked through the coding process, particularly after each mode of qualitative data

collection took place, I was soon able to narrow down to three primary themes what

started off as 25 codes. The themes seemed to be interrelated based on best practices in

education, stemming from recent research, the district study site's mission and goals, and

each principal's leadership style.

I began with the individual interviews, person-to-person, with permission to

record each. Participants were told that the interview would last no longer than 1.5 hours.

Of the six interviews, only one lasted less than 1.5 hours. Within hours of my interviews,

I started transcribing, each transcript taking an average of eight hours to complete. The

transcribing, although time-consuming, allowed for much-needed reflection and note

taking, as well as the learning of each participant's leadership style and rationale for

choosing it. My guiding research question was kept foremost in the mind of each

participant because each question asked of them related to it. The following three

categories of questions were based on my conceptual framework regarding the role of

elementary principal as instructional leader: (a) self-efficacy, regarding their ability to do

the job; (b) distributed leadership, regarding the support from key stakeholders; and (c)

principal-agent, regarding impediment.

Individual interviews: The self-efficacy of principals as instructional leaders.

With each interview, data began intertwining, and the coding process started taking form.

Although participants were unique in their primary approach to overseeing their

individual schools, common themes started developing right away. I began my coding

process based on identified theories and themes I had discussed in the first literature

review, which served as the foundation for forming my open-ended questions. As

mentioned earlier, this process is called a priori (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). I organized and

prepared the data for analysis by listening and reading through data as I transcribed the

work, to get a general sense of the meaning of my information (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). I

reflected on its overall meaning by searching for tone, overall depth, and credibility

(Creswell, 2009).

My first category of coding was based on Bandura's (2002) self-efficacy theory,

which is grounded in social cognition theory, consisting of personal self-efficacy and

outcome expectancy. According to social psychologist Bandura, people manifest self-efficacy through a strong belief in their own capabilities to organize information and carry out a plan to effectively manage a particular situation, consisting of the individual's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive resources. Time spent on duties related to the job is one of the key factors in Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory as contributing to a professionally perceived sense of autonomy. Each participant attributed confidence in doing the instructional leadership role well to the time spent on this role: time spent on developing the mission and goals of the school, time spent in leadership meetings and dialoguing with the instructional staff daily, and time spent in the classrooms ensuring that alignment was in place with the mission and goals of the school. In addition, formal education and experience in the educational field were clearly articulated by two of the participants as to why they felt confident in doing the instructional leadership role. The first participant provided this explanation:

> I definitely believe I have the capacity to provide instructional support because I was a classroom teacher for about 10 years, and at that time, I really worked hard on working with my students on improving student achievement. I really pride myself with incorporating the best practices of teaching and learning in my classroom with my students. I went into the leadership program at the local university, which was an amazing program that shifted my thinking greatly about what it meant to be a principal, meaning moving from being the manager of the building to being that instructional leader, which for me was a huge paradigm shift.

The second participant qualified her ability to perform the role of an instructional leader based on degrees in fields of special education, speech pathology, and educational administration. She also worked in a literacy curriculum department at the district level and taught staff development classes within surrounding school districts regarding effective instructions, learning styles, higher learning thinking, and cooperative learning. In addition, she worked once a week in the classrooms coaching teachers, which in turn gave her a wealth of background for being an instructional leader. "I was definitely hired based on qualification," she stated. "I had opportunity to participate in the best of that as well as help lead it."

Two more participants attributed their ability and confidence regarding the instructional leadership role to their ability to create, articulate, and steer the school mission, which is supported by planning, delivering, and aligning educational school-site-based decisions with school and student data. Below are their comments, respectively:

My capacity to be the instructional leader based on a scale of 1-10, I say is a 9. I do these things by providing instructional support and leading and articulating the school mission. I believe you have to be vigilant about instructional practices; therefore, planning, delivering, and backing it up with data is crucial. Develop the mission and stay constant. I start looking at the data in June and July (both the past year's as well as historical data) and I do 70% of the planning before the school year starts. The other 30% is based on the implementation of the plan, which then becomes what the instructional staff is responsible for. I believe this

brings about the structure the school needs. I schedule meetings with my teachers, each one every 3 weeks to discuss their data.

I have the capacity to provide instructional support, and what I mean by that is that I can coach teachers and get help if they need help in instructional areas. I can meet with teachers after observations and give feedback for growth. One of the reasons I believe I have the capacity is because of the distributed leadership model that we have at our school where we share responsibility for instructional coaching, observations, and helping teachers get what they need. So, all that duty, managerial stuff, I am not dealing with. So, when you have that distributed leadership model, it gives you time to do feedback and instructional coaching. You can't give feedback or instructional feedback if you are not an instructional observer.

Last but not least, several of the participants discussed the district expectation and the evaluation tools used, for both the principals and teachers, to ensure that they conduct themselves as instructional leaders. In this context, one participant commented, "The expectation of the district is that we (principals) are instructional leaders. That has my highest priority; therefore, I am the instructional leader of the building and it is my job as an instructional leader to deliver the instruction." Another participant shared these thoughts:

Let me just start with saying, as the principal, first and foremost, I see myself as the instructional leader; therefore, I have to be grounded in instruction because I

am evaluating instructors on their instructions. So, the evaluation tool we use in this district is very clear about instructional moves and high leverage ways to move student achievement. So, knowing that, inside and out, upside and down, helps me to talk to a teacher to discuss potential instructional strategies that they might want to put into place...and all of that just requires that I have a sound base of instruction.

Each coding theme below relates to the principals' confidence to execute the role of an instructional leader. The common denominators that supported their confidence to execute the instructional leadership role consisted of time spent implementing the duties associated with the role, experiences gained before and after becoming a principal, and continuous professional development. After several coding processes, the following themes took form regarding the principals' perceived capacity to implement the instructional leadership role:

- As the principal, first and foremost, I see myself as the instructional leader.

- District expectation is that principals conduct themselves as instructional leaders.

- Experience working in the classrooms and other specialized educational service supported my abilities to lead as an instructional leader (special education teacher, speech language pathologist, leadership coach, curriculum developer, and coach of teachers in teaching and learning).

- Continuous education (district, university certificate programs) supported the development and enhancement of the instructional leadership role.

- Ability to create, articulate, and steer the school mission, which is supported by planning, delivering, and aligning educational school-site-based decisions with students and school data, enhanced my capacity to implement the instructional leadership role.

- Time to attend to the instructional leader role is crucial.

School-site observations: The distributed leadership approach/alignment and focus. I started the school-site observations shortly after my first few individual interviews, and they were interwoven thereafter because I scheduled them based on what the participants felt worked best for them. I explained individually to the principals that I would like to shadow them on both a typical morning and a typical afternoon, as well as sit in on one of their leadership meetings. I also emphasized that the observations could take place in 1 day or stretched over several visits. Three out of the six visits took place in 1 day. The other three were stretched over several visits. Two of my observations took place when the principal's district instructional leader superintendent came to visit the school site. I used my observation protocol guidelines and chart (see Appendices D-1 and D-2), which enabled me to clock the time spent on instructional leadership duties verses management duties. Accounting for all six participants' duties performed on the days of observation, on average, 98% of their time was spent on instructional leadership duties.

What I noticed the most while shadowing the participants during the observation process was how well their practices aligned with their leadership styles, school missions, and goals. The voices of the principals from their individual interviews took actionable form, while the school day was filled with teachers teaching and students learning.

During my observation of each leadership meeting, much discussion centered on the actions needed to support the mission and goals, assessment of what had taken place in the classrooms, and the next steps for researched best practices of teaching and learning. The topic of discussion of stakeholders, such as school-site instructional staff, district instructional leaders, and community members, was also based on what was best for the students and the families they served. One of the participants qualified the alignment of the mission and goals at her school by stating the following:

> It is always about systems. We do have a pretty wonderful system of support through monthly network meetings, through school site visits by my instructional superintendent, through co-observing and debriefing. So, we can make sure we are on the same page in terms of what instruction should look like. So, I feel like I have a pretty good base of support from the district in the form of my instructional superintendent, especially.

The district instructional leaders' presence and actions supported the principals' responsibilities of accountability for themselves and their staff, which in turn created an accountability factor at the district level. The standard for the district study site is that instructional leader superintendents visit their assigned schools every 3 weeks. And, depending on the needs of the school, it is not unlike the instructional leader superintendent to show up several times within a week to account for what would support the growth areas identified. One of the participants stated, "You must inspect what you expect and communicate the mission and goals throughout the school year to all stakeholders, the instructional staff, parents, community support people, and to the

students." He continued by saying, "The instructional practices of the day must align with the mission and goals set for the year, and how you determine credibility is through consistency of communication along with your actions as the leader."

The principals also spoke of how important it was to focus their attention on the instructional leadership role. "Management issues will creep up on you suddenly," they stated. In several instances while I shadowed, there were management situations that needed attending to right away. In these cases, the principals had to remind themselves that they had qualified people on staff for that very reason. In one incident, a student was hurt, and the nurse along with 911 first responders attended to the situation. The principal, as any caring person would do, took a minute to check in to make sure all was well, and then immediately continued with the scheduled walk-throughs. In another incident, a principal purposely left his walkie-talkie in his office while doing scheduled walk-throughs in the building; and upon his return, several people on his staff were waiting to discuss issues that had occurred and that they were able to resolve in his absence.

Most of the principals still struggled with needing to be in the mix of everything, particularly the management issues, more so than others, because as one of the participants stated, "Ultimately, the buck still stops with me." On the flip side of his statement, another participant shared, "Delegating must be in place; you must understand where the principal's job begins and ends to be successful as an instructional leader. You can't do it all!" Each principal shared how important it was to build capacity and to hire the right people capable of doing the job in their absence. Subsequently, the participants

articulated how their time attending to instructional leadership duties had increased by consciously focusing on the instructional leadership role as opposed to management issues. Notably, one of the participants shared these comments:

There are a lot of distractions. I think you have to be driven and love the instructional leadership role to find the time to do it because the rest of the job just comes at you, as you know, problem solving, problem solving, problem solving— from the brick building, to people, people's lives, to children's lives. Everybody needs something regarding support and resources, not those things related to instruction. So, I think you have to love being an instructional leader, and you have to make time for it, over the weekend, at night, in the early morning. When there is a quiet time for it.

"Focusing instruction and directing of the school is data driven," shared another participant as he spoke extensively about how important it was to protect the school's mission and goals based on time. This participant explained:

I feel like what I am always fighting for is time: making sure I have time to sit down to look at the data, find the things I need to define, hash out all the encumbrances, and make sure that time is being allocated throughout the whole school year; make sure that you can get things done. I pretty much, if somebody comes to me or asks me anything, I am the first person to say no. Just because I know that if I am carried off on too many missions, then what needs to happen at the school does not get done. Even positive things can be a distraction.

I remembered my first couple of years here (12 years ago), I spent a lot of time working with community groups and not enough time working as the principal of the school looking at raw data. And so, I promised myself, I decided that I was never going to do that again. I really feel I have enough empirical knowledge to know what I can and what I cannot do.

Prioritizing my time is important, basically, not to get distracted in other things. I don't want to take on other projects in the middle of the year; I don't want to take on a lot of projects because when you talk about instruction, the delivery of instruction, you have to make sure that that is happening. Nothing else is important. It means saying no to a lot of things and a lot of people who may or may not have good intentions, and you are going to have to say no to them and they may not like it, but you are going to have to say no and you can say no, politely.

Another participant related his thoughts regarding focus on instruction with the phrase, "Less is more!" He shared how the district supported his efforts to focus more on instruction by allowing his staff to work with a company out of Boston called Focus on Results. He stated the following:

The company came in and facilitated the conversation to develop the instructional focus. It was not just what I as the principal and my instructional team wanted, it was the whole staff, the whole staff coming up with the instructional focus. We also had to be grounded in our decision before implementation.

We needed to make sure that we understood what we meant, massaging that, rewriting it; and once we came up with our instructional focus, all professional developments and classroom practices had to align with it. Therefore, when the 12 people on my instructional leadership team meet, we talk about just instruction, that is the key, opposed to the other stuff; and the mandate is very clear—our focus is instruction. When I meet with the instructional staff, both individually and collectively, we talk about instruction.

As I continued the coding process by integrating the observation notes with what had been shared with me from the individual interviews, several more themes emerged: alignment, focus, and building capacity. These themes were connected to the second theoretical piece of the conceptual framework guiding of this study: Hallinger's (1993) distributed cognition and activity theories. These theories address how cognition is distributed based on the physical environment and socially through collaborative actions, particularly as it relates to leadership practices instead of specific leadership roles.

Overall, the elementary principals spoke of how important it was that each of these elements existed as they oversaw the mission of the school to support student achievement. The coding process revealed themes of alignment, focus, and building capacity that shaped practices, such as the following:

- Leading as the principal - never forgetting that ultimately the buck stops here;
- Communicating mission and goals throughout the year to all stakeholders (students, instructional staff, parents, and community support);
- Directing the school from a data-driven standpoint;

- Understanding that less is more - focusing instruction and focusing time;

- Protecting the focus on mission and goals - even good intentions should be scrutinized as possible distractions to the mission;

- Aligning professional development with mission and goals;

- Aligning resources with mission and goals (human and materials);

- Inspecting what you expect;

- Hiring the right people;

- Building capacity;

- Determining credibility through consistency of communication and action;

- Maintaining consistency - everyone focused on what supports the mission and goals of the school.

The principal-agent theory: Tools and artifacts as a distraction. Several of the participants spoke of how the artifacts adopted by the district study site created a distraction in their instructional leadership role because of the time it takes to execute the process involved, particularly in regard to the evaluation tools. It is not the evaluation tool itself, they pointed out; the tool works well with best teaching practices. It is just a very lengthy process. Spillane et al. (2004) observation that although school-level conditions, new leadership roles, and new organizational structures contribute to instructional innovation, what is most essential is how leadership practice is carried out on a daily basis. Distributed cognitive and activity theories focus on leadership practice instead of specific leadership roles; the focus is on thinking and action in position (Hallinger, 1993). Therefore, Spillane et al. argued that "leadership activity is

constituted—defined or constructed—in the interaction of leaders, followers, and their situation in the execution of particular leadership tasks" (p. 13). From a distributed perspective, "the unit of analysis is shifted from the individual actor or group of actors to the web of leaders, followers, and situation that give activity its form" (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 13). With this in mind, looking at how the evaluation tool is used is paramount.

The district study site has a teacher evaluation tool that requires an average of 2.5 hours to complete. The observation of a teacher in practice takes approximately 40 minutes; the post conference, approximately 30 minutes; and the preparation of the evaluation tool used for discussion, approximately 1.5 hours. A teacher is observed on an average of three times per year. Now multiply that by the number of instructional staff placed at the school site. One participant stated that the process takes away from duties performed as an instructional leader: "It is so time-consuming to use this evaluation tool that it becomes more of a managerial process, even though, in a sense, it is about instruction; the management piece is not about instruction. Most of the work is put on the principals." This sentiment was shared by two of the participants.

Although the district study site narrowed the evaluation indicators that are to be observed from 21 to 12, it is still very time consuming: First is the observation that consists of scheduling, taking approximately 40 minutes to conduct; next, the principals are to script everything they hear and see. Once the observation is over, the principals must then look throughout the evaluation tool to pull from the frameworks the 12 indicators of evidence they observed. This part of the process is the preparation of the evaluation tool for discussion, which also entails the preparation of the tool itself. Next

begins the balancing act of getting the work completed without any interruption at the school site; it is nearly impossible. Once the document is prepared, the scheduling for the post conference starts again.

Another participant shared these thoughts:

> You want to give the teacher feedback within the week, although really, best practice is 2 days; so either I would shut my doors and try to work on it while at work, but there were interruptions. So, I would end up taking them home to do. Interruptions based on questions related to the heater is not working, who is covering playground duty, is today going to be an inside day?

Both of the participants quoted above explained that although the evaluation tool supported performing the role of an instructional leader, there is a very thin line between using the tool for instructional purposes and the time it takes to manage the process.

A third participant spoke of how the evaluation tool was a time-consuming instrument from a staffing prospective, particularly a new staff:

> Because we are a new staff, we have so many new members; therefore, we have to do more observations, and the observation tool requires getting into the class to do the full observation opposed to a partial one. We have to do walk-throughs, and honestly with a new staff, you are going to have to do more of those up front; that means doing them in October [as] opposed [to] December or January. And so, trying to get those observations in, and not to mention the amount of time we are taken out of the building to do district directive trainings, creates the challenge. Scheduling is a nightmare.

I sometimes wonder and I sort of question the number of observations—

because it is so very time consuming—when you go in to do a full observation—

that is going to take about 45 minutes, and you need to give teachers feedback.

And, I believe in feedback. Then you need to write it up; I can spend at least an

hour and a half on that whole process. And, trying to schedule feedback and

meeting with teachers—it is difficult. And again, it is necessary. I am just

thinking out loud. Perhaps, if there were fewer observations, we can go deeper as

opposed to going wider. I think what we want is quality opposed to quantity.

