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ABSTRACT

The need for principals to have the time and tools to focus on instruction and student learning has continued to intensify. At the same time, the incongruence between what principals want to do instructionally and have time to do, creates dire consequences for school leaders and their work in making a difference in schools regarding staff and student improvement.

This study examines whether and how principals take their lead from students, and use student voice, to create more responsive schools, and more responsible models of leadership. In order to describe and explain whether and how principals have used students' perspectives to meaningfully structure their experiences of school and learning, I explore how students can naturally inform the work being done by principals in order to bring students' attitudes and feelings about school, learning and leadership into the dominant discourse on effective administrative practice.

I consider issues of student agency and voice within four very different elementary school settings. Further, I consider the challenges students face, and the ways principals are preparing to address these challenges. In this study I address roadblocks to responsive leadership in urban, suburban, and rural schools using a cogenerative qualitative approach that principals and students can use to create new dialogue and shared theories that are focused on improving both administrative function and the instructional programs of their schools. This approach has revealed a new shared theory which includes students in models of school leadership. Central to this theory is a call for principals to use more student-driven approaches to guiding their principalship, so that students can be empowered as learners and school leaders in their own right.

UNLOCKING STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE OF LEADERSHIP

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Teaching and Curriculum in the School of Education's Department of
Teaching and Leadership.

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“Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people—they manipulate them.
They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress.”

-Paulo Freire

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The need for principals to have the time and tools to focus on instruction and student learning has continued to intensify with the introduction of federal accountability mandates such as No Child Left Behind and Race to The Top. At the same time, the incongruence between what principals want to do instructionally and have time to do, create dire consequences for school leaders and their work in making a difference in schools regarding staff and student improvement.

Principals today are spending more time focusing on teaching and learning than ever before. This shift away from the office implies that more direct relationships between principals and the instructional program are necessary if new models of leadership are going to replace earlier models that limited contact with students to matters of discipline, and classroom visits to teacher feedback, supervision, and modeling (Waters et al., 2003). Research into issues of administration has emphasized reflective and inquiry-oriented approaches to working with teachers (Blase & Blase, 1999). As a result, principals now collaborate more with others before making decisions and many employ models of distributive leadership in which adults share in responsibilities that were typically overseen by the administrator (Spillane et al., 2001). Despite these efforts towards reorganization, schools have neglected to include students in more responsive models of leadership, and research has largely ignored the inherent possibilities.

The purpose of this study is to discover how leaders of students have performed in their role as instructional leaders, and to determine by what means their thinking or behaviors associated with this role have been shaped in part by students. I will begin with an overview of

the study. Next I will examine the research on educational leadership, how student voice has been used by principals, and the limitations of this knowledge base. I will then describe the theoretical frameworks that have helped me structure my understanding of the literature, how this study might inform the literature, and my exploration into possible research methods. Finally, I will describe the mixed qualitative approach I will take to answer the following research questions:

- What, from the perspective of students, are the most significant challenges faced by students in schools?
- How do principals help children cope with the challenges they face?

Overview

My study's intent, and my basic research question, is to analyze whether and how principals take their lead from students, and use student voice, to create more responsive schools, and a more responsible principalship. In order to describe and explain how principals have used students' perspectives to meaningfully structure their experiences of schools and learning, further investigation into how students can naturally inform the work being done by principals may help to bring students' attitudes and feelings about principals into the dominant discourse on effective leadership practice.

Rather than focus on one aspect of educational leadership (e.g., visibility of the principal), I focus on the instructional behaviors of principals as seen through the eyes of the students, the administrators themselves, and my own observations of the interactions between these two often disparate members of the school community. By capturing the work that is being done in schools where students, principals, and parents are interested in developing a meaningful

dialogue about learning and leadership, I have begun to better understand how the relationships between students and principals may lead to more efficient instructional programs, increased communication, and student empowerment.

Background

Educational Leadership

The principal's role has historically been that of manager. Typical administrative responsibilities in schools have been defined by Portin et al., (1998) as: (a) maintaining safe schools, (b) overseeing the budget, (c) completing and submitting reports, (d) complying with regulations and mandates, (e) coping with teacher and student behavior issues, and (f) dealing with parents. In the 1980s, research into effective schools gave birth to the connection between school leader and school success (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). For the first time principals began to pay more attention to student learning in an effort to make schools more effective. More recently the expanding job, and its increasing focus on accountability, standardization, and resource allocation, has necessitated the emergence of an instructional leader (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Walker, 2010), capable of impacting student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Waters et al., 2003).

The changes brought on by No Child Left Behind and Race to The Top have forced principals into the spotlight at a time when many schools are coping with significant changes in the socioeconomic composition of their student body, adjusting to a steady influx of English Language Learners (ELL), and pushing towards inclusion of students with special needs in regular education classrooms. More current descriptions of the leadership role include: initiators of change, educational visionaries, curriculum and assessment experts, budget analysts, special

program administrators, school managers, personnel administrators, and community builders (Darling-Hammond, 2007). School leadership is now widely regarded as second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2006).

Just as the relationships between principals and schools have changed, so too have the relationships principals are having with teachers and students. Principals are spending more time observing teaching and learning than ever before. The old model of formal, one-person leadership is no longer realistic (Lambert, 1998), and with the increase in job demands principals now collaborate more with others before making decisions (Wulff, 1996) and employ models of distributive leadership (Spillane et al., 2001) in which adults share in responsibilities that were typically overseen by the administrator. These models of leadership have, until now, included teacher-leaders, principal-teachers, assistant or associate principals, co-principals, and management service coordinators (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003), and provide principals with opportunities to focus more on their capacity as instructional leader (Walker, 2010). Despite these efforts towards reorganization, schools have neglected to include students in more responsive models of leadership, and research has largely ignored the inherent possibilities.

Collins (2009) argues that organizational decline is largely self-inflicted and is often generated by neglecting the core business (in our case students). While some principals are having success navigating the bumpy instructional terrain outside of the classrooms using non-traditional and at times innovative methods, many principals, including those working in districts that have more resources, fail to acknowledge what students identify as high-influence instructional behaviors. Although research has recognized the impact of effective principal leadership on individual student learning and achievement, much of the research regarding the effects of leadership on student learning needs clarification (Walker, 2010). While research tells

us that principals have indirect effects on students and student learning (Marzano et al., 2005), it has ignored the possibility of principals having a direct and profound effect on students' experiences of school. By exploring the topic of leadership through the eyes of the student, we can begin to see whether and how principals are directly impacting students in more concrete ways.

A few arguments have traditionally been advanced in support of school leaders considering student participation and involvement when making decisions.

1. *Teachers and school based support teams have been involved in helping principals make decisions for years. These same arguments apply, at least in theory, to students as well.*

While most principals would argue that it is their job to make the decisions that affect their school, many actively involve teachers in conversations about the school's instructional program on a regular basis. This has improved the overall quality of teaching, and made principals into more responsive leaders (Portin et al., 2003). If principals were to involve students in similar conversations about their experiences of teaching, learning, and even leadership, students might also become more empowered as learners, and principals would become even more effective leaders.

2. *Students have a moral right to be involved.* When principals do not involve students, and ignore students' basic needs, such as the need for social/emotional support, autonomy, and respect, students are left to wonder if their principal actually cares (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Students have a right to a voice in decisions that affect their experiences of school and learning, and will become more responsible learners if they have a higher morale.

3. *Student involvement enhances cooperation and reduces conflict between all members of the school.* There is evidence that when students' personal needs of accomplishment and

meaningfulness are met by adults in schools, students' agendas, goals, and perspectives, will align with those of adults (Allen, 1983). When these goals and perspectives align, students and adults are more likely to work together toward improving student learning outcomes. Active involvement in the school's instructional program will also provide students with opportunities for their voice (as it relates to problems and dissatisfaction) to be heard by those that matter, and who can address their needs before they manifest themselves in a negative way.