Therefore, what is clearly being articulated as a distraction is the managerial time it takes

to complete the process, as well as how important it is to utilize the concept of less being

more—going deeper, thus creating quality over quantity, as one of the participants

continued to propose.

Another problem was brought up by a participant as follows:

Often time the teacher would get their observation feedback and they would just

look for the total score. They did not necessarily reflect on the feedback given by

me as the principal; thus, no real evidence showed up in their classroom practices.

It was also pointed out by a participant that in a surrounding district, it was up to the

teachers to communicate and bring evidence of their teaching indicators to the meeting,

not the principal. The theory regarding this particular approach was that the teachers

would be able to reflect on their own teaching and learning and share their next steps

toward progress. Thus, from some of the principals' perspectives, the validity of the

evaluation tool came into question. As stated earlier, is it better to do less and go deeper to create quality over quantity.

A further artifact that was discussed by one of the participants was the use of the district's school calendar as it related to designated professional development dates for the instructional staff. The concern was based on how many of the allotted dates were taken up by district mandates. This participant's premise was based on the question: Is the district still operating on a school-based management system? He spoke of how the teacher contract allowed so many days throughout the school year to conduct professional development based on school instructional goals, and how often district-mandated professional development took priority. The experience of his instructional staff, filing grievance through the teacher's union regarding their self-directed planning time being inundated with both school-site and district-led professional development, brought more light to each stakeholder's position and how both the district and the teachers' agendas could get in the way of what he perceived as his ability to carry out the school's goals and mission. He observed, "You must be very strategic in using the professional development days because there are so many days on the school calendar that cannot be used; soon you look up and the school year is over." This example was given in relationship to priority and time and how the restraints of utilizing certain tools, mandates, and contracts made this principal feel the school-site needs did not take precedence over others. He continued as follows:

I understand that the district has priority, but I also have priorities within the

community I serve. I also understand that district priorities are higher than the

priorities I have in my community, but there has to be a way, a better way so that

they are both capable. I think the ultimate goal is student achievement, and there

is no doubt in my mind that we can make it happen. But, again, one of the

distractions is often time, the conflict between the district priorities and the

priorities of the building—just finding time to do all of those things. Prioritizing:

making sure that you have your priority in place.

In addition to evaluation tools, school calendars, contracts, and district mandates,

many of the participants also spoke of structure not being in place at both the school sites

and the district level—structures such as teachers not knowing when to call on the

administration for help, being pulled out of the building to attend all-day trainings

(sometimes they were completely ineffective because the trainings were not building on

the instructional leadership role), and lack of communication between the silos.

According to one participant, "There are so many silos at the district level—perhaps

because it is a large district." She continued as follows:

> Therefore, it appears that the departments are not communicating with one
>
> another. So, the same information, sometimes by the same department, is
>
> requested of the principals numerous times during the school year; and it takes
>
> time to respond to their requests....Therefore, instructional leadership duties get
>
> neglected.

Many of the other principals also spoke about the issue regarding mandated

trainings that pulled them out of the building. One of the participants spoke passionately

about the travel aspect of it:

When I go downtown to district headquarters, it is a total of 3 hours because of

the distance and the traffic; whereas, for those whose schools are close, it may

take them only 15 or 20 minutes. Instead of them spending 3 hours out of the

building, they are out of the building for only an hour, it is quick. So, I

sometimes wonder, I sometimes think, and again, I don't have the answers, but

when those meetings are held, sometimes they ought to come to us [as] opposed

to us going to those meetings. We got 18 to 20 schools in my surrounding area;

we can at least host a meeting. With the Powers-to-Be downtown, what message

are they sending? Who are more important—the adults at the main headquarters

or the kids here in the building? So, I don't know—food for thought.

By shifting the unit of analysis from the individual actor or group of actors to

leaders, followers, and situations, Spillane et al. (2004) claimed that investigations of

practice will go beyond documenting lists of strategies that leaders use in their work. A

distributed leadership framework could frame inquiry into leadership activity so that the

distributed leadership perspective will move beyond leaders and teachers' account, thus

developing an integrative understanding of leadership as a practice (Spillane & Kim,

2012). Spillane et al. posited:

Investigating purposeful activity in its "natural habitat" is essential for the study

of human cognition….An individual's cognition cannot be understood merely as a

function of mental capacity because sense making is enabled and (constrained) by

the situation in which it takes place (Resnick, 1991). (pp. 10-11)

The analysis of leadership practice contributes to an understanding of how school leaders interpret, present, and execute their tasks.

Individual and environmental interactions are linked and become essential in developing the framework for studying principals' leadership role in practice. Spillane et al. (2004) instructed, "The research challenge for understanding leadership practice is to reconstruct, through observation and interview, whatever links exist between the macro-functions and micro-tasks of school leadership" (p. 17). As I coded this section, themes continued to collapse (Creswell, 2009), based on the participants' perspectives related to the tools and artifacts adopted and utilized by the district study site. These narrowed themes included the following:

- Less as more; focusing instruction and focusing time;
- Protecting the focus of mission and goals;
- Aligning professional development with mission and goals.

Cultural responsiveness: The voice of the community. Cultural responsiveness is a theme that I was not expecting to emerge as I researched what factors influence the adoption of the instructional leadership role by elementary principals. It is what Creswell (2009) calls a close theme: an unexpected theme that emerges and is not based on the conceptual framework developed in the literature review. As stated earlier, each participant brought to this research a unique leadership style and passion; therefore, the question: How has the demographics of your school site influenced the practice of the instructional leadership role? brought about a variety of views and concerns on the subject. All of the participants spoke about the culturally responsive concept with respect

to the demographics of their schools, each presenting a different perspective and addressing several groups of key players and situations as they shared their concerns.

One of the participants stated that the demographics of a school would not influence how she would lead her school: "It should not matter because of demographics. I am probably more passionate because they are kids of color, but it does not matter and it should not matter." Saying that she would not change how she leads, whether the school was highly impacted or not, she explained, "If I went to a school that is not highly impacted, I would lead the same way because it is about the kids." Building strong relationship with the children, making sure all decisions made by stakeholders are based on what is best for students, and providing the necessary resources for the instructional staff were key elements she felt needed to be in place at all school sites. She emphasized that the principal as an instructional leader must be about instructional coaching by being in the classrooms doing observations and providing immediate feedback. "It is about that instructional piece" she restated. Varying from this perspective, another participant did not see it as simple as that. This principal stated that leading schools in which the demographics were highly impacted often pulled her time away from the instructional leadership role:

> It influenced me greatly in several of the highly impacted schools I worked at, just because at times, there were lots of social and emotional needs of the students that took away from the instruction: students coming to school and they were hungry, students coming to school late, habitually; things that were out of their control that impacted our instructional day.

Both of these participants' schools, however, were staffed differently, although the demographics were similar. The principal who stated it should not matter what the demographics are had a culturally responsive teacher leader who worked with classroom teachers to ensure that they had a clear cultural curriculum that related to the student population. She also hired several restorative justice intervention paraprofessionals to help with kids who needed extra support with behavior. She gave this explanation:

> Sometimes a kid needs to be out of the classroom; so, we go in there and get them; do a little of bit of brain gym, do a little of bit of talking, do a little of bit of coaching; give them some strategies and skills to get them through, as well as it gives the teacher a five minute break.

Unfortunately, the second participant did not have the same support system built into her school: the kind of system that enabled key people to focus on helping the staff build curriculum around culturally sensitive concerns and address severe student behaviors, which many times distract instructional time in the classrooms and often times, pull principals away from the instructional leadership role. And, as stated, the first participant hired several people to address cultural responsiveness concerns and behavior issues.

This brings to mind what two of the participants shared as concerns when they addressed the question regarding the demographics of their schools. These participants spoke particularly about the makeup of their staff versus the makeup of their student population, and the impact it had on the student population. One participant shared these thoughts:

When I look at the staff as it relates to 78% of my kids being black and brown, I worry. I have concerns about the demographic of my staff. The staff does not represent the demographics of my students. The preponderance of my staff is Anglo; so, one of the things that I worry and think about is culturally responsive teaching. I worry about discipline because when you look at the number of suspensions and expulsions, the greater numbers are with my black and brown kids. But, again you expect that, because 78% of my kids are black and brown. But, when you look at the reasons why, I think that our teachers have to be more culturally responsive. They need to make sure that they are engaging kids, that they are using the kids' background knowledge when they are teaching; and they also need to understand what their biases are. I think we all have biases. And, I think we as a staff are not there yet.

This particular participant also spoke of having conversation with the staff about the opportunity and achievement gaps, and how many of his teachers were offended by the subject:

They thought I was talking about them. They took it personally opposed to looking at this as an opportunity to have courageous conversations. So, because of those biases, both implicit and explicit, I think that sometimes we forget that we have high expectations and that we want our black and brown kids to achieve just as much as we want our other kids to achieve. We don't need to dummy it down, we don't need to think that just because 78% of our population receives free and

reduced lunch that our kids can't learn or we think less of them, and that is hard to get across.

The second participant shared concerns based on the socioeconomic status and makeup of her staff as well:

I think about the demographics of my students and my families; and then I think about things like cultural equality—and you know—that is when I think about my staff. How is my staff mirroring the equality piece that has the cultural aspect to it?

When I look at my staff, I see primarily White middle-class people; so when I say to my parents, "This is your school," they look at me as if to say, What do you have in common with me? What do you know about my life and my stressors?

I grew up poor and there were a lot of changes that I understood resulted from being poor; not just because of the demographics though, but in terms of the socioeconomic status of my community. I think of the two as being closely connected. Our school's population, by and large, our families are highly impacted by poverty issues. The grinning killer tears you apart, home-to-home kind of poverty, homelessness. We got all those factors going on and they are looking at us as though to say, "What do you have to offer me?"

So, as a school leader trying to say to my families, "You have a voice here, you have power here, this is your school, we do need to hear from you," sometimes I get a little bit of cynicism in return and possibly, rightfully so. I look

at the makeup of my staff, I look to see, would I as a parent coming into this

school be able to say, "Yea, this is a place where my children and I are going to

be comfortable and belong, as well as contribute to." So, those are the kind of

things, if we want to talk about challenges I feel I am challenged by at this school

as it relates to the demographics.

This second participant spoke extensively about the existence of inequalities and

how important it was for her as a leader to authentically address the issues, particularly as

it related to the school's community. She talked about how growing up poor helped her

relate to too many of the issues the families face in their community. She also shared how

her father's decision to realize his dreams created a different economic status for a family

of six, and how it set each one of her siblings, as well as herself, up for success. She

explained, "I want my parents [the parents in my school] to know that this is their school,

their place; and that we are all working for the same goal." She continued by saying that

the overall goal for the students, from her perspective, was to help them make their

dreams come true, to help them make their life the way they want it to be. And because

the school partners with the community, this principal felt their jobs were to help the

students achieve those possibilities. She also felt cultural responsiveness was one of the

key foundations for building a school community that will help develop academic and

social strength in the students they serve. She stated that over the years, she had read

research that confirmed that if family engagement can be promoted, student success will

soar. So, for this principal, creating those partnerships was really going to create positive

results. "They, the school community, have to understand their social power, their social opportunities, and their potentials," she reiterated.

Both of these participants felt strongly about the social aspect of the school community. Along with sharing how important it was to be culturally responsive, they also shared the importance of helping their students feel safe in their environment, how important it was for their staff to be aware of what influence both student peers and the media have on today's children, and how to teach their students to build a community of kindness among each other.

The demographic of the school and how it impacted the role of the instructional leader, as shared by the last two participants, was discussed in relation to not only race and poverty but also other dynamics that make up the school community: children who come to school with disabilities, children who come to school who are being raised by same gender parents, children whose parents identify them as multiple-race, and children's socioeconomic status across the board. One of the participants shared how she chose to work in this school for that very reason. The makeup of the demographics was so diverse, she felt it gave the students great exposure and opportunity to learn from each other. She gave this explanation:

> Now, I think we are one of the few schools that is left, that still really has a mix of kids. That is why I drove from my city to this one for years. I have a little apartment close to the school because you don't find that much anymore. In most schools, you find all one type of student. The mixing, the integration of the kids in my school—without any particular order to do so; it is sort of naturally

happening, partly because of the boundaries, partly because of choice. I think that

is a good thing.

Working in the school for many years also gave this principal the opportunity to build her

community group with the mindset of representing the student population.

This same participant also spoke about the achievement and opportunity gaps, and

how the data helped the instructional staff identify what students' strong and weak areas

needed to be addressed. One example was related to the overall boys' writing skills being

much lower than the girls' on standardized tests. The instructional staff researched ways

to combat this issue and started putting best practices in place, discussing them at grade-

level meetings, and assessing to determine next steps. This became one of their academic

focuses for the year. "The achievement and opportunity gaps are a national problem,

inequality," she stated. She shared the following thoughts:

Well, I don't think that there is one answer. I think schools are a part of it, but I

also see the bigger society as a part of it. And, that does not mean we should not

take responsibility; we are going to do what we can do because God grant me the

serenity…

So, I think we have a lot of issues. It is not just instructional and

opportunity; it is what kind of an organization are we? How do we present

ourselves as a school? How welcoming are we? How do we not have our own

egocentric view of the world of our own education? Looking at other people's

experiences and valuing them—valuing the kid that babysits for his little sister,

and he is late every day, and we are irritated he is late and yet he is doing the right

thing for his sister, for his family. So, just being more flexible, I think is huge. It

is not just one thing—if it was just one thing, we would do it.

The participants understood clearly the roadblocks that existed within their

school's demographic makeup; also, participants passionately embraced their core values

to guide decisions as to how staff would treat the school community they served.

Participants also purposely stayed with or selected the population they served because

they wanted to make a strong impact on the community within and outside the school

building, ensuring that all stakeholders understood that giving voice to their education

and their dreams should be valued and realized.

To summarize what each participant shared, I conclude with the last participant's

thoughts concerning this subject. It is a powerful statement, inclusive of what each

principal felt regarding what being culturally responsive is all about:

I think as far as racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically, this is probably the

most diverse staff that has ever been. I have people with disabilities, I have

African-Americans, I have Hispanics, I have Whites, I have females, and I have

males. I have the gamut; and the best thing about that is everyone that comes to

this school has someone to look up to. It is my belief that everyone should come

to this school and have someone they can identify with. Everyone should have the

opportunity to learn from people with different ethnicities, and I think that that is

a right, and we in education should not make it such a foreign thing. I have

different experiences that other people may not have, and I can share that, and I

want to learn from other people—their different experiences as well.

It is not only the diversity of race, which I think is very, very important; it is also a diversity of hiring people who are from the community that they serve. We are never going to be an affluence of folks coming out of low socioeconomic situations unless we hire them in the positions to get them to the next level. We are never going to have students seeing that happen if we don't have those people in positions of authority. We have to have that; otherwise, our children don't see it. And our children are smart enough to see when that is not happening. Children are smart enough to see when they are the minority in the building and they have no power. And, there is no movement to be a teacher, or an administrator, or a secretary. So, we have to have diversity on the staff. We cannot have everyone the same. That is not OK. We have to have diversity of thought, mind, and reason.

With all that was discussed and shared regarding the demographics of the schools, the close theme that I identified was cultural responsiveness; and within this particular theme, several themes, previously identified, also continued to reveal themselves:

- Hiring the right people;

- Building capacity.

The following overall theme surfaced in this section of the findings:

- Voice, everyone's voice matters as it relates to the demographic of the school site.

Focus group: Voice matters. Focusing on what the principal has control over was one of the themes not only related to the overall view shared during the discussion of cultural responsiveness as it pertained to the demographic of the school, but also that

influenced the discussion of how the participants oversaw their schools and attended to their practices under the directives of the district study site. As stated earlier, although each school was highly impacted, each had its own uniqueness: serving a large percentage of the homeless population, operating three special education programs in one school, and teaching a large population of second language learners, as well as working in poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Bringing the participants together during the focus group, in which five of the six participated, helped even more through the resultant triangulation process (Creswell, 2009) to explore the guiding research question: What factors influence principals' adoption of the instructional leadership role?

In the context of the focus group, it was the first time throughout the qualitative study that I revealed each individual participant's identity. Because I had retired from the district study site 4 years prior, my assumption was that they would know each other by being affiliated with the study site. As the principals gathered in the meeting room, they began to talk to one another comfortably, sharing what was going on at each school site. It was evident, based on how they related to one another, that they had a mutual respect for each other. As I had informed them in their focus group invitations, I brought with me a hard copy of the individual interview transcript for member-checking purposes. This also gave each person a chance to reflect on what was discussed during the interview. Within 20 minutes of the start time, I welcomed them and explained the purpose of the focus group (see Appendix C). The following four questions were asked of them from the instructional leadership perspective:

1. What practices do you promote at your school site to influence academic success?

2. What practices do you observe your instructional staff developing and implementing to promote academic success?

3. What practices supports the successes of academic achievement and school improvement?

4. What practices negate the success of academic achievement and school improvement?

The answers shared by each participant aligned well with what was shared during the individual interviews, such as using student and school data to guide their decisions—being data driven, using best practices with literacy approaches, aligning professional development with the goals and missions of the schools, preplanning for the school year, and hiring well. Other approaches principals shared regarding school-site instructional staff centered on using the leadership team brainpower to make instructional decisions for what is best for students, building strong leadership teams, and delegating the work load, with the understanding that the job is too big for the principal to do alone. As principals individually shared their practice, agreements followed quickly through gestures and verbal confirmations. These approaches were followed up with such remarks as catalyst for change, being innovative, and being proactive regarding district, state, or federal mandates. The principals shared common attitudes as to how the instructional leadership role took precedence at their school.