The rationale for giving students a voice, and involving them in decisions about the work of learning and leadership is clear. Just as teachers have valuable information about the instructional program, students also have information that leaders need to make good decisions. Students also have a need and a basic undeniable right to feel committed and connected to their experiences of learning. When principals do not actively consider students as being valuable to the overall success of the school, and involve students in decisions that effect the work of learning, students in turn get the message that their participation and involvement is not valued by all members of the organization.

Students' Perspectives of Leadership

What is clear is that almost all of the data correlating school leadership with student learning has been collected from administrators, school board members, parents, and classroom teachers (Cook-Sather, 2009). Few studies have examined what students perceive schools do to impact their learning, and of these few studies, the emphasis has largely been on issues such as student satisfaction with school, perceptions of school climate and culture, issues of motivation, classroom management, and expectations of teachers (Cusick, 1973; Ogbu, 1974; Wilson, 1993; Wilson, 1994; Wilson, 2011; Allen, 1983; Stubbs & Delamont, 1976). As useful as these lines of inquiry were, none reveal much about what students think and feel about principal leadership

and its effect on academic achievement, arguably the most central aspect of student life (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

While the departure from a more traditional, managerial role has been critical for principals that want to appear more accessible to both the students and teachers in their schools (Fullan, 2008), there is evidence to suggest that these new roles only in part fulfill what the students were looking for in a strong instructional leader (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Teacher and student engagement data related to these instructional behaviors has been recorded (Quinn, 2002), and secondary students have been able to talk about how they perceive these behaviors (Cook-Sather, 2010; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001), but no study to date has considered elementary school student perspectives on this topic.

Promoting student voice and agency has been heralded as one of the keys to successful schools (Warner, 2010), yet rarely are student perspectives considered in educational research or applied work. Many schools are struggling to create instructional programs that are suited to the members of the organization that will inevitably determine whether or not the school is successful. In order to understand what students are looking for in their educational experience, we must first ask the students what it is they think their principals do. Do elementary school students even perceive principals to be instructional leaders? If not, what do students think and feel about their relationship, or lack thereof, with their principal? If students do believe that principals directly influence their learning we must then ask which instructional leadership behaviors do they perceive to influence their academic achievement in school.

We know from data provided by adults that principal behaviors, such as maintaining a visible presence on campus, are correlated with higher student achievement (Waters et al., 2004). However, we lack data explicating such findings from the perspective of students (Gentilucci &

Muto, 2007). How can instructional leaders say they have done all they can when many have not even considered the undervalued perspectives students have about instructional leadership? If schools are not asking the students what works for them, then whose needs are they trying to address? Whose experiences of school are they really trying to structure? Who is being empowered? Schools are not measured by how well teachers, superintendents, or even principals perform; they are measured by the strengths and weaknesses of their students.

If leadership wants to address issues of instruction more thoroughly they have to begin to find ways to understand what the students think and feel about their experiences of school. Some critics of student perspective research argue that learning, not understanding students' thoughts and feelings, is the primary goal of schooling. While this may be true, it begs the following question; Who is better qualified than the students to tell us what most effectively influences or hinders their learning and academic achievement (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007)?

Youth Studies

Teachers today have become more adept at using student voice and collaborative approaches to learning in classrooms (Mitra, 2004), and administrators have involved teachers in inquiry-based approaches to leadership (Lambert, 2002). These collaborative models have long been shown to lead to improved teaching, and as a result increased student performance (Talbert, 1995). Yet administrators still rarely use student voice to structure their reform efforts or students' experiences of school.

More modern definitions of student voice such as Mitra's (2008):

The ways in which young people can work with teachers and administrators to co-create the path of reform. This process can enable youth to meet their own developmental needs and can strengthen student ownership of the educational reform process (p. 7).

highlight the power student voice holds for impacting schools on a much deeper level. They also draw our focus to new relationships between students and adults in schools. This concept of adults learning from, or working alongside students to shape the climate of schools may sound to many practitioners and researchers like a radical departure from more traditional methods (Jones & Perkins, 2004). These relationships between students and adults have resulted in more collaborative learning environments, where students accept more responsibility and share authority (Panitz, 1996). These new and more meaningful models of shared leadership have begun to receive attention from researchers focused on understanding how schools can best use student voice initiatives to drive reform efforts. Research has demonstrated that cooperative efforts between students and adults can develop schools in a way that students and adults acting alone cannot (Kirchner, 2005).