Also, what soon became evident among the five principals was the fact that they must take the initiative in their schools to make success happen. The participants shared how the district study site would communicate what the mandates or initiatives were for the school year; however, acting on them might be prolonged for several reasons. Each participant spoke about how he or she must "take the bull by the horns" in order for the students to be prepared for academic success; besides, waiting for the support of the district was not always an option. Therefore, working closely with instructional staff, inspecting what is expected, and providing the resources in the building constituted practices the participants communicated were in their repertoire.

Autonomy to oversee their schools seemed to permeate the room with an air of confidence, as each spoke and validated the practices of the others. However, it did not take long before the conversation changed to not having total autonomy due to what seemed and felt like the district's management techniques. The conversation centered on such questions as: Is site-based management still in place? How much room do principals really have to implement what are best practices for the community they serve? and Is expertise valued? One of the participants, during the individual interview, shared the following story related to such concerns regarding autonomy:

My school purchased literacy books to address the Common Core approach, to the tune of $15,000. In collaboration with the school-site instructional staff, decisions were made based on data from standardized tests and other forms of classroom assessments as to what books would best work with addressing

comprehension strategies. The Parent-Teacher Association, along with other grant support from the community, funded the purchase.

Being proactive by creating a backward planning approach to prepare students with much needed literacy and test skills was our goal. The instructional staff and I were elated! Then all of a sudden, the bubble bust. I shared innocently what had taken place at my school with the instructional leadership superintendent, who was new to the district; the instructional leadership superintendent told me the purchased books should not be a problem. However, once the curriculum department head, who was also new to the district, learned about our school-site decision, the books were confiscated by the district.

Because it took me a while, as the researcher, to process what the principal was telling me, in my mind I asked repeatedly: Who would take books out of the building of a school? The principal continued her story:

Our school was recognized for innovation. We are a Green school, highest rated schools in the state [see Appendix H] and getting high growth. And with us wanting to address the achievement gaps we have not solved yet, however going in the right direction. Why can't we have a little freedom to get some more books in addition to the guided reading books required by the district?

Compliance versus support from the district level was what the principal was questioning, as she pondered quitting. Valuing her expertise and having longevity at the school site were all factors that could have been looked at by the district study site to support the decision a qualified instructional staff made. Instead, she felt hindered and

controlled. And still, in the end, although feeling overwhelmed by the whole ordeal, the principal felt she would be hurting herself, her staff, and her students if she quit. She concluded, "We will just do the best we can and we are going to get over it."

A checklist to ensure compliance as opposed to using a leadership technique of coaching is what the participants lamented as a preference for working with the instructional leader superintendent. One of the participants concurred as follows:

I feel like there is a checklist the district instructional superintendents use to see if we are in compliance. The coaching technique values our professionalism and the dialogue allows for creativity and innovation. The use of the checklist created a feeling of "catching" something not being done [as] opposed to the coaching technique of working toward the goals and mission of the school.

Yes, although I respect and like my instructional leader superintendent, I feel like he shows up far too often. It does not allow enough time for implementation of the goals set in place from his previous visit. Time is a factor for properly getting things in place and allowing the instructional staff to assess and develop next steps of implementations. The instructional superintendent's presence started to become more of a distraction when visiting the school, because taking the time to address the agenda of the instructional leader superintendent opposed to the agenda of the school became the focus.

Next, the question of alignment was discussed: Are the district and the school site in alignment with what needed to happen for the students' academic and social success at each particular school? How is the district helping to address those needs? The principal

who left the district site upon the start of the study, along with the principal who worked in several surrounding districts prior to being employed by the district study site, shared their experiences on what having autonomy felt like. Linking the discussion of alignment of resources to autonomy, the first of these principals provided the following explanation:

In the district I presently work for, my instructional leader superintendent will ask me, upon his visit to the school, what type of support do I need? I initiate the support I want for my school. I don't feel like I am under the semblance of a compliance checklist. I believe my instructional leader superintendent is aware of what is going on in the school and would most likely guide me if there were any concerns. What is different is that the instructional leader superintendent starts the dialogue between the two of us about what support I am seeking as the leader of the school.

Total autonomy is new to me, and sometimes I feel a little anxious about not being led as much by my new district. Therefore, learning how to lead from the approach of me taking the initiative is something I have to learn and develop. For example, being told by the district study site that there will be a scheduled walk-through at my building, opposed to scheduling one myself with colleagues, is a different form of leadership autonomy.

I do, from time to time, feel overwhelmed by this approach, because the guidance is not a directive as was formally. On the other hand, being treated as a professional and being told by my superiors that they feel good about their decision to hire me, opposed to feeling like every step I took was being

scrutinized by the district study site, is encouraging; it makes me want to do better each day just to please them.

The second principal also shared how she had more autonomy in her former district. She then commented, "Oh, I think I have autonomy in this district study site too. However, it just feels like less and less, as time goes by." The other participants in the focus group gestured in agreement. This second principal continued, "And, I just thought that when the district superintendent says, 'Don't wait. Lead,' he meant it." So, as the principal stated during the individual interview, in the case of purchasing books for the school, "I thought the study-site district superintendent would undo it [the decision of the curriculum department]." She mentioned how she was "on the dance floor" (so to speak) asking about the books and how she pressed it as far as she could; also, she shared how she had been in places where it had been a little more personal and how one could go to the superintendent and say the following:

> Hey, I know what I am doing—here is my plan for not totally using guided
>
> reading books. I certainly believe in guided reading; however this is our plan, and
>
> I would like the freedom to be able to do this.

Having said this, the participant then commented:

> These other people don't know me, the people I had to appeal to—none of them
>
> know me...total turnover down there in literacy; the curriculum person is new, the
>
> literacy person is new, and my two bosses are new to me. I think I am on my fifth,
>
> no seventh boss.

Based on her remarks about new bosses, I asked the group if this would also be considered a distraction, an impediment regarding the instructional leadership role. "Yes," she stated as the other participants gestured in agreement, "I feel like it is not knowing or listening. I feel like the principals feel not listened to. We elementary people love instruction for the most part, that is why we are here."

Both of the above-cited principals also stated how there were too many silos in a district the size of the study site, and in comparison, stated that although there is a sense of autonomy in place, the district resources are not as plentiful. This statement instigated the question posed by another participant: "Where is the balance between total autonomy at the school site and support from the district?" He gave the following example:

Having the mission and goals set by the district level helped the development of mission and goals at the school-site level; and having both human and material resources at the district level supported the school site not having to invent or reinvent the wheel.

The other participants agreed by saying that the difference is who initiates what practices need to take place to support academic growth at the site level versus being told by the district what needs to happen. This approach could be used by the district's having a menu of best practices to choose from, thus allowing each school to choose what works best for its school's community. Collaboration with the district would be in the form of allowing the principals to have input, particularly, as stated earlier by one of the participants, "since we are the ones on the frontline!"

The following themes were created from the focus group that mimicked several from the individual interviews and observation sections:

- Leading as the principal - never forget that ultimately the buck stops here;

- Building capacity - using the brain power at the school site.

Several new themes that occurred only from the focus group discussion were as follows:

- Taking the initiative;

- Compliance versus coaching;

- Total autonomy versus shared autonomy.

Overall, the three themes that were collapsed based on redundancy and interpretation included focus, alignment, and voice. Each one of these themes encompass what the participants articulated as key factors that influenced their adoption of the instructional leadership role as elementary principals.

Conclusion

As I worked through the process of interpreting what my six participants were saying through the qualitative triangulation data process (individual interviews, on-site observations, and focus group), what I soon discovered was that descriptor codes emerged multiple times. Looking at the data as a whole through the stories shared by the participants, both individually and collectively, helped me collapse what had been produced through overlaps and redundancy (Creswell, 2009). The overall phrase that was constant throughout the process was, "can't do it alone." This phrase evoked my codable themes: focus, alignment, and voice. Each of these themes worked well within the conceptual framework discussed in the first literature review and grounded my work for

the second literature review in support of my project, which will be incorporated in the presentation of this project in the form of a position paper in Section 3.

The position paper I will introduce in Section 3 is based on my qualitative study and supporting research in the literature. In this position paper, I will first provide the project description and goals, including the project rationale, before I turn to a second review of literature, which supports my project. Next I will present elements of the actual implementation of the project, including the three concepts/themes from my qualitative study that are considered instrumental to both the development and implementation of the proposed policy, followed by a discussion of other key components of implementation. Lastly, I will provide a conclusion.

Section 3: The Project/A Position Paper

Introduction

In Section 1**,** I presented the problem and purpose of my research study, which

provided the foundation and support for my position paper and subsequent project. To

reiterate, although school principals have been charged with overseeing academic

achievement based on state and federal mandates, many elementary school principals in

highly impacted schools in the Denver metropolitan area have focused more on

management than on instructional leadership issues. Yet, research has confirmed that

participating in the two very disconnected roles of manager and instructional leader

hinders principals' ability to effectively achieve the academic and social success of their

students as well as overall school improvement. As indicated in both the literature review

in this first section, and confirmed later in the study's findings, it has become imperative

that the traditional focus of the principal on management issues be shifted to that of

instructional leadership. With this shift in thinking regarding the significance of the

principal's role of instructional leadership, along with recent studies articulating the

support that the instructional leader's role lends to teaching and learning, it is critical that

principals, and particularly principals working in highly impacted schools (those with

demographics of high-minority students living in high-poverty areas), embrace the role of

instructional leader in order to oversee effective instruction and student engagement by

focusing on priorities that are essential for school success. Taking this into consideration,

the purpose of my study, as discussed in Section 1, was to explore how principals can

shift from managing the school to becoming its instructional leader, prompting the

study's guiding research question: What factors influence the adoption of the instructional leadership role of elementary principals? I based this analytical study on theories related to self-efficacy and distributed leadership.

In Section 2, I described how in this qualitative study, I employed an intrinsic case study design involving multiple methods of collecting data, including interviews, a focus group, and observation. The inquiry particular to this research was based on the principal's primary responsibility of facilitating effective teaching and learning. The participants included six elementary school principals who were successful in the instructional leadership role at their individual schools. Data from one-on-one interviews and a focus group were triangulated with observational data and field notes. Based on a data analysis coding process, three core themes emerged: voice, focus, and alignment of resources, together with the unexpected theme of cultural responsiveness. In the latter part of this section, study findings revealed a gap in collaborative efforts between the school-site leaders and the district-level administrator. This gap was based on decisions related to what resources and strategies are considered best for achieving the academic and social success of the students being served at individual school sites. The three core themes that emerged in the study's findings, reflecting constituting elements of the instructional leadership role, provided a basis for my strong recommendation that principals at the school-site level be directly involved with the development of their school-site infrastructure. In turn, these findings also inspired my study-based position paper, which provides the groundwork for developing a school district-level policy

directed toward the building of a school-site infrastructure that supports elementary principals in the role of instructional leader.

In Section 3, I present my project in the form of a position paper, based on study findings and supporting research in the literature. Xavier University Library (2014) stated that "the purpose of a position paper is to generate support on an issue. It describes a position on an issue and the rational for that position" (para.1). Accordingly, I will begin this section with a description of my position paper, including the issue or problem under scrutiny, the goal and rationale of the position paper as a basis for the policy being recommended to address the issue, and the supporting research for my position and recommendation. Next I will present a literature review in support of the project, covering the salient topics of formulation, considerations for policy implementation, professional development and training, and management of change. Following this I will provide a brief description of the basic elements of policy implementation specific to this position paper. First, I will describe the three themes of voice, focus, and alignment of resources, which directly address the policy's purpose regarding an infrastructure conducive to the instructional leadership role, as well as the need for a collaborative approach amongst key stakeholders. I will then describe other components of policy implementation specific to this project, including potential resources and existing support, a potential barrier, a suggested time line, my roles and responsibilities related to the project, its justification and the overall goal, key stakeholders, and social change at the local level. Finally, I will provide a conclusion. Overall, this position paper recommendation is in direct alignment with one of the district study-site goals: to have

great leaders and great schools throughout every sector of the district study site. In this position paper, the proposed project—development of a district-level policy—seeks to support such efforts.

Project Description and Goals

The goal of this project was to provide the groundwork for development of a school district-level policy directed toward the building of a school-site infrastructure that supports elementary principals, particularly those in highly impacted schools, in the role of instructional leader. My analysis of data, gathered from the research study and supporting literature, will be used to inform key district-level stakeholders (a) how principals define their role as an instructional leader, (b) what support principals need to implement the role of an instructional leader, and (c) what resources principals require to accomplish the instructional leadership role effectively. Informed by the project, the recommended policy that I set forth in this position paper must also be the product of strong collaborative efforts among the key stakeholders as they develop the individual school-site infrastructures conducive to the academic and social success of their students. The collaborative team of key stakeholders includes the elementary chief academic officer, the instructional superintendents, and the school-site principals. Moreover, in this policy-directed effort, it is of primary importance that the principals be given the power to assume an authoritative role in the decision-making process at their own school sites. Furthermore, based on analysis of project data, the policy must stipulate that the school district invest in ongoing professional development and training that incorporate effective and strategic tools for leading and managing change.

Project Rationale

I designed this project to inform and guide district-level stakeholders in the development of a policy supporting the collaborative building of a school-site infrastructure that enables elementary principals to use the instructional leadership role effectively. In so doing, the project directly addresses the problem, present in many schools, that elementary principals do not have the necessary infrastructure in place to allow them to assume the instructional leadership role—a role educators and researchers have deemed instrumental to students' academic and social success. As the researcher, I chose to use the position paper because it articulates the true stories of elementary principals in highly impacted schools—the participants—based on their everyday professional leadership experiences, and so, provides the key district-level stakeholders— the targeted audience—understanding and first-hand substance to work with.

Because this project was not the evaluation of a program, the data collected and researched in the study were not intended for evaluative purposes. Rather, the findings, which addressed the study's research question, revealed three salient themes: voice, alignment of resources, and focus. I used each of these themes in the project to provide the groundwork needed by the policy makers in terms of an understanding of what the instructional leadership role entails and what perspectives, resources, and tools are required for the building of individual school-site infrastructures that support principals in assuming that role successfully. In the end, informed by the study's findings, it is hoped that this project will serve the district-level stakeholders, in close collaboration

with the individual principals, as a guide to the development of a policy that addresses the problem set forth in this positon paper.

Literature Review in Support of the Project

The contextualization of this literature review in support of the project incorporates some work from the first literature review, which was framed by theories related to self-efficacy, distributed leadership, and the principal-agent problem, along with data gathered during the qualitative data process. In addition, in this second literature review, I infuse the resiliency leadership theory, particularly as it relates to thriving and culturally responsive awareness, to support the concept of how leaders work within the construct of their everyday existence and in support of my guiding research question: What factors influence the adoption of the instructional leadership role by elementary principals? As emphasized earlier, it was Spillane et al.'s (2004) observation that although school-level conditions, new leadership roles, and new organizational structures contribute to instructional innovation, what is most essential is how leadership practice is carried out on a daily basis. This second literature review and the findings of my research study are used in my position paper to share with the district study site what the participants (elementary school principals) believed they did and needed in order to successfully implement the instructional leadership role.

In conducting this project-related comprehensive literature review with the intent to reach saturation, I searched the EBSCO data base, using the Walden University Library databases and the Google Scholars search engine. I used the following terms relevant to my project position paper for my search, while utilizing the Boolean

Operators: *principals as instructional leaders, instructional leadership, policy, managing change,* and *reform.* I used databases that were considered the best avenue for locating scholarly peer-reviewed journals in the field of education and within the 5-year time period of my dissertation completion date with Walden University, such as Education Research Complete, ERIC, SAGE Journals*,* and Academic Search Complete. Each database provided not only recent research studies but also historical information regarding reform and polices related to elementary principals as instructional leaders as well as to their practices.

These literature review strategies were based on the following project goal: to provide the groundwork for a school district-level policy directed toward the building of school-site infrastructure that supports elementary principals, particularly those in highly impacted schools, in the role of instructional leader. More specifically, in this project, I propose that key stakeholders, both at the district level and school-site level, develop and adopt a policy that will empower and guide the principals as instructional leaders. In this literature review, I will provide a critical, interconnected analysis of how theory and research complement and support the study's findings and their implications for (a) policy formulation, including attention to the three emergent themes and need for collaboration; (b) policy implementation; (c) the importance of professional development and training; and (d) the management of change.

Policy Formulation

For the purposes of this project, policy formulation refers to the *wha*t that is contained in the policy. Accordingly, policy formulation spells out in detail the items and

stipulations that are deemed necessary to address the policy's goals—its reason for being. Although such specific content is beyond the scope of this literature review, the inclusion of two important components to be included in the policy—the study's three themes that directly address the policy's purpose and a collaborative approach—are discussed in the following subsections.

Three salient themes. The mission and goals created for school success are crucial and take concentrated effort and commitment on the part of the instructional staff (DuFour, 2015). One size does not fit all, and although the demographics may look similar, close assessment of the needs of individual schools may result in seeking different resources to support the growth of the students and staff at each site. The three themes that emerged in this qualitative study in support of the instructional leadership role were voice, alignment, and focus, clearly emphasizing the significance to policy development of each concept as an integral component of the infrastructure of the individual school site. As such, each of these themes, intertwined with one another, has been shown in the literature to be a critical factor in the development of a successful school environment (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Shun-Wing & Szeto, 2015).

Having infused these three themes within the project as groundwork for policy development, I suggest that (a) the *voice* of the principal is vital in the process of developing the infrastructure because it is the principal at the school site who is actively listening to the views of the stakeholders and collecting data on a daily basis that speaks to what is best for the community at large; (b) the *alignment* of resources in the form of curriculum and instruction and human resources is a necessary component of the

infrastructure and must be supported by the use of school-site data collection and the instructional staff's expertise; and (c) the efforts to *focus* on the instructional day must be in the form of protecting the time of the instructional day.

        Policy emphasis on collaboration. Recent researchers have given credence in support of the instructional leadership role and its duties, citing that policy makers and district stakeholders must work collaboratively with designated school leaders for the mission and goals of their work to be realized (DuFour, 2015; Shun-Wing & Szeto, 2015). It has been found that when principals as instructional leaders practiced collaboration with key stakeholders, teachers improved instruction and students' academic achievement showed increased results (Fullan, 2001; Fuller & Young, 2009; Glanz, Shulman, & Sullivan, 2007). Researchers have also reported that:

> collaborative-based change is effective at the school-site level, [and] most other
>
> countries that are more successful [than the United States] have a different
>
> approach in which accountability is much more tied to developing capacity and
>
> self and group responsibility at the level of implementation. (Fullan, Rincon-
>
> Gallardo, & Hargreaves, 2015, p. 3)

However, Shun-Wing and Szeto (2015) shared that district and state policy makers were hesitant in some districts to relinquish control over curriculum and instruction at the centralized level, creating a significant barrier to instructional leadership management at the school-site level. At the same time, principals felt that their autonomy in overseeing their school site had eroded, creating limitations as instructional leader at their school,

which in essence contradicted their ability to promote student achievement at their individual school sites (Shun-Wing & Szeto, 2015).

More and more, from the perspective of accrediting agencies, consortiums, and educational boards, the expectation that the principal lead the school as an instructional leader is taking precedence over that of primarily managing things, thus leading learning communities to facilitate change (Drake & Roe, 2003; Gray & Lewis, 2013; Hoy & Hoy, 2009; Rooney, 2000). In regard to such change, the principals in this study indicated that they sought not only voice in terms of a collaborative form of leadership style from district stakeholders but also the acknowledgement and support of these key stakeholders in efforts toward alignment and focus within their school-site communities (Hancock, Hary, & Muller, 2012; Mitgang & Gill, 2012). Educators and researchers have agreed that it is no longer a question of whether instructional leadership matters, but rather that of how to train, place, and support effective leaders, particularly in struggling districts and schools (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013). Based on the above discussion, to accomplish this necessitates a collaborative decision-making approach that involves both the district and school-site stakeholders.

Considerations for Policy Implementation

The educational institute is unique in that its primary purpose is to produce the country's future. The process in which this can be realized is, first and foremost, producing an educational system that is both healthy and viable (Sack, 2015). Policy formulation, planning, and management are central to this creation. Sack (2015) suggested that to help advocate for new educational visions, policies should be based on

the broadest support, together with rationale, knowledge-based planning, and management. As such, these policies should constitute the intentions of a legitimate decision-making body that has the authority and resources to orient, guide, and organize the educational system (DuFour, 2015).

To reiterate, the purpose of the educational policy informed by this project is to support the principals' role as instructional leader through the development and establishment of individual school-site infrastructure conducive to the academic and social success of their students. For the purposes of this project, *implementation* refers to *how* to accomplish the *what* of policy formulation. Relevant to such implementation, Sack (2015) recommended the consideration of several salient factors: (a) capable management of the policy, (b) competent planning toward its successful implementation, and (c) close assessment of the work being applied.

Careful attention to the various aspects of management of the policy is central to its implementation but often gets lost in the policy-makers' focus on policy formulation (Washington State Human Resources, 2012). One major emphasis of this project-informed policy that supports the principal as instructional leader is the successful implementation of the services expected of the school's instructional staff. As with other priorities of the policy, to accomplish this, it is crucial that the district stakeholders and school-site principals manifest capable management and competent planning.

The management of policy covers a host of activities that bring knowledge to the task of governing the schools, complemented by the educational system to which the educational stakeholders belong. Findings from this study, which have been confirmed by

recent research (Hancock et al., 2012), have provided such knowledge—knowledge that in turn has been used by the project to inform school governance as it relates to policy development and implementation. For example, principals in the study sought out not only a collaborative form of leadership style with the district stakeholders, but also the district's acknowledgement as well as their support toward efforts of alignment and focus within the school-site communities. Acknowledgment of the principals' professionalism and their capacity to know what is best for their school-site community would embrace a collaborative approach, thus encouraging growth and support from the district level (Mitgang & Gill, 2012). In light of this "knowledge" gained from the study's findings and support from the research literature, this project has highly recommended that the principals be given voice, that is, be empowered by the district study site to assume such governing authority. Along with gaining the district's acknowledgement, receiving support for their efforts regarding alignment and focus was **s**een by the principals as instrumental in increasing their ability to successfully take on the instructional leadership role. And of major importance, professional development and training constitute another component in capable policy management toward successful policy implementation. Professional development and training are essential to the realization of the policy's goals.

Under the umbrella of policy management, planning is the second key factor recommended above by Sack (2015). This author asserted that planning is a vital activity of management that requires particular consideration in policy implementation. Planning

application, stated in the policy, is seen as a collection of tools designed for the allocation of resources—human, financial, and physical (Sack, 2015).

Assessment constitutes the third key factor to be taken into account in regard to successful policy implementation (Sack, 2015). As the district-level policy regarding the instructional role of elementary principals is being developed, an assessment tool that guides and supports the effectiveness of this endeavor—although beyond the scope of this project—is equally important. It has recently been established that leadership assessment systems should be designed to enhance performance as well as ensure accountability (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Cho & Lewis, 2012). As such, they constitute an integral part of the support necessary to help school leaders develop the skills and behaviors that promote learning for all students (Louis et al., 2010). Although this purpose is applicable to the project-informed policy in general, the particular intent of the assessment tool to be used in the policy's implementation process is to guide and direct the successful working plans of the infrastructure. Overall, in order to get the policy right, implementation, including management as well as planning and assessment, depends on the ability, capacity, knowledge, resources, and willingness to get the work done.

Professional Development and Training

For the policy to have a significant impact on the conception of the school-site infrastructure, professional development and training for the principals as instructional leaders must be infused in the process. When the concept of principals as instructional leaders was first introduced in the 1980s, principals were thought to be charismatic

leaders who singularly and heroically brought direction, control, and revitalization to the school; researchers now know that such natural leaders were far and few between (Elmore, 2000; Shun-Wing & Szeto, 2015). With the more recent heightened emphasis on principals' being effective instructional leaders, created by their newfound responsibilities and higher profile of accountability, professional development of their craft is a necessity and clearly must accommodate more than just a 1-day session (Schachter, 2013). It must take place over an extended period of time and enable principals "to apply what they have learned and grow with it" (Connolly as cited in Schachter, 2013, p. 55).

At the school level, planned change must begin in the principal's office (Broin, 2015; DuFour, 2015; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fullan, 2014). Therefore, it is essential that principals as instructional leaders make more effective the skills they already have plus develop new skills that will be needed to oversee the academic and social success of their students. Specific to this project, because the groundwork for this policy development continues to be based on the three emergent themes of voice, alignment, and focus, the professional development and training of principals as instructional leaders toward building an infrastructure must carefully align with the skills and training necessary to acquire and implement these three concepts.

Beyond the importance of such skills, aligning professional development and training with a newly created infrastructure entails theoretical considerations. Empirical research on distributed leadership theory, reinforcing that within any organization there are numerous sources of influence, has placed considerable focus on "the leadership plus

aspect of leadership work" (Spillane, 2006, p. 3). Harris (2011) communicated that "purposeful or planned leadership distribution is more likely to impact positively on school development and change…[and] cannot take place without the principal" (p. 10). Harris also stated that principals actively and purposefully restructure, reformulate, and redesign leadership practice so that it is more widely distributed. Thus, moving from the bureaucratic to the collaborative structure, this also means "the development of new skills and a new repertoire of approaches" (Harris, 2011, p. 8) for all stakeholders involved.

In this regard, it is well recognized in the literature that along with the principals, the district administrators and school-site instructional staff are all contributors to creating success for schools (DuFour, 2015; Hallinger, 2011; Lashway, 2002). The participants in this study also embraced this concept of distributed leadership. They believed that the job is too big to do alone and had seen positive results based on collaborating with what they called the "brainpower" at the school site. Therefore, as Harris (2012) posited, "because principals occupy the critical space required to make distributed leadership a reality in schools, it is imperative that they, as instructional leaders, develop leadership capacity and the capability of others" (p. 8). Ongoing professional development and training represent an integral part of this imperative.

Management of Change

Managing change in any organization is a deliberate imperative in today's global environment, and the educational institutions have not been immune to the change process. Unfortunately, in the pursuit of change, sometimes motivation in organizations is based on managers and leaders' seeking higher levels of status and power, as well as

urgently and impatiently following the latest change-oriented trend (Worley & Vick, 2005). In contrast, the collaborative team targeted in this project—the school-site principals and the district-level stakeholders—must be purposeful and reliable in terms of the specific goals related to the planned change because they are empowered to make critical decisions regarding school improvement (DuFour, 2015; Elmore, 2000; Spillane & Kim, 2012).

Leading and managing change well represents an ongoing and continuous endeavor that "assures alignment of an organization's strategies, structures, and processes" (Worley &Vick, 2005, p. 2)**.** For this reason, the policy supported by this project should act as an initiative in innovating and managing change, as individualized school-site infrastructures are being developed and established (Worley & Vick, 2005). More specifically**,** the policy must subscribe to developing an understanding within the collaborative team of how to manage change. Managing change is about the culture of the organization's shared beliefs, which in turn is created as the team learns how to establish values and practices that they will ultimately pass on to other members. (DuFour, 2015; Worley & Vick, 2005). According to Anderson (2011), "You rarely change behaviors in an organization, measurably, or sustainably, by changing its vision. Rather, you change behaviors in an organization by changing the culture" (p. 150). Thus, managing change is essentially centered on the two primary concepts of values and practices (Worley & Vick, 2005). According to Washington State Human Resources (2012), "Values inform people how to perceive events, analyze new information, and emotionally react to new situations" (p. 1).

Practices are the tangible things experienced, seen, heard, and felt in an organization and usually include "programs, policies and procedures, roles and responsibilities, and forms and other documents" (Washington State Human Resources, 2012, p. 1). As to development of the proposed policy in this project, the process of managing change begins with the identified district stakeholders and the school-site leaders, and then proceeds to become diffused throughout the individual school-site communities. Researchers on change management have stated that "leaders often create new programs or policies without attempting to change the underlying beliefs, [the values and practices] that guide individual choices" (Washington State Human Resources, 2012, p. 1). This often causes lack of support and at worst, the finding of a way to undermine it. Change must take a whole-systems thinking that views "all parts of the organization [as] connected directly or indirectly" (Worley & Vick, 2005, p. 2). So, as the three themes of voice, alignments, and focus are integrated throughout development of the policy, as discussed earlier, it is essential that policy makers also keep at the forefront the imperative that effective change requires leaders to help staff process through it.

Addressing the project goal of providing the groundwork for development of the policy under consideration, below I recommend six basic principles suggested by Worley and Vick (2005) and a seventh principle suggested by these authors, as well as by Bartoletti and Connelly (2013) and DuFour (2015), as prerequisites in effecting successful change:

1. "Change should only be pursued in the context of a clear goal….Change for change's sake is a recipe for failure. The notion of 'If it's not *broke* (emphasis

added), break it and improve anyway' is a waste of scarce and valuable resources" (Worley & Vick, 2005, p. 4).

2. The team should find ways that "build on past success to meet the challenges of the [individual school's] future" (Worley & Vick, 2005, p. 3).

3. Involvement in change "breeds commitment....Involving people in change decisions provides improved estimates of time tables, expectations, and commitment" (Worley & Vick, 2005, p. 5).

4. Change requires good background information: "Commission a task force of people across the organization to study the organization's existing structure and recommend alternatives" (Worley & Vick, 2005, p. 5).

5. "Change involves time and the opportunity to learn. So, don't expect performance improvement too quickly" (Worley & Vick, 2005, p. 4). "The relationship between change and performance is not instantaneous....There is no such thing as instantaneous transformation" (Worley & Vick, 2005, p. 3).

6. "Change must align with and support [the proposed] strategy" (Worley & Vick, 2005, p. 5). It is imperative that stakeholders envisioning change make certain that the proposed strategy is understood by the instructional staff. Furthermore, it is essential that the principal, with consistency, "communicate the proposed change within the context of [the school's] needs so that [the instructional staff] will see a connection between their personal effort and the impact of their effort" (Worley & Vick, 2005, p. 5) on the academic and social success of their students.

7. The change process requires time for the key stakeholders to pause from

    doing the work related to the planned change to reflect on how it is going,

    what has been learned in the implementation of change, and how things can

    be done differently in the future (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; DuFour, 2015;

    Worley & Vick, 2005).

And finally, Worley and Vick (2005) warned that "implementing change poorly is

often worse than not implementing change at all" (p. 2). They concluded that the way

change occurs is just as important as change itself; real change effort "results in increased

capacity to face change in the future" (p. 5). Importantly, involvement of the instructional

leaders—the principals—in the decision making and design of a new organizational

structure (their school-site infrastructure) is instrumental in their having a better

understanding of how to manage the process of change.

Implementation

Key to project implementation, placing emphasis on the notion that the role of

instructional leader is crucial to the success of a principal, Becker and Smith (2011)

explained, "The role of the school principal can influence the culture of the school

environment and the way that staff members, students, and parents successfully interact

with one another" (p. 1). As viewed by this position paper, the three influential factors of

voice, focus, and alignment of resources represent components that need to be in place in

the development of an infrastructure conducive to the principals' assuming the role of

instructional leader at each individual school site. The work involved in making this

happen must take place in the form of a dialogue, not a monologue: The district-level

superintendent must work collaboratively with school-site principals to address what is best needed at their individual school site in support of their students' academic and social success, along with overall school improvement.

In the following section, these three critical components are introduced, and in Appendix A, tables corresponding to each of them, respectively, communicate what support, distractions, and researchers' findings are viewed as impacting the instructional leadership role. Following this description is a brief discussion of potential resources and existing support, potential barriers, and a time line, as well as my roles and responsibilities as researcher and project developer, the project's justification and overall goal, key stakeholders, and social change at the local level.

The Three Concepts

Voice: A dialogue, not a monologue. Inclusion of the voice of the principal is vital to the process of developing the school-site infrastructure recommended in the proposed policy (see Table A1), because it is the voice that is heard throughout the day and recognized as to how the school needs to operate in order to create success for all stakeholders involved. It is also the principal at the school site who is actively listening to the voices of the stakeholders, collecting data daily that speak to what is best for the community at large. The stakeholders at the school site include not only the students whom the staff serve, but also the staff who serve the students. Anderson (2011) observed, "What one person can do is finite, but what a team can accomplish together has no limits" (p. 140). Anderson also shared three true measures of leaders: (a) "the ability

to get work done through others," (b) "their ability...to make their team less dependent on them," and (c) "how well the team perform in the absence of their leaders" (p. 140).

Focus: Protection of instructional time. The efforts to focus on the instructional day (see Table A2) must be supported by the district in the form of protecting the time of the instructional day. The mission and goals of the school are crucial and require concentrated effort and commitment on the part of the instructional staff (DuFour, 2015). In the study informing this project and subsequent policy, the participants articulated two key factors that supported their ability to keep their instructional staff focused at the school site: (a) collaboration among the instructional stakeholders and (b) the building of capacity by providing the instructional staff with the necessary support and training to follow through with the agreed upon mission and goals of the school.

Alignment of resources: Systems and structures. The alignment of resources (see Table A3), through the use of data and the school-site instructional staff's expertise on what works best for their students, must be strongly considered and supported by the school-district instructional superintendent. One size does not fit all; although the demographics may look similar, close assessment of the needs may result in seeking different resources to support the growth of the students and staff at each individual school site.