While schools and principals have for decades used student voice in relation to maintaining the status quo, or to manage and organize student activities and student behavior, student voice has been largely subjected to limiting school-established parameters (Warner, 2010). These parameters have rarely been designed to include students' perspectives of teaching and leadership, arguably the two most important aspects of student life. Many adults struggle to view students as collaborators that can potentially inform their practice. Despite this we know from research that when adults listen to what students have to say about their learning, and meaningfully use student voice to shape their experiences of school, they can empower students as learners (Warner, 2010).

It is important to note that it is not only principals that have failed to meet and make decisions with students. Researchers too have largely ignored asking students about the work being done in schools. While students have been given some opportunities to talk about their

experiences of school, we see fewer students included in research as we go down in age, and virtually nothing on the topic of leadership. While young students are less mature, and have had less experience relating to principals, their perspectives are also less affected by what others (parents, teachers, principals and even popular culture) have taught them about what leadership means, and how it impacts them directly (Gentilucci, 2004).

Findings also show that when ethnographers have gone to kids and asked about how they learn, they often invoke their own agendas, identities and memories in relation to their informants (Biklen, 2004). Research indicates that educational researchers and leaders, in their effort to make sense of how students perceive schools, have imposed meaning in the development of their theses (Denzin, 1978). This has been problematic for researchers and practitioners who have used adult perspectives to structure their approaches to effecting change in schools for some time now. In a time in which students feel increasingly isolated and disengaged from school, there is an emerging body of evidence that suggests young people can increase their sense of agency, and develop skills necessary for leading socially and emotionally healthy lives (Mitra, 2004).

In this study, I address conceptual, practical, and ethical matters involved in studying students, and examine the ways in which research has attempted to understand the role students play in schools. The purpose of this study is to develop a more innovative way of including students in research that is meant for improving not only the situations of principals, but of the schools and most importantly the students themselves. Researchers have continually been inspired by how much students have to say about their own education, how what they have to say aligns with the extant research on student learning, and how their attention demands that of adults (Reisinger & Cook-Sather, 2001). Students' thoughts and feelings matter and can provide

schools and the research community with new evidence that can be used to inform administrative function in the field.

The remainder of this study is organized into five chapters. In Chapter Two, I first present the theoretical frameworks upon which this study has been based, and which have been adapted or borrowed from relevant scholarship on educational leadership and student perspective research. In this chapter I will also present my review of these two bodies of literature as they relate to my research topic. In Chapter Three, I will present and describe the research design, the setting, the participants, and the cogenerative qualitative approach I have taken to collecting and analyzing the data gathered from principals and students.

In my first data chapter, Chapter Four, I present findings in the form of case studies developed from my student and principal interviews and my observations at four different elementary schools. In Chapter Five I present demographic data as well as provide a cross-case analysis that is focused on analyzing key themes related to the research questions.

In my concluding chapter, I open a discussion that is based on constructed themes from the cross-case analysis including (a) the challenges faced by students, (b) shared decision making, (c) principals' behaviors, (c) personal inclination (of principals), and (d) student voice. I will then use these themes to bring findings of the literature review alongside findings from the case studies and analysis in order to develop a set of conclusions and demonstrate contributions of this study to the literature. Here I will also present broader implications of the study as it relates to both practice and preparation programs. Finally, I will present suggestions for future research, some methodological observations, and some concluding reflections based on the impact this study has had on principals and students to date.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will review the extant research on educational leadership alongside research that has included students' perspectives on a range of factors affecting their experiences of learning and school. I will also be introducing two theoretical frameworks. The first framework was borrowed from my review of the literature on educational leadership. The second framework has been adapted and borrowed from my review of literature that includes students' perspectives, and which places the perspectives, agendas, strategies, and goals of the principal, beside those of the student. Finally, I will explain my own background, what led me to this study, and discuss possible impacts this has on my objectivity.

Instructional Leadership

I will begin by introducing my conceptualization of instructional leadership behaviors using a pre-existing model (Table 2.1) that includes principal behaviors associated with student interaction (Murphy, 1990). Murphy's (1990) model, while not empirically tested, is derived from a systematic and comprehensive review of instructional leadership. This model synthesizes research findings from the literature on effective schools, school improvement, staff development and organizational change literature. The student-oriented behaviors include: (a) setting goals that emphasize student achievement for all students, (b) communicating with students, (c) providing specific suggestions and feedback on the learning process, (d) providing incentives for students, and (e) providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement. In addition, it communicates the significance of using student performance data to develop a set of

goals. This helps align the twenty-year-old model with more current leadership practices in this era of accountability and data driven decision-making.

Murphy’s (1990) model of instructional leadership includes four dimensions: developing mission and goals, managing the educational production function, promoting an academic learning climate, and developing a supportive work environment. While other models based on extensive reviews of instructional leadership include as many as 21 descriptors (Waters et al., 2003), this more succinct model is best suited to my research question, and review of the literature. Murphy’s four dimensions include 18 subtopics which emphasize active administrative involvement in instruction. By better understanding which active leadership behaviors influence student learning we can move from description to prescription (Shoemaker & Fraser, 1981) in an effort to shape the applied work of school principals, and develop a line of research that holds real significance for students and learning.

Developing Mission & Goals	Managing the Educational Production Function	Promoting an Academic Learning Climate	Developing a Supportive Work Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Framing and communicating school goals -Having vision and the ability to develop shared purpose through the way they communicate their vision for their school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Promoting quality instruction -Informally supervising instruction -Evaluating instruction -Allocating and protecting instructional time -Active involvement in coordinating the curriculum -Extending content coverage -Actively monitoring student progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establishing positive expectations and standards -Maintaining high visibility in the classroom and around the school -Providing incentives for teachers and students -Promoting and encouraging professional development of teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Creating a safe and orderly learning environment -Providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement -Developing staff collaboration and cohesion -Securing outside resources in support of school and goals -Forging links between the home and the school.

Figure 2.1: *Instructional Leadership Model*, adapted from Murphy (1990).

Using the theoretical framework to group the data into four main thematic categories, a few patterns emerged. While instructional leadership is considered a fundamental aspect of the

school leader's role, research has revealed that most principals do not place sufficient emphasis on core issues of instruction (Murphy, 1990). Most leaders today believe in creating conditions that enable teachers to develop professionally (Leithwood, 1992). Many of these same principals are fluent in their use of reflective, collaborative and inquiry-oriented approaches to working with teachers (Blase & Blase, 1999), and yet most administrators neglect to use similar approaches when addressing issues of student learning. Despite this, there is evidence to suggest that more assertive instructional leaders can become actively involved with the learning that takes place in their schools by setting goals that emphasize student achievement for all students, communicating with students, providing specific suggestions and feedback on the learning process, and providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement.

Administrators have used distributive models of leadership to make more time to focus on matters of instruction. This has given principals opportunities to be more visible, to spend more time monitoring the instructional program, to develop staff collaboration and cohesion, and to create schools that are safer and more orderly (Murphy, 1990). All of these leadership behaviors have been found to positively influence school climate, and as a result many principals are now better able to coordinate the instruction that takes place in their schools. These advances are significant, but not sufficient in addressing the needs of schools nationwide that are still struggling to make academic progress. As schools are becoming more diverse, and more inclusive, principals are now being forced to develop more responsive strategies for creating schools that are both equitable and excellent.

Developing mission and goals

Research has shown that effective principals develop specific learning goals which emphasize student achievement (Clark et al., 1980), while less effective schools tend to have

adult needs in mind (Murphy, 1990). These goals should be applied to all of the students served by the school (Leithwood, 1984), and should be shared by the teachers. Principals should develop goals that are measurable, attainable, result-oriented, and time-bound (Schmoker, 1999).