Potential Resources and Existing Support

The elementary chief academic officer and the elementary district instructional superintendents will receive this position paper, which charts what the study participants

collectively perceived as key factors that supported and distracted them from implementing the instructional leadership role and the duties related to it. It should be noted here that in each of the three tables shown in Appendix A, the third column presents recent research findings, including my own, in support of the federal, state, and local policies that address the importance of the school-site principal instructional leadership role.

Since the start of this qualitative research, the district study site has received funding from the Wallace Foundation, which has presented its findings and is conducting ongoing research regarding principals as instructional leaders. The Wallace Foundation funding has enabled the district to hire additional instructional superintendents, thus creating additional support for principals at each school site. The district has also adopted a principal evaluation tool that supports an approach to ensure individualized professional development and continuous development of leadership skills. Moreover, the district study site has created a plan that aligns well with recent research to seek the principals' input as to what will best serve their schools' community. Two of the directives in the plan, which are already in place, are as follow:

[a] Empower schools through flexible, school-based decision making, including the use of resources, and [b] provide schools with opportunities to innovate and create environments that best meet the academic and social/emotional needs of their students, including expansion of personalized learning environments.

Potential Barrier

The potential barrier to this project is that the principals and their communities

will not be allowed full participation in the development of an infrastructure that clearly

supports their ability to effectively assume the instructional leadership role, and in turn,

one that promotes continuous academic and social improvement at their individual school

site. The self-efficacy of each principal, as the instructional leader in the school—novice

or experienced—to lead effectively requires consistent and positive support from the

district level. It is essential that the principals be an inclusive part of the decision-making

process as it pertains to the schools they oversee.

Time Line

The implementation of this project-informed policy needs to occur annually as the

needs of each school in highly impacted areas are addressed for the upcoming school

year. The proposed 2017–2018 school schedule allows for ongoing dialogue regarding

both the assessment and implementation process. The following two bulleted directives,

derived from the district study-site plan mentioned above, will guide the entire process**:**

- "Empower schools through flexible, school-based decision making, including
  the use of resources";
- "Provide schools with opportunities to innovate and create environments that
  best meet the academic and social/emotional needs of their students, including
  expansion of personalized learning environments."

The proposed time line for 2017–2018, presented below, reflects my suggested

schedule as researcher and project developer regarding the recommended steps to be

taken toward realization of this project, and ultimately, the goal of policy implementation and assessment:

March 2017:

- Share my research findings with key stakeholders who are in a position to support the development of a policy in support of the instructional leadership role;

- Discuss the overall plan (school-site infrastructure) with key stakeholders: the elementary district chief academic officer and elementary district instructional superintendents;

- Select school-site principals to participate in a collaborative decision-making process to develop an infrastructure that will not only empower them as instructional leaders, but also meet the academic and social/emotional needs of the students being served at their school site.

April 2017:

- Discuss the overall plan (school-site infrastructure) with selected school-site principals;

- Schedule the initial meeting: instructional superintendent and respective school-site principal to discuss plans and begin the development process (formal and informal data to guide the discussion);

- Schedule additional meetings as needed to continue and complete development of the overall plan for building the school-site infrastructure.

May 2017:

- Discuss the overall plan (school-site infrastructure) with school-site instructional staff. Gather additional information to support the proposed infrastructure.

June–July 2017

- Begin the preparation process for carrying out the overall plan at the individual schools (resources and staff development process).

August 2017–March 2018:

- Begin the implementation and assessment process;

- Schedule ongoing meetings (school-site principal and district superintendent) to discuss the progress and results; create next steps to sustain and/or improve on the infrastructure.

April 2018:

- Discuss and develop infrastructure plans for the upcoming 2018-2019 school year.

Roles and Responsibilities

As the researcher and project developer, I will be the person communicating the results of my research. My proposed stance is for principals as instructional leaders to be fully involved in the decision-making process, working collaboratively with key district stakeholders in the development of an infrastructure at their designated school site, the purpose of which will be to enable the principals to fully assume the instructional leadership role, and in doing so, be empowered to create and sustain a successful academic and social environment for their students. Once the findings in my literature

review and case study results have been shared and the district study site confirms an interest in developing a policy, I will offer my services as a consultant in the development of the policy, implementation process, and ongoing assessment of the work.

Justification

To reiterate, a dialogue, not a monologue amongst the school-site principals and the district-level superintendents is needed to create an infrastructure that is conducive to the principals' assuming the role of instructional leader at each individual school, and in turn, the academic and social growth of the students. Louis et al. (2010) established that "school districts are able to influence teaching and learning…through the contributions they make in the positive feelings of efficacy on the part of school principals" (p. 15), which indirectly supports the principals' efficacy beliefs that enable them to "persist in school-improvement projects" (p. 15).

Limitation of the principals' autonomy to manage their school contradicts their ability to promote student achievement at their individual school (Shun-Wing & Szeto, 2015). Brezicha, Bergmark, and Mitra (2015) posited that to effectively lead "a complex and dynamic system requires leaders who understand and respect how individuals [of the instructional staff] make sense of their work, while working within the context of their social environment and boundaries of the school setting" (p. 124). Therefore, the principals and district-level stakeholders must work collaboratively to make decisions on what is best for the community being served.

Overall Goal

The overall goal of this project is to support the principals' ability to enact the instructional leadership role. But equally important, this overall goal is to allow school-site elementary principals, particularly in highly impacted areas, to be fully involved in creating an infrastructure that accomplishes this goal at their school. The purpose for empowering this position—the principal in the instructional leadership role—is to support the academic and social growth of the students and the overall improvement of the school, subsequently increasing the number of students achieving at the proficient and above-proficient levels within highly impacted schools and throughout the district study site.

Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders involved in the proposed policy's development, implementation, and assessment include the selected elementary school principals, the respective district instructional superintendents, and the elementary chief academic officer. The primary recipients of this project are the elementary school principals working in highly impacted schools. My goal is the development of a policy that will allow their full involvement in creating an infrastructure conducive to their ability to effectively assume the role of instructional leader, a role considered critical to the academic and social success of the students at their individual school sites. To see this goal realized, the implementation and assessment of this project must also include the district instructional superintendents and the elementary chief academic officer.

Social Change at the Local Level

Social change at the local level, initiated by this study, will be the result of the assurance that elementary principals, in the role of instructional leaders at their individual school site, are directly involved with creating and sustaining an infrastructure conducive to the academic and social success of their students, particularly in highly impacted schools. This change will therefore reflect the principals' increased autonomy in overseeing the academic and social growth of their students. The change process must be embedded in the district policy and implemented and assessed throughout the school year to ensure continuous growth. In the end, social change at the local level will be based on two outcomes: (a) the assurance that there are great schools in every area of the district, and (b) an increase in the number of students succeeding at the proficient and above-proficient level within the highly-impacted schools.

<div align="center">**Conclusion**</div>

The findings of my qualitative study as well as recent research strongly support the basic premise of this position paper and proposed project: the need for principals, as instructional leaders, to take more of an autonomous role in developing an infrastructure at their individual school site conducive to both the academic and social growth of the students they serve. Researchers (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Shun-Wing & Szeto, 2015) have qualified this charge by stating three key factors: (a) There can be no good schools without good principals; (b) "school-site leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013, p. 3); and (c) "school-level leadership is most

productive when couched within a supportive and consistent district-level leadership that sets the vision and expectations but is willing to step back and take the risk of allowing the principal...to lead with some autonomy" (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013, p. 6). Within my own case study, three themes were constant in support of the instructional leadership role toward realization of the school's success. These themes included voice, focus, and alignment of resources; furthermore, intertwined with these three concepts, close attention to cultural responsiveness was encouraged to guide the process.

Although the significance of each of the above factors and themes may appear obvious to both the professional and the layman, it is the implementation and ongoing assessment of the concepts that need to be realized in order for schools in highly impacted areas to reach their full potential of creating an environment conducive to the academic and social growth of their students. Therefore, it is recommended that a policy be in place at the district level to direct the dialogue and creation of an infrastructure that, while supporting the principals in their role as instructional leader, produces the outcome of addressing the needs of each school-site community and the overall district goal of educating the students served.

In Section 4, I will present my reflections and conclusions with respect to the information I have provided above in my position paper. In brief form, I will provide my thoughts on implementing the project, including its strengths, limitations, and recommendations. I will then describe my roles in this project as scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Following, I will analyze first leadership and change, then the project's potential impact on social change. To end my reflections, I will discuss

implications of the study and project and its application. And finally, I will provide an overall conclusion to this research-based effort and resultant project, presented as a position paper.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

My primary purpose for pursuing a doctorate degree stemmed from a professional observation of many years. I was perplexed by the amount of time many elementary principals, particularly in highly impacted schools, were spending on management issues as opposed to the instructional leadership role. As I began searching for the answers, my first inclination was to interview principals who were leading the schools in which many of their students were failing both academically and socially. These principals were by no means less educated, dedicated, or passionate about their position to lead. In fact, it might be fair to say that they worked harder and put in more time than the average principal. Later, I concluded that the answers might be found with the principals who created a successful academic and social environment within schools that appeared to have the same type of demographic. By means of synthesizing the data I collected, I was able to develop a project that I believed would enable more elementary principals to create success for all those involved in the school community they serve.

In the following section, I present my reflections on implementation of the project, which include a brief discussion of its strengths, potential limitation, and my recommendations. I then reflect on my various roles relevant to the project and analyze the strong connection between leadership and change. I also give my thoughts on the project's potential impact on social change. Before providing a conclusion, I point to the implications and application of the project, which relate to the need for a district-level policy that will articulate and guide the school-site principals' full participation in the development of an infrastructure that will best meet the needs of their school community.

Project Implementation

I developed the project implementation to assist elementary principals in being fully involved with creating an infrastructure that best meets the needs of the school community they serve. The purpose of the project was to guide the creation of a policy that provides for the building of an infrastructure at the school site that supports the principals in the role of instructional leader, toward the larger goal of better preparing their students both academically and socially for success. This project, designed to be an annual event, consists of a collaborative effort between the key district stakeholders and the school-site principals. Aligning with the project implementation purpose, the district study site has currently created a 2020 plan that includes the following guidelines: "[a] Empower schools through flexible, school-based decision making, including the use of resources, and [b] provide schools with opportunities to innovate and create environments that best meet the academic and social needs of their students" (p. 7). Both statements, in turn, will be used to guide the project process.

Project Strength

The strength of this study-based project is that it provides the opportunity for key stakeholders at the district level to create a policy that will ensure full participation from school-site principals working in highly impacted schools. This recommended policy will empower and support school-based, decision-making processes and provide schools with opportunities to innovate and create environments that best meet the academic and social needs of their students. Support for the recommended policy is twofold: First, the recent research in the literature has stated that principals as instructional leaders play a vital role

in influencing school improvement, particularly in highly impacted schools, confirming

that it is their operational procedures that directly support the academic and social growth

of the students and instructional staff. Secondly, the district study-site's recent plan for

2020 articulates the importance of empowering flexible, school-based decision making

that allows increased autonomy at the school-site level. Accordingly, it is crucial that the

work related to policy development and implementation be a collaborative effort amongst

key stakeholders. The principals' voice must also be heard, so they must be given a

strong voice. Moreover, the district-level and school-site leaders must create an

alignment of resources and strategies that both focus and protect daily instructional time.

Project Limitations

A possible limitation of this project and its implementation would most likely not

be found in the recommended policy itself, but rather, a result of the constant change of

administration due to the excessive turnover rate, which is currently happening in areas of

the district study site where improvement is needed the most. Often, along with change in

administration comes change in the infrastructure of the school. Studies have suggested

that student achievement dips following a transition period and sometimes takes 2 to 3

years to recover (Matlach, 2015); multiply these recovery years by the statistic that

schools have, on average, three principals within 5 years.

Implicating the principal as the one who takes the fall when school improvement

is not showing progress in a short period of time, the "can't do it alone" statement voiced

by the principals participating in this study is real, replacing the "knight in shining

armor" and "Lone Ranger" concepts. Another limitation could hinder the success of the

project if the building of the infrastructure does not take into account what research has stated as instrumental in supporting the development and sustainability of schools. District key stakeholders must be fully engaged in supporting the instructional leader position at the school site.

Recommendations

Addressed by this project, a central recommendation of mine in this study requires the district stakeholders' support of the school-site elementary principals as fully involved in developing an infrastructure that enables them to effectively assume the position of instructional leader, and in turn, promotes the teaching and learning environment of the school they are charged to oversee. Of critical importance but not included in the scope of this project is also my recommendation that an assessment tool be developed that will initiate the development and accountability process among key stakeholders, who in this case are the elementary chief academic officer, the instructional superintendent(s), and the school-site principal(s). The purpose of the assessment tool would be to assist in the growth of the work being implemented. Communication will be the key to successfully developing policies that lead to useful procedures that accurately support such recommendations. A further recommendation is the development of a policy addressing the administration's excessive turnover rate, a potential limitation to this study project, mentioned above. A preliminary requirement of this recommendation is the creation of a task force of key stakeholders to explore the complex factors involved and suggest subsequent strategies for amelioration of the problem.

Analysis of the Researcher as Scholar, Practitioner, and Project Developer

What I learned in the process of preparing and conducting this research study varied from one section of the project study to another. Preparing for the first section of this study required reflecting on the *why* of my wanting to pursue my research topic. I knew right away *what* I wanted to research, supported by ongoing reflection of my professional and personal experience in the field of education. I then understood the why—my passion for the research topic. Passion for the topic is what motivated me and kept me moving forward on a very difficult journey of writing and pursuing my doctoral degree in education.

My attention to details required learning the mechanical steps of putting the work together. I connected with key people in several departments at Walden (library, research, and the writing center) as I learned how to navigate the support systems embedded in the university. The people in each department guided and supported my efforts to gather, sort, and organize much-needed data. Available resource tools, such as writing templates, Grammarly software, webinars, and Microsoft Powerpoint presentations were also accessible at the university to aid in my work.

Writing at a scholarly level meant understanding the logistics of the American Psychological Association writing rules and guidelines, as well as giving full attention to the writing process of developing drafts, editing, and revising before submitting the work to my chair for review. Written communication is invaluable but time consuming. It requires receiving feedback; therefore, building relationships with colleagues, friends, and family to receive constructive feedback was time consuming. Yet, I discovered early

on in this journey that I would need the support of others. At a local university, I joined a group of women who were working on their dissertations. This helped me persevere and develop the momentum it took to do the work required.

My favorite part of the whole process was working with the study participants: listening to their stories of success and struggles, spending time observing them at their designated sites, and having them share their subordinate stories collectively during a focus group. Each one of these modes stirred my passion once again as to why I wanted to do the qualitative case study. Interpreting and analyzing the data took prior skills learned from my formal education and the work I performed as a teacher and administrator, together with my new learning in pursuit of my doctoral degree at Walden University. My chair was instrumental in my learning as she communicated with me through both e-mails and phone conferences. She also gave me resources whenever I reached out to her for direction.

The study project itself provided the legitimacy for my qualitative case study, and the literature review validated the application of its findings. Through my work as a researcher, particularly as I engaged in the qualitative case study while combing through the literature review and communicating what I perceived as the local problem, I experienced the evolution of my thinking and understanding of the instructional leadership role, the professional learning community, and the work of distributed leadership—each component presently manifest at the core of the educational culture. As the extant research continues to support the principal as one of the primary stakeholders who influence the academic and social success of the students, I hope this study project

will be a validation of such findings and provide ongoing support for principals as instructional leaders.

Working on my doctoral degree took enormous time and effort—the experience, both invaluable and demanding. And, if I were asked, "Would you do it all over again?" the answer would be, "Absolutely!" The process has created the scholar in me as well as supported my growth as a practitioner and project developer. Overall, this work has taught me to be patient with myself and others, because through this work, I have learned to appreciate the best that each of us, as educators, has to offer. To me, that is what education is all about.

Analysis of Leadership and Change

This project is about change concerning a local problem and finding answers to solve the problem. As the researcher, I set out to understand why some principals at the elementary level were successful at implementing the role of instructional leader, while spending less time working on management issues. Many principals, using the duties of the instructional leadership role, saw results of academic success and school improvement materialize. On the other hand, principals who spent most of their days on management issues witnessed their school in constant flux, yielding unsatisfactory results for the students they served. Throughout the study, both the participants and recent researchers identified key factors within the infrastructure of the schools that led to principals' success, factors such as their strong sense of professional self-efficacy, their ability to focus on instructional practices, and the alignment of resources based on the mission and goals of the school.

Unfortunately, there are schools not experiencing successes. What must be realized is an increase in the number of students experiencing academic success and overall improvement, particularly in highly impacted areas. The broader goal of this study was to have great leaders and schools in all sectors of the district. With this is mind, it is imperative that the change proposed in this study-based project take place through the empowerment of the school-site leader, the elementary principal. The implication is that principals must participate fully in the development of their school-site infrastructure. The targeted key stakeholders to support this endeavor are at the district level. The building of a successful infrastructure, with the needs of the school community as its focus, must take place as a joint effort between the school-site leaders, their instructional superintendents, and the elementary chief academic officer. The purpose of this study-based project is to develop a policy that will articulate and support this collaborative effort. The development of great schools must begin with the development of great leaders.

Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

The project's potential impact on social change is to produce great instructional leaders in every school within the district study site, the targeted areas being in schools where support is needed most. The avenue to reach this goal, from the project perspective, is to empower school-site leaders as effective instructional leaders to be fully involved in creating an infrastructure conducive to the academic and social success of their students. Great schools begin with great leaders; yet recent research has reported that principals are experiencing less autonomy to make crucial decisions that would

impact school improvement at their individual school site. Conversely, empirical studies have shown a strong connection in overall school improvement when school-site leaders are supported positively by district-level stakeholders, particularly as it relates to supporting flexible decision-making efforts at the school-site level. Hence, the potential policy impact on social change is infused with, and dependent upon, a strong collaborative effort between key district stakeholders and school-site leaders in the development of an infrastructure that supports the principals' ability to assume the instructional leadership role, and in turn, provides whatever resources are needed to best serve the school community they are charged to oversee. The ultimate recipients of this change will be the school community, particularly as it relates to the students' academic and social success.

Implications

The primary implication of this study and this project is that principals must participate fully in the development of their school-site infrastructure. The research presented in this doctoral study validates what many educational theorists have been saying over the past three decades. To create schools conducive to excellence in teaching and learning, key factors, such as principals' voice, focus, and the alignment of resources must be put into practice. Interwoven with these three concepts, attention to cultural responsiveness in terms of students' learning being connected to an educational mission that is infused with strong, positive racial identities is paramount. The study participants' conclusive statement of "can't do it alone," brought meaning to each of the study's three

major concepts, as they shared how they were able to influence their students' academic and social success.

This research also revealed the importance of having principals, as instructional leaders, fully involved in the development of their designated school infrastructure. To reiterate, recent research has indicated a decrease in autonomy felt by many principals in the governing of their schools. Lack of support from the district level, new and various initiatives, and the distraction of having to meet the needs of many contingency groups often contributed to principals' inability to make critical school-site decisions. However, research has confirmed that it is the daily work and practices of principals and the positive support from the district level that are producing school improvement throughout the nation (Broin, 2015; DuFour, 2015; Fullan, 2014). The implication, supported by this study, is the need for a district-level policy that will articulate and guide the school-site principals' full participation in the development of an infrastructure that will best meet the needs of their school community.

Application

The application of this study-based project starts with the development of a district policy—one that empowers principals in terms of both role and autonomy to be fully invested in overseeing their individual school's needs. The project aligns well with one of the district's overall goals of having great schools in all areas of the district, with the emphasis of placing great leaders in each school. An initial goal of the project is to propel the research study's recommendations and the above-mentioned district goal into action. If implemented, the project-based policy will create a catalyst for change at the

local level, not only by ensuring incorporation in the school infrastructure of the three key factors of voice, focus, and alignment, but also by creating a collaborative effort with two stakeholders—the school-site principals and their instructional superintendent—as essential to the entire process.

Conclusion

My doctoral work and study project were motivated by what I, as a practitioner, perceived to be a local problem within the district study site. Some elementary school principals in the Denver metropolitan area were focusing more on management than instructional leadership issues, although school principals have been charged with overseeing academic achievement based on state and federal standards, as required in the NCLB legislation of 2002. I wanted to know what influenced principals' ability to adopt the instructional leadership role and what key factors supported the growth of their schools. Throughout this study, the participants as well as scholars in the recent literature associated key factors within the infrastructure of the schools with the principals' success, factors such as the principal's strong sense of professional self-efficacy, the ability to focus on instructional practices, and the alignment of resources based on the school's mission and goals. Unfortunately, there were schools not experiencing this success.

As indicated earlier, recent research has indicated a decrease in the autonomy felt by many principals in the governing of their school. The lack of support from the district level, new and various initiatives, and the distraction of having to meet the needs of many contingency groups have interfered with the principal's ability to make critical school-

site decisions. However, research also confirmed that it is the daily work and practices of principals as instructional leaders, combined with the positive support from the district level, that are producing school improvement throughout the nation (Broin, 2015; DuFour, 2015; Fullan, 2014). The goal to be realized by the district study site and this study-based project is an increase in the number of students experiencing academic success and the overall improvement of schools, particularly those in highly impacted areas. As stated earlier, the overall goal is to have great leaders and great schools in all sectors of the district. Therefore, I am suggesting in this study that local change take place through the empowerment of the school-site leader, the elementary principal. The implication is that principals must participate fully in the development of their school-site infrastructure. The targeted key stakeholders to support this endeavor are at the district level.

The purpose of this study-based project was to assist the district study site in the development of a policy that will articulate and support this collaborative effort. My case study findings, along with the literature review for this project, provide guiding information in support of full involvement of the principals as instructional leaders in creating an infrastructure that will best meet the needs of the students they serve. The study project itself provides the legitimacy that will validate the application of its findings. As the research continues to support the principal as one of the primary stakeholders who influence the academic and social success of the students, I hope this project study will serve as a validation of these research findings and provide ongoing

support for principals as instructional leaders. The development of great schools must

begin with the vision and development of great leaders.

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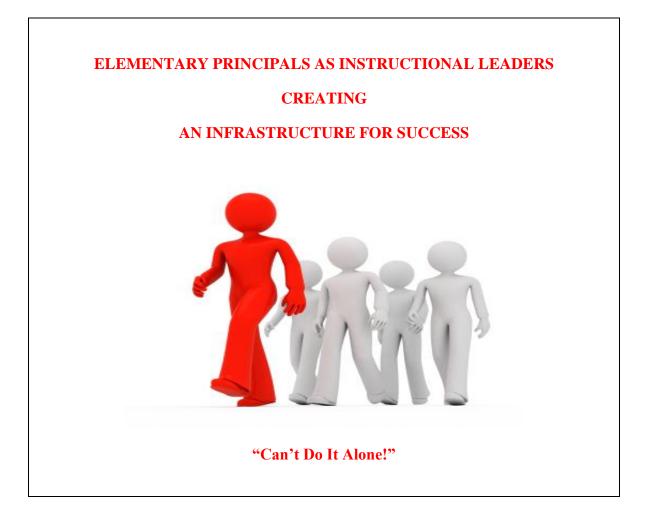
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Appendix A: The Project Study

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

CREATING

AN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SUCCESS

"Can't Do It Alone!"

Walden Doctoral Student: Lolita A. Rockette
Project: A Policy
2017

Abstract

The primary purpose of this project, as a policy recommendation, is to acknowledge that school leadership matters, particularly regarding the instructional leadership role. The principals play a vital role in nurturing and promoting the culture of the school and are charged with continuous personal/professional growth and improved instructional practices. This project, presented as a position paper, was motivated because many principals, especially in highly impacted schools, were more focused on their role as manager than on that of instructional leader. These two very disconnected roles are responsible for principals' excessive work week but also hindering their ability to effectively achieve the academic and social success of their students and overall school improvement. The qualitative study supporting this project was framed in self-efficacy and distributed leadership theories and asked: What factors influence the adoption of the instructional leadership role of elementary principals? in order to explore how principals can shift from managing the school to becoming its instructional leader and can elicit the support that will inspire change. The study found three themes related to adopting the leadership role: voice, focus, and alignment of resources, intertwined with the theme of cultural responsiveness, which together with supporting research, served as the basis for the position paper and, in turn, the project. This project provides the groundwork for developing a district-level policy directed toward building a school-site infrastructure that supports principals in the role of instructional leader. Its potential impact on social change at the local level is to produce great instructional leaders in every school, thus creating great schools throughout the district study site.

Table of Contents

The Project Study: Elementary Principals as
Instructional Leaders Creating an Infrastructure for Success

Executive Summary

This project, presented in the form of a position paper, originated from the researcher's observation that many principals in highly impacted schools must spend more time on management issues as opposed to instructional leadership duties, even though school principals have been charged with overseeing academic achievement based on state and federal mandates. Therefore, the primary purpose of the research study supporting this project was to explore how principals can shift from managing the school to becoming its instructional leader, prompting the study's guiding research question: What factors influence the adoption of the instructional leadership role by elementary principals? Study findings revealed three key factors, representing the core themes of voice, focus, and alignment of resources as well as the unexpected theme of cultural responsiveness, which together served as the basis for this position paper.

The purpose of a position paper is to convince a targeted audience of a particular position held on an issue of interest. This is accomplished by generating support for the stance taken on that issue, which includes a discussion of the issue, the position taken, and the rationale behind it. Accordingly, in this position paper, I argue for a project that provides the groundwork for developing a recommended district-level policy directed toward the building of a school-site infrastructure that supports elementary principals in the role of instructional leader. The intended audience of this position paper and subsequent project consists of the elementary chief academic officer, instructional superintendents, and school-site principals.

More specifically, I discuss the issue (principals as instructional leaders as opposed to school managers) and provide a description of, and rationale for the project—the development of a policy—recommended to address this issue. In the literature review, I present a critical, interconnected analysis of how theory and research not only support the findings of the study that informed this project, but also the project itself, including the position of developing the recommended district-level policy. In this context, I discuss the following policy-related components: (a) policy formulation, emphasizing the study findings' three emergent themes of voice, focus, and alignment of resources, as well as the critical need for collaboration; (b) policy implementation; (c) the importance of professional development and training; and (d) the management of change. I then focus on implications and recommendations regarding implementation of the recommended policy, which include suggested action steps and a time line. In conclusion, I suggest practical implementation strategies and support for the recommended policy in the form of three tables. Each table, highlighting one of the research study's three core themes—voice, focus, and alignment of resources—upon which the recommended policy is based, communicates what support, distractions, and research findings have been identified as having an impact on the adoption by elementary principals of the instructional leadership role.

Background of Existing Problem

My doctoral research work and subsequent project were motivated by what I, as a practitioner, perceived to be a local problem within the district study site. Many elementary school principals in the Denver metropolitan area, particularly in highly

impacted schools, were focusing more on management than on instructional leadership issues, despite the fact that school principals have been charged with overseeing academic achievement based on state and federal standards as required in the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2002. I wanted to know what influenced the principal's ability to adopt the instructional leadership role as well as what key factors supported the growth of their schools, hence the impetus for my research study and resultant project, with its policy recommendation. Throughout the study that supported this project, the participants and recent researchers associated key factors within the infrastructure of the schools that lead to its success, factors such as (a) the principal's strong sense of professional self-efficacy, (b) the ability to focus on instructional practices, and (c) the alignment of resources based on the agreed upon mission and goals. Unfortunately, there were schools not experiencing this success.

An analysis of research regarding principals as instructional leaders and explicit research related to what researchers are now calling the contemporary role of the school-site leader indicates principals' full participation in the creation of an infrastructure that best serves the students at their individual school sites. The study that informed this project and its policy recommendation has shown a gap in collaborative efforts between the school-site leaders and the district-level administrator. The gap is based on decisions related to what resources are best for the academic and social success of the students being served at individual school sites. The charge is to develop a policy at the district level that will both articulate and guide the process for key stakeholders to build the infrastructure conducive to teaching and learning. The primary key stakeholders are the

school-site principals in the role of instructional leader and their instructional

superintendents.

Nevertheless, recent research has indicated a decrease in autonomy felt by many

principals in the governing of their school. The lack of support from the district level,

new and various initiatives, along with demands to meet the needs of many contingency

groups have contributed to the principal's inability to make school-site decisions (Elliott

& Clifford, 2014). On the other hand, research has also confirmed that it is the daily work

and practices of principals as instructional leaders and the positive support from the

district level that are producing school improvement throughout the nation (Broin, 2015;

DuFour, 2015; Fullan, 2014).

What must be accomplished by the district study site and this project-informed

policy recommendation is an increase in the number of students experiencing academic

success as well as overall school improvement, particularly in highly impacted areas. The

broader goal is to have great leaders and schools in all sectors of the district. With this is

mind, it is imperative that the change proposed in this study-based project take place

through the empowerment of the school-site leader, the elementary principal. The

implication is that principals must participate fully in the development of their school-site

infrastructure—one that supports their efforts as instructional leader. The building of a

successful infrastructure, with the needs of the school community as its focus, must take

place as a joint effort. In addition to the school-site principals, the targeted key

stakeholders to support this endeavor are at the district level: the elementary chief

academic officer and instructional superintendents. This project is designed to assist the

district study site in the development of a policy that will articulate and support this collaborative effort. The study-based project itself provides the legitimacy that will validate the application of its findings. As the research continues to support the principals as one of the primary stakeholders who influence the academic and social success of the students, I hope this study project will serve as a validation of these research findings and provide ongoing support for principals as instructional leaders. The evolution of great schools must begin with the vision and development of great leaders.

Purpose and Rationale

The general purpose of this proposed project, as a policy recommendation, is to inform key district-level stakeholders (a) how principals define their role as an instructional leader, (b) what support principals need to implement the role of an instructional leader, and (c) what resources principals require to accomplish the instructional leadership role effectively. The specific intent of the project itself is to encourage and guide key stakeholders in developing a district-level policy directed toward building a school-site infrastructure that supports elementary principals in the role of instructional leader. This recommended policy would, in turn, support the academic and social success of the students served and subsequently increase the number of students succeeding within the district as well.

Study Findings and Research Literature in Support of the Project

Findings from my research study, in conjunction with other empirical research, provide critical support for this proposed project. In doing so, the groundwork is laid for developing a policy at the district level directed toward the building of a school-site

infrastructure that supports elementary principals in the role of instructional leader. The

following review of the literature, combined with key themes that emerged from the

study's findings, is presented below in support of the policy recommended to the key

stakeholders.

Policy Formulation

For the purposes of this project, policy formulation refers to the *what* that is

contained in the policy. Accordingly, it spells out in detail the items and stipulations that

are deemed necessary to address the policy's goals—its reason for being. Although such

specific content is beyond the scope of this literature review, the inclusion of two

important components to be included in the policy—the study's three themes that directly

address the policy's purpose, and the use of a collaborative approach—are discussed

below.

Three salient themes. The mission and goals created for school success are

crucial and take concentrated effort and commitment on the part of the instructional staff

(DuFour, 2015). One size does not fit all, and although the demographics may look

similar, close assessment of the needs of individual schools may result in seeking

different resources to support the growth of the students and staff at each site. The three

themes that emerged in the qualitative study underpinning this project, in support of the

instructional leadership role, were voice, alignment, and focus, clearly emphasizing the

significance to policy development of each concept as an integral component of the

infrastructure of the individual school site. As such, each of these themes, intertwined

with one another, has been shown in the literature to be a significant influence in the

progression of a successful school environment (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Shun-Wing & Szeto, 2015). Infused within the project as groundwork for policy development, these three themes suggest that (a) the *voice* of the principal is vital in the process of developing the infrastructure because it is the principal at the school site who is actively listening to the views of the stakeholders, collecting data daily that speaks to what is best for the community at large; (b) the *alignment* of resources, in the form of curriculum and instruction, as well as human resources, is a necessary component of the infrastructure and must be supported by the use of school-site data collection and the instructional staff's expertise; and (c) the efforts to *focus* on the instructional day must be in the form of protecting the time of the instructional day.

Policy emphasis on collaboration. Recent researchers have given credence in support of the instructional leadership role and its duties, citing that policy makers and district stakeholders must work collaboratively with designated school leaders for the mission and goals of their work to be realized (DuFour, 2015; Shun-Wing & Szeto, 2015). It has been found that when principals as instructional leaders practiced collaboration with key stakeholders, teachers improved instruction and students' academic achievement showed increased results (Fullan, 2001; Fuller & Young, 2009; Glantz, Shulman, & Sullivan, 2007). Researchers have also reported that "collaborative-based change is effective at the school-site level. The evidence is clear…that current systems of external accountability in the U.S. are not producing increased student performance" (Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo, & Hargreaves, 2015, p. 3). Fullan et al. (2015) also stated that "most other countries that are more successful have a different approach

in which accountability is much more tied to developing capacity and self and group

responsibility at the level of implementation" (p. 3). This approach was previously called

"decision-making decentralized" (Glantz et al., 2007). However, Shun-Wing and Szeto

(2015) shared that district and state policy makers were hesitant in some districts to

relinquish control over curriculum and instruction at the centralized level, creating a

significant barrier to instructional leadership management at the school-site level. At the

same time, principals felt that their autonomy in overseeing their school site had eroded,

creating limitations as instructional leader at their school, which in essence contradicted

their ability to promote student achievement at their individual school sites (Shun-Wing

& Szeto, 2015).

More and more, from the perspective of accrediting agencies, consortiums, and

educational boards, the expectation that the principal lead the school as an instructional

leader is taking precedence over that of primarily managing things, thus providing the

impetus for learning communities to facilitate change (Drake & Roe, 2003; Gray &

Lewis, 2013; Hoy & Hoy, 2009; Rooney, 2000). In regard to such change, the principals

in the study that informed this project indicated that they sought not only voice in terms

of a collaborative form of leadership style from district stakeholders but also the

acknowledgement and support of these key stakeholders in efforts toward alignment of

resources and focus within their school-site communities (Hancock, Hary, & Muller,

2012; Mitgang & Gill, 2012). Educators and researchers have agreed that it is no longer a

question of whether instructional leadership matters, but rather that of how to train, place,

and support effective leaders, particularly in struggling districts and schools (Bartoletti &

Connelly, 2013). Based on the above discussion, to accomplish this necessitates a collaborative decision-making approach that involves both the district and school-site stakeholders: the elementary chief academic officer, instructional superintendents, and school-site principals.

Considerations for Policy Implementation

The educational institute is unique in that its primary purpose is to produce the country's future. The process in which this can be realized involves, first and foremost, producing an educational system that is both healthy and viable (Sack, 2015). Policy formulation, planning, and management are central to this creation. Sack (2015) suggested that to help advocate for new educational visions, policies should be based on the broadest support, together with rationale, knowledge-based planning, and management. As such, these policies should constitute the intentions of a legitimate decision-making body that has the authority and resources to orient, guide, and organize the educational system (DuFour, 2015).

To reiterate, the purpose of the educational policy recommended in this project is to support the principals' role as instructional leader through the development and establishment of individual school-site infrastructure conducive to the academic and social success of their students. In relation to this project, *implementation* refers to *how* to accomplish the *what* of policy formulation. Relevant to such implementation, Sack (2015) advised the consideration of several salient factors: (a) capable management of the policy, (b) competent planning toward its successful implementation, and (c) close assessment of the work being applied.

Careful attention to the various aspects of management of the policy is central to its implementation but often gets lost in the policy makers' focus on policy formulation (Washington State Human Resources, 2012). One major emphasis of this project-recommended policy that supports the principal as instructional leader is the successful implementation of the services expected of the school's instructional staff. As with other priorities of the policy, to accomplish this, it is crucial that the district stakeholders and school-site principals manifest capable management and competent planning.

The management of policy covers a host of activities that bring knowledge to the task of governing the schools, complemented by the educational system to which the educational stakeholders belong. Findings from the study upon which this project was based, which have been confirmed by recent research (Hancock et al., 2012), have provided such knowledge—knowledge that in turn has been used by the project to inform school governance as it relates to policy development and implementation. For example, principals in the study sought out not only a collaborative form of leadership style with the district stakeholders (the elementary chief academic officer and instructional superintendents), but also the district's acknowledgement and their support toward efforts of alignment and focus within the school-site communities. Such acknowledgment of the principals' professionalism and their capacity to know what is best for their school-site community would embrace a collaborative approach, thus encouraging growth and support from the district level (Mitgang & Gill, 2012). In light of this "knowledge" gained from the study's findings and research literature, a key element of the policy

recommended by me in this project is that the principals be given voice, that is, be empowered by the district study site to assume such governing authority.

Along with gaining acknowledgement from the district, receiving support for their efforts regarding alignment and focus was seen by the principals in the study as instrumental in increasing their ability to successfully take on the instructional leadership role. Moreover, professional development and training constitute another component in capable policy management toward successful policy implementation. Thus, it is essential that professional development and training be included in the realization of the recommended policy's goals.

Under the umbrella of policy management, planning is the second key factor recommended above by Sack (2015). This is a vital activity of management that requires particular consideration in policy implementation (Sack, 2015). Planning application, as stated in the policy, is seen as a collection of tools designed for the allocation of resources—human, financial, and physical.

Assessment constitutes the third key factor to be taken into account in regard to successful policy implementation (Anderson, 2011; Sack, 2015). As the recommended district-level policy regarding support for the instructional role of elementary principals is being developed, an assessment tool that guides and supports the effectiveness of this endeavor is equally important. It has recently been established that leadership assessment systems should be designed to enhance performance as well as ensure accountability (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Cho & Lewis, 2012). As such, they constitute an integral part of the support necessary to aid school principals in the development of behaviors and

skills that promote learning for all students (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Although its purpose is applicable to the project-informed policy in general, the particular intent of the assessment tool to be used in the recommended policy's implementation process is to guide and direct the successful working plans of the infrastructure. In the end, however, in order to get the policy right, implementation, including management as well as planning and assessment, depends on the ability, capacity, knowledge, resources, and willingness to get the work done.

Professional Development and Training

For the recommended policy to have a significant impact on the conception of the school-site infrastructure, professional development and training for the principals as instructional leaders must be infused in the process, as mentioned above. When the concept of principals as instructional leaders was first introduced in the 1980s, principals were thought to be charismatic leaders who singularly and heroically brought direction, control, and revitalization to the school; researchers now know that such natural leaders were few and far between (Elmore, 2000; Shun-Wing & Szeto, 2015). With the more recent heightened emphasis on principals' being effective instructional leaders, created by their newfound responsibilities and higher profile of accountability, professional development of their craft is a necessity and clearly must accommodate more than just a 1-day session (Schachter, 2013). It must take place over an extended period of time and allow principals to apply what they have learned and grow with it.

At the school level, planned change must begin in the principal's office (Broin, 2015; DuFour, 2015; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fullan, 2014). With this in mind, the

foci of professional development and training constitute an important consideration. It is essential that principals as instructional leaders make more effective the skills they already have, plus develop the new skills needed to oversee the academic and social success of their students. In regard to this project, because the groundwork for the development of the recommended policy continues to be infused with the three themes of voice, alignment of resources, and focus, the professional development and training of principals as instructional leaders toward building an infrastructure must carefully align with the skills and training necessary to acquire and implement these three concepts.

Beyond the importance of such skills, aligning professional development and training with a newly created infrastructure entails theoretical considerations. Empirical research on distributed leadership theory, confirming that within any organization there are many sources of influence, has focused on the "leadership plus aspect of leadership work" (Spillane, 2006, p. 3). In this regard, it is well recognized in the literature that along with the principals, the district administrators and school-site instructional staff are all contributors to creating success for schools (DuFour, 2015; Hallinger, 2011; Lashway, 2002). Participants in the study that informed this project also embraced this concept of distributed leadership. They believed that the job is too big to do alone and had seen positive results based on collaborating with what they called the "brainpower" at the school site. Thus, because principals occupy the critical space required to make distributed leadership a reality in schools, it is imperative that they, as instructional leaders, develop "leadership capacity and the capability of others" (Harris, 2012, p. 8).

Ongoing professional development and training represent an integral part of this imperative.

Management of Change

Managing change in any organization is a critical and purposeful strategy in the global environment of today (Worley & Vick, 2005), and the educational institutions have not been immune to the change process. Unfortunately, in the pursuit of change, motivation in organizations is sometimes based on managers and leaders' seeking higher levels of status and power, as well as urgently and impatiently following the latest change-oriented trend (Worley & Vick, 2005). In contrast, the collaborative team targeted in this project—the school-site principals and the district-level stakeholders (the elementary chief academic officer and instructional superintendents)—must be purposeful and reliable in terms of the specific goals related to the planned change, because they are empowered to make critical decisions regarding school improvement (DuFour, 2015; Elmore, 2000; Spillane & Kim, 2012).

Leading and managing change well represents an ongoing and continuous endeavor that "assures alignment of an organization's strategies, structures, and processes" (Worley &Vick, 2005, p. 2). For this reason, the recommended policy supported by this project should act as an initiative in innovating and managing change, as individualized school-site infrastructures are being developed and established (Worley & Vick, 2005). More specifically, the recommended policy must subscribe to developing an understanding within the collaborative team of how to manage change.

Managing change is about the culture of the organization's shared beliefs, which in turn is created as the team learns how to establish values and practices that they will ultimately pass on to other members. (DuFour, 2015; Worley & Vick, 2005). Thus, managing change is essentially centered on the two primary concepts of values and practices (Worley & Vick, 2005). According to Washington State Human Resources (2012), "Values inform people how to perceive events, analyze new information, and emotionally react to new situations" (p. 1), whereas practices in an organization represent tangible things that are experienced, seen, heard, and felt, and usually include "programs, policies and procedures, roles and responsibilities, and forms and other documents" (p. 1). As to development of the recommended policy proposed in this project, the process of managing change begins with the identified district stakeholders and the school-site leaders, and then proceeds to become diffused throughout the individual school-site communities.

Researchers on change management have stated that "leaders often create new programs or policies without attempting to change the underlying beliefs, [the values and practices] that guide individual choices" (Washington State Human Resources, 2012, p. 1). This often causes lack of support and at worst, the finding of a way to undermine the proposed change. Change must reflect "whole-systems thinking in recognition that all parts of the organization are connected directly or indirectly" (Worley & Vick, 2005, p. 2). So, as the three themes of voice, alignment, and focus are integrated throughout development of the recommended policy, as discussed earlier, it is essential that policy

makers also keep at the forefront the imperative that effective change requires leaders to help staff process through it.

Addressing the project goal of providing the groundwork for development of the policy that I have recommended, the following fundamental and sound principles have been suggested by Worley and Vick (2005) as prerequisites for successful change to occur:

- Change should only be undertaken "in the context of a clear goal….Change for change's sake is a recipe for failure. The notion of 'If it's not *broke* [emphasis added], break it and improve anyway' is a waste of scarce and valuable resources" (p. 4). Therefore, the team would need to find ways that "build on past success to meet the challenges of the [individual school's] future" (p. 3).

- Change involvement breeds commitment. "Involving people in change decisions provides improved estimates of time tables, expectations, and commitment….[To accomplish this], commission a task force of people across the organization to study the organization's existing structure and to recommend alternatives" (p. 5).

- Change requires "time and the opportunity to learn….So, don't expect performance improvement too quickly. The relationship between change and performance is not instantaneous" (p. 4); there is no such thing as immediate transformation.

Also regarding prerequisites for successful change, Bartoletti and Connelly (2013),

DuFour (2015), and Worley and Vicks (2005) suggested these principles:

- Change must align with and support the plan. Stakeholders envisioning
  change must be sure that the instructional staff understands the strategy.
  Therefore, in a consistent manner, the principal must present to the
  instructional staff an understanding of the proposed change as it relates to the
  needs of the school, so they can see how their personal efforts are connected
  to the impact of those efforts on the academic and social success of their
  students.

- The change process requires time for the key stakeholders to pause from doing
  the work related to the planned change to reflect on how it is going, what has
  been learned in the implementation of change, and how things can be done
  differently in the future.

In the final analysis, "implementing change poorly is often worse than not

implementing change at all" (Worley & Vick, 2005, p. 2). Therefore, the *way* change

occurs is just as important as change itself (Worley & Vick, 2005). Real change effort

"results in increased capacity to face change in the future" (p. 6). Importantly,

involvement of the instructional leaders—the principals—in the decision making and

design of a new organizational structure (their school-site infrastructure) is instrumental

to their having a better understanding of the way in which the process of change is

managed.

Implications and Recommendation

The primary implication of the study that informed this project is that principals must participate fully in the development of their school-site infrastructure. Research presented in the doctoral study underpinning this project validates what many educational theorists have been saying over the past three decades. To create schools conducive to excellence in teaching and learning, key factors, such as voice, focus, and alignment of resources must be put into practice. The study participants' conclusive statement, "can't do it alone," brought meaning to each of the three major concepts, as they shared how they were able to influence their students' academic and social success. And finally, interwoven with these three concepts is the theme of cultural responsiveness. Based on the study's findings, it is essential that attention be directed to cultural responsiveness in terms of students' learning being connected to an educational mission that is infused with strong, positive racial identities.

This project, as a basis for the policy recommendation, also revealed the importance of having principals, in the role of instructional leader, fully involved in the development of their designated school infrastructure. The implication, supported by this research, propelled the project's recommendation: the need for a district-level policy that will articulate and guide the school-site principals' full participation in the development of an infrastructure that supports them in the role of instructional leader—an infrastructure that will, in turn, best meet the needs of their school community.

It is critical that the implementation phase of the recommended policy occur annually, as the needs of each school in highly impacted areas are addressed for the

upcoming school year. The proposed 2017–2018 school schedule allows for ongoing

dialogue regarding both assessment of the policy and the implementation process, thus

supporting the continuous growth of the infrastructure. The two bulleted statements

below, based on the district study-site plan, will help guide the process from the district

study-site position:

- Empower schools through flexible, school-based decision making, including

  the use of resources;

- Provide schools with opportunities to innovate and create environments that

  best meet the academic and social/emotional needs of their students, including

  expansion of personalized learning environments.

Action Steps and Time Line: Proposed 2017-2018 School Schedule

Policy Development: Creation of the Elementary School-Site's Infrastructure	
May 2017	Present project findings to the elementary chief academic officer and elementary instructional superintendents. Discuss the overall plan to empower the elementary principals to create an infrastructure supporting their role as instructional leader at their designated school site that will best serve their students' academic and social needs.
June 2017	Submit the superintendent's report to the School Board of Directors and ask for a 1-year task force led by the elementary chief academic officer and elementary instructional superintendents to develop the recommended policy in support of elementary principals in highly impacted schools to create an infrastructure supporting their role as instructional leader that will best serve their students' academic and social needs. Note: The task force consists of a legitimate decision-making body that has the authority and resources to orient, guide, and organize the educational system.
July 2017	Task force convened and approved by the School Board.
August 2017	Present overall plan and select school-site principals to participate in a collaborative decision-making process to develop an infrastructure that will meet the academic and social needs of the students being served at their school site. (Suggestion: For the first year, select a comfortable number of principals to pilot the implementation and assessment process of the project-based policy). Create a calendar to establish meeting twice a month for the development of the policy.

September 2017	Meeting 1: Review literature related to the development of the policy. Tables A1, A2, and A3 regarding the three themes that emerged from the research findings will guide the process (voice, alignment, and focus). Meeting 2: Review literature related to components and resources necessary for the development of the policy in support of elementary principals as instructional leaders, in highly impacted schools, to create an infrastructure that will best serve their students' academic and social needs, including professional development and training.
October 2017	Meeting 3: Policy developers utilize the literature review components from the study and the district's study-site plan related to both the empowerment of schools through flexible, school-based decision making and providing schools with opportunities to innovate and create environments that best meet the academic and social needs of their students. Meeting 4: Policy developers write the first draft of the policy by utilizing policy language and study literature, with attention to core factors or themes from the study that informed this project and its policy recommendation (refer to Tables A1, A2, and A3), as well as professional development and training, and the management of change concepts.
November 2017	Meeting 5: Policy developers review policy draft and revise (if necessary) to prepare document for School Board approval. Meeting 6: Policy developers write the first draft and revise (if necessary) to prepare documents for School Board approval.
December 2017	Meeting 7: Task force presents policy to School Board for approval. School Board makes recommendations to the task force and determines whether to move forward with task force recommendations.
January 2018	Meeting 8: Task force works with designated department heads to create procedures and secure funding for the implementation and assessment process.

Implementation

The project, as viewed in the study's position paper, needs to be an annual event

that works in conjunction with the district's schedule (see Action Steps and Time Line

chart) to address the needs of each school for the upcoming school year, particularly

schools in highly impacted areas. It is imperative that the implementation of the

instructional leadership role be infused with the three components of voice, focus, and

alignment of resources—concepts that must be in place to support the development of an

infrastructure conducive to teaching and learning at each individual school site. The work

must take place in the form of a dialogue and not a monologue. The district-level

instructional superintendents must work collaboratively with school-site principals to address what is best needed at their individual school site in support of their students' academic and social success, along with overall school improvement. Accompanying the synopsis below of each of the three essential components is a table that communicates what support, distractions, and researchers' findings have been found to impact enactment of the instructional leadership role.

<div align="center">

~~~~~~A Dialogue Verses a Monologue~~~~~

</div>

The voice of the principals is heard throughout the day and recognized as to how the school needs to operate and is intended to create success for all stakeholders.

<div align="center">

Students ~~ Staff ~~ Community ~~ District
All Stakeholders!!!

</div>

The voice of the principal is vital in the process of developing the infrastructure because it is the voice that is heard throughout the day and recognized as to how the school needs to operate in order to create success for all stakeholders involved. It is also the principal at the school site who is actively listening to the voices of the stakeholders;

collecting data daily that speaks to what is best for the community at large. The

stakeholders at the school site include not only the students whom the staff serve, but also

the staff who serve the students (see Table A1).

Table A1

Voice: A Dialogue, Not a Monologue

Support	Distractions	Findings/Research
Autonomy/Self-Efficacy	Autonomy Eroding	Recommendations

Identification of self as the instructional leader:
 	
  Formal education and training;
 	
  Experience in the educational field;
 	
  Lifelong learner.
 	
Abilities:
 	
  Create, articulate, and steer the school mission;
 	
  Assess data and instructional practices;
 	
  Build capacity.
 	
Characteristics:
 	
  Resiliency: the ability to combat the demands and challenges of the job and "bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune" (Ledesma, 2014, p. 1);
 	
  Thrivers: "transformation that includes a cognitive shift in response to a challenge; the person may refocus priorities and have a stronger sense of self" (Ledesma, 2014, p. 3); therefore, the transformation may include the "reconstruction of meaning,...[and] the renewal of faith, trust, hope, and connection" (Ledesma, 2014, p. 3).
	"A discrepancy between the levels of accountability expected of principals and the lack of influence they really have over many factors affecting school success" (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013, p. 6);
	
	Multiple conflicting priorities, always on call to respond to the needs of all constituencies: teachers, students, parents, superintendents, and the school board (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013);
	
	A sense of being isolated when dealing with challenges;
	
	Threat of adversity. An ongoing threat of adversity and extended periods of stress can greatly hinder leaders (Nishikawa, 2006). Principals facing adversities during different times in their career and the pressure of wanting to leave the job or someone in a key position alluding to their job being taken away from them was not uncommon.
		A dialogue, not a monologue is needed. Principals and district-level stakeholders collaboratively make decisions on what is best for the community being served (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013).
		
		The limitation of the principals' autonomy to manage their school contradicts their ability to promote student achievement (Shun-Wing & Szeto, 2015).
		
		"School districts are able to influence teaching and learning…through the contributions they make in the positive feelings of efficacy on the part of school principals" (Louis et al., 2010, p. 15), which indirectly supports the principals' efficacy beliefs that enable them to "persist in school-improvement projects" (Louis et al., 2010, p. 15).

Efforts to focus on the instructional day must be supported by the district in the form of protecting the time of the instructional day. The mission and goals created are crucial and take concentrated efforts and commitment on the part of the instructional staff (DuFour, 2015). The participants in the study informing this project articulated two key factors that supported their ability to keep their instructional staff focused at the school site: (a) collaboration among the instructional stakeholders and (b) building capacity by providing the instructional staff with the necessary support and training to follow through with agreed upon direction (see Table A2).

Table A2

Focus: Protection of Instructional Time

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Support	Distraction	Findings/Research Recommendations

_____

Collaboration

Working "interdependently to achieve common goals for which members are mutually accountable" (Dufour, 2015, p. 125);

Determining credibility through consistency of communication and action;

Being consistent, where everyone is focused on what supports the mission and goals of the school.

Building Capacity

Utilizing the brainpower at both the school site and the district level in order to build capacity effectively;

"Developing leadership capacity and the capability of others" (Harris, 2012, p. 8).

Protecting Time

Prioritizing time. It is important not to get distracted with other things;

Protecting the focus of school's mission and goals;

Less is more: focusing instruction and focusing time;

Providing time for educators to work;

Not allowing new initiatives or projects during the school year.

Multiple constituencies: Principals always on call to respond to the needs of the teachers, students, parents, superintendents, and school board;

Multiple and often conflicting priorities at school site and district level;

Constraints regarding the spending of time observing classrooms;

Not enough time to follow through with mandates and shared decisions before another one is initiated by the district;

Mandated district meetings during the instructional day;

External mandates: local, state, and national initiatives, (e.g., accountability and high-stakes testing.

"'Leadership shared within and between schools' (Harris, 2008, p. 16) has found favor with researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and educational reformers around the globe (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2009)" (Harris, 2012, p. 7).

Utilizing instructional staff's expertise, energy, and influence is considered one of the best practices principals as instructional leaders can engage in (Broin, 2015; DuFour, 2015; Fullan, 2014).

Principals play a central role in leadership distribution, which constitutes a necessary component in developing leadership capacity within the school (Murphy, Elliott, Goldring & Porter, 2007).

It is essential to assign people to meaningful teams, providing time for educators to work together (DuFour, 2015).

Laws at both the state and local levels must encourage rather than get in the way of the support of distributed leadership, and "principals also need authority to build an aligned staff [with the ability to support school-wide expectations] for participating in collaborative structures" (Broin, 2015, p. 8). Protecting the instructional time requires the voices of the instructional staff to be heard, which in essence should produce planning, alignment, and focus toward the goal of student achievement and overall school improvement, according to study participants and Bartoletti and Connelly (2013).

The alignment of resources through the utilization of data and the school-site

instructional staff's expertise on what works best for the students they serve must be

strongly considered and supported by the school district instructional superintendent. One

size does not fit all; although the demographics may look similar, close assessment of the

needs may result in seeking different resources to support the growth of the students and

staff at each individual site (see Table A3).

Table A3

Alignment of Resources: Systems and Structures

Support	Distraction	Findings/Research
"Inspect what you expect": Aligning resources (human and materials) with the school's mission and goals; Aligning professional development with mission and goals; Conducting classroom observations with a purpose: • Observe best practices; • Give feedback; • Discuss data on continuous basis. Hire the right people: Hiring instructional staff to perform specialized roles and who will work directly with classroom teachers. Put systems and structures in place: Developing and maintaining systems of support at the school-site level; Creating systems of support through monthly network meetings and through school-site visits by the instructional superintendent.	Management of tools and artifacts; Scheduling of school-site professional development around district-mandated and union calendars; Management of the teacher evaluation tools.	Data should be continually discussed with individual teachers and teams to move students toward success. All stakeholders must be on board, engaging in the right work on their collaborative team; subsequently, the implementation of those decisions must be seen throughout the school year (DuFour, 2015). Walkthroughs must "support professional development and other human resource practices" (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013, pp. 18-19); otherwise, the information gained is not helpful (Blase & Blase, 1999; Leithwood, Harris & Strauss, 2010). How stakeholders behave as a collective collaborative team determines the results in student achievement (DuFour, 2015; Grissom et al., 2013; Hallinger, 2014).

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Appendix B: Protocol Individual Interview Questions

Lolita A. Rockette, Walden University Doctoral Student

I am an Ed. Doctoral candidate at Walden University conducting research for my dissertation on elementary principals as instructional leaders in the Denver metropolitan school districts. Each participant in my study has knowledge of the instructional leadership role as well as experience working in highly impacted schools with a demographic of high-minority students living in high-poverty areas. As part of my study, I am conducting individual interviews. Your participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect your job status in anyway. The interview length should not exceed an hour and a half.

Guiding Research Question:

What factors influence the adoption of the instructional leadership role by elementary

principals?

Part 1: Demographics

Place an X on the line or write in your answer.

1. Are you currently employed as a school principal? _____

2. Gender: _____ Male _____ Female

3. Highest level of education attained:___ Bachelor Degree _____ Master's

   Degree_____ Doctorate

4. Total number of years working as an educator (including this year): _____

5. Total number of years working as a school leader (including this year): _____

6. How many years have you worked as an elementary school principal? _____

7. How many years have you worked as an elementary principal in schools based on the demographic described: highly impacted schools with a demographic of high-minority students living in high-poverty areas? _____

8. How many years have you worked as an elementary principal in schools with demographics that differ from the one described in Question 2? _____

Knowledge Questions:

1. As an elementary principal, in your opinion, which characteristics/role listed below describe an instructional leader?

   a. Leading and articulating to the school community the academic mission of the school

   b. Meeting with instructional staff on a regular basis to discuss instructional work

   c. Meeting with instructional staff to collaborate, solve problems, and reflect on teaching and learning

   d. Developing collaboratively with the instructional staff

   e. Creating a culture of continuous learning for adults

   f. Setting high expectations for instructional performance

   g. Getting the community's support for school success

2. **As an elementary principal, what characteristics listed below do you perform as an instructional leader? If not applicable, please check N/A.**

   a. Leading and articulating to the school community the academic mission of the school   Yes/NA

   b. Meeting with instructional staff on a regular basis to discuss instructional work   Yes/NA

   c. Meeting with instructional staff to collaborate, solve problems, and reflect on instruction Yes/NA

   d. Developing collaboratively with the instructional staff a learning community   Yes/NA

   e. Creating a culture of continuous learning for adults   Yes/NA

   f. Setting high expectations for instructional performance Yes/NA

      g. Getting the community's support for school success   Yes/NA

Open-Ended Questions

To what extent do you as a principal believe that you have the capacity to provide instructional support (*principal's capacity*)?

As a principal performing the role of an instructional leader, what factors influence your ability *(perceived capacity)* to execute this role?

As a principal performing the role of an instructional leader, what factors distract your ability (*perceived capacity*) to execute this role?

How do you as an elementary principal solicit support for the role of an instructional leader from key stakeholders, such as?

      a. District administrators
      b. Instructional staff (classroom teachers, instructional coaches, support staff)
      c. School-site leadership team

If any, what type of conflict arises for you as an elementary principal while executing the role of an instructional leader?

      d. District administrators
      e. Instructional staff (classroom teachers, instructional coaches, support staff)
      f. School-site leadership team

How do the demographics of your school site influence the practice of the instructional leadership role?

Appendix C: Protocol Focus Group Interview Questions

Lolita A. Rockette, Walden University Doctoral Student

I am an Ed. Doctoral candidate at Walden University conducting research for my dissertation on elementary principal as instructional leaders in the Denver metropolitan school districts. Each participant in my study has knowledge of the instructional leadership role as well as experience working in highly impacted schools with a demographic of high-minority students living in high-poverty areas. As part of my study, I am conducting a focus group interview. Your participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect your job status in anyway. I am requesting each participant to sign a confidential agreement. The interview length should not exceed two and half hours.

Open-Ended Questions (opinion and value)

1. How do you describe the role of an instructional leader, particularly as it relates to an elementary principal?

2. What is your opinion about elementary principals implementing the role of an instructional leader versus the role of the manager of the school?

Open-Ended Questions (practices)
1. As a principal instructional leader, what practices do you promote at your school site to influence academic success?

2. As a principal instructional leader, what practices do you observe your instructional staff developing and implementing to promote academic success?

3. As a principal instructional leader, what practices support the successes of academic achievement and school improvement?

4. As a principal instructional leader, what practices negate the success of academic achievement and school improvement?

Appendix D-1: Guidelines for School-Site Observation

Lolita A. Rockette, Walden University Doctoral Student

As the researcher, my purpose of the observation is to directly observe operations and activities from a holistic perspective, an understanding of the context within which the instructional leadership (IL) role is put into practice. This may be especially important where it is not the event that is of interest, but rather how that event may fit into, or be impacted by, a sequence of events. The observational approach may allow me to learn about things that the participants may be unaware of or unable to discuss in an interview or focus group. As the observer, I will be noting what is listed below during the on-site observation:

1. **Date, Time, Place:**

2. **Describe the setting:** where the observation took place and what the physical

    setting looked like

3. **Identify what IL duties the principal is displaying during the observation**

4. **Document the principal's instructional leader's role actions and how they are impacted by the stakeholders**: (note, the job or position of the stakeholder will not be identified because he or she will not be considered a participant for the study; my focus is only to record what the principal as the participant is doing)

5. **Describe and assess: interaction of elementary principals as the instructional leader and the focus of the day**

Appendix D-2: Guidelines for School-Site Observation Checklist

Lolita A. Rockette, Walden University Doctoral Student

What factors during the morning, afternoon, and leadership meeting support the principal to implement the role of an instructional leader (IL)?

What factors during the morning, afternoon, and leadership meeting distract from the principal to implement the role of an IL?

Date_____   Start
Time_____
School_____   End
Time_____

	Time		Time
Instructional Leadership Roles/Duties		Managerial Leadership Roles/Duties	
Observation, Walk Through		Office Work Prep	
Feedback to Teacher		Building Management	
Professional Development		Handles Student Discipline Problems	
Planning, Curriculum, Assessment		Student Supervision	
Decision-making Groups, Meetings		Employee Supervision	
District: Meetings, Supervisors		Parents / Guardians	
Others		Others	

Reflection Notes:

_____
_____

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement

Lolita A. Rockette, Walden University Doctoral Student

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research, I, Lolita A. Rockette, will have access to information that is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter, or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification, or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access, and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature:

Appendix F: Selection of Participants Summary Letter

Lolita A. Rockette, Walden University Doctoral Student

Dear Participants,

This letter is written to explain why I have chosen you as a respected candidate to participate in my qualitative research study. The inquiry particular to this research is based on the principals' primary responsibility to facilitate effective teaching and learning, which in turn, is what initiated my guiding research question: What factors influence the adoption of the instructional leadership role? Therefore, I want to have elementary principals who have knowledge on the subject of instructional leadership, experience working in highly impacted schools, and who have demonstrated success at their school site utilizing the instructional leadership role. As the researcher, I am interested in what the data will reveal about the everyday practices of elementary principals as an instructional leader (IL). I am interested in what is in place at the school site that supports as well as impedes the implementation of the IL role. The overall implication of the study will be to help the district site develop a policy or formula that will support the elementary principal's role of an instructional leader based on the school-site's needs. Recent research shares that principals both nationally and globally are moving to the forefront of educational reform in the role of instructional leadership. Several reasons triggering this movement are the positive influences the instructional leadership role has on instructional practices and student academic achievement. I am so looking forward to what I will learn from your expertise.

Sincerely,

Lolita A. Rockette, Doctoral Student at Walden University

Appendix G: Letter of Cooperation

Lolita A. Rockette, Walden University Doctoral Student

Community Research Partner Name:

Contact Information:

Date:

Dear Lolita A. Rockette,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Principals as Instructional Leaders Opposed to Managers of School within the Insert Name of Community Partner*. As part of this study, I authorize you to select six to eight participants that have knowledge on the subject of the instructional leadership role, working in highly impacted schools, and who have demonstrated success at their school site utilizing the instructional leadership role.

Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: suggested list of principals whom the organization feels will be a good fit for the study, based on the criterion listed above. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorization Official

Contact Information

Appendix H: Study-Site School Performance Framework

What is the School Performance Framework? The SPF (School Performance Framework) is a comprehensive system to help schools focus on strengths and areas for targeted improvement. A wide range of measures are used to calculate ratings of how well each school supports student growth and achievement, and how well it serves students and families.

What Does the Rating Mean? Based on the percentage of overall points earned, schools receive one of five possible ratings.

Distinguished (80-100 PERCENT): Schools rated Distinguished are exceeding district expectations and have very high ratings in both Academic Growth and Academic Proficiency.

Meet Expectations (51-79 PERCENT): Schools that Meet Expectations are performing at the level that the district expects and have high ratings in either the Academic Growth or Academic Proficiency category, or the school has good ratings in both categories. Schools with this rating that have seen a decline in student performance from previous years receive increased instructional supports, such as assistance with enhanced training for staff.

Accredited on Watch (40-50 PERCENT): Schools are rated as Accredited on Watch when they are performing below the district's expectations. Improvement is needed on either Academic Growth or Academic Proficiency measures. Schools with this rating receive intensive instructional supports, such as enhanced, targeted training for staff, consultation on curriculum and assistance using data to increase student achievement. Accredited on Watch schools that show a lack of improvement from previous years may be subject to interventions, such as replacement of staff or changes in the academic program.

Accredited on Priority Watch (34-39 PERCENT): Schools rated Accredited on Priority Watch are performing significantly below expectations and are expected to dramatically improve student achievement. Accredited on Priority Watch schools receive intensive instructional supports, such as enhanced, targeted training for staff, consultation on curriculum, and assistance using data to increase student achievement. These schools are subject to interventions that may include changes to academic programs or school staff or implementation of school-turnaround strategies.

Accredited on Probation (up to 33 PERCENT): Schools rated Accredited on Probation are performing significantly below expectations and are expected to dramatically improve student performance. Accredited on Probation schools receive intensive instructional supports, such as enhanced, targeted training for staff, consultation on curriculum, and

assistance using data to increase student achievement. Accredited on Probation schools require additional budget review, and the district provides additional financial resources and strategic planning supports to help the school improve. These schools are subject to interventions that may include changes to academic programs or school staff or implementation of school-turnaround strategies.

How Are Schools Evaluated?
Every study site school that is included in the SPF is evaluated in the following categories: This category focuses on how much students are learning from year to year. Academic Growth is a meaningful measure because it applies equally to students at all academic levels—regardless of whether a student starts the year advanced, at grade level or below grade level. The Academic Growth rating tells parents how students at their child's school are growing each year, as compared to students across the state who start the year at a similar level. Academic Growth is the category that receives the most weight in calculating each school's overall SPF rating.

This category of measures is a snapshot of how well students performed on state assessments during the previous school year. A school's rating is based primarily on the percentage of its students who scored at grade level or above grade level on state tests.

This category measures how well a high school is preparing its students for post-secondary success. College & Career Readiness includes graduation rates, performance on assessments (ACT, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), etc.) and enrollment in higher-level course work (AP, IB, etc.)

This category measures how well a high school is improving its preparation of its students for post-secondary success. This category rates each school on its successful improvement of graduation rates and performance on state and national assessments. It also measures changes in enrollment in AP and IB program coursework and college courses, as well as changes to students' passing rates on AP and IB tests.

This category measures how effectively a school engages and creates a connection with its students. Attendance rates, results from student-satisfaction surveys, and availability of enrichment and special education offerings are factors that are used to determine a school's Student Engagement rating.

Enrollment is a measure of how likely students are to stay at their school from year to year. This category is included in the SPF rating as an evaluation of how effectively a school is meeting the needs of its students and families. Dropout rates are also used in calculating this rating for high schools.

This category is based on responses to the study site parent-satisfaction survey at your child's school. It also takes into account the response rate on the survey for your school.

Appendix I: Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Lolita A. Rockette, Walden University Doctoral Student

Name of Signer:

During the **Focus Group** session, each of you will be sharing and listening to other participants share information for Lolita A. Rockette, Walden University student's research: _____ will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

8. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
9. I will not in any way divulge copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
10. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
11. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
12. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
13. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
14. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: **Date:**