Rosenholtz (1989) suggests the following benefits for creating specific goals:

- 1) Specific goals convey a message directly to teachers that they are capable of improvement
- 2) Specific goals provide a basis for rational decision making, for ways to organize and execute their instruction
- 3) Specific goals enable teachers to gauge their success
- 4) Specific goals promote professional dialogue

This can be done by communicating their significance with the teachers, students, and staff in the context of instructional decisions. Facilitating the development of shared goals is a core responsibility for instructional leaders. Effective instructional leaders make decisions with these shared goals in mind, and use these goals to drive the teaching and learning that takes place in schools (Locke & Latham, 1990). Effective principals are able to engage and empower teachers and students through the way they share their vision. Principals that are actively involved in the instructional program are better able to develop this shared purpose and create a climate characterized by trust and commitment (Smylie et al., 2005).

Finding a cure-all for developing a schools' mission and goals has not worked (Portin, 1998). Principals today develop goals driven by data in order to make organizational decisions and align instructional practice. Data has also been used by principals to overcome cultural, structural and professional barriers that stand in the way of shared models of leadership (Murphy et al., 2009). When teachers and principals effectively use data to develop and monitor shared

goals, schools stand the best chance of being able to maintain, or improve their instructional program (Schmoker, 1999). Schools that use more members of the staff to create goals will naturally develop a more coherent and observable understanding of the school mission. Principals that do not incorporate others in a shared vision may lose the support of their teachers (Goodlad, 2004) and students (Lambert, 2002).

Successful schools provide principals and teachers with opportunities to develop and implement the school vision as a team (Little, 1990). This collaboration involves focusing the principal, teachers, and students on a common purpose and set of goals, and having all members of the school rely on each other to achieve these goals (Conzemius & O'Neill 2001). Principals that develop specific school goals using a shared vision, and who are able to communicate these goals clearly and consistently, will create an instructional program that is both more coherent, and better equipped to respond to change.

Managing the educational production function

Effective principals are aware of the different ways they can promote learning at both classroom and school levels (Murphy, 1990). These administrators are able to spend more time coordinating instructional programs (Walker, 2010), clearly define methods of instruction (Spillane et al., 2001), and emphasize interactive teaching strategies (Blase & Blase, 1999). Instructional leaders typically employ informal classroom visits and meetings with staff members over formal observation and teacher conferences (Blase, 2004). More effective principals have been found to spend more time visiting classrooms, providing specific feedback to teachers about the teaching-learning process, and participating in classroom activities than those who acted merely as supervisors of instruction.

Effective principals allocate more time for instruction, and ensure coordination of time usage among teachers (Schneider, 1985). Principals continue to assume the responsibility for instructional leadership and yet are still spending less than one third of their increasing workweek focused on curriculum and instructional activities (Cooley & Shen, 2003). Most school leaders did not become principals to be managers and thus see their two roles as a disconnect (Portin, 1998). Principals that spend more time on instructional issues are able to increase the student achievement rate (Shellinger, 2005). Students and parents also perceive principals that have more interactions based on instruction, and are more visible, as more effective instructional leaders (Walker, 2010).

Effective leaders are more familiar with the technical knowledge of their organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2008), and this is especially true of principals and in effective schools. Strong school leaders have more knowledge about curriculum and instruction, and use this knowledge to drive their involvement and coordination of the instructional program (Leithwood, 1984). Instructional leaders ensure that school objectives align with content taught in classes (Murphy, 1990). They do this by interacting with teachers across grade levels to create continuity and provide support (Cotton, 1999). Through effective communication with teachers, effective principals are also able to ensure that the content is being covered in a way that is conducive to student learning, school objectives, and testing expectations (Leithwood et al., 2002).

A core leadership responsibility that has become more pronounced in this era of accountability is the active monitoring of student progress. Effective principals now align their instructional programs with local, state, and national assessment criteria. Instructional leaders diagnose problems with teaching and learning, and evaluate the results of changes that have been made in the instructional program (McEwan, 1998). Effective principals must be able to strike a

delicate balance between their role as supervisor and participant in order to successfully manage the instruction in their schools. Principals that are taking the time to play a more active role in the teaching and learning that takes place in their schools are better able to produce observable results at both the classroom and school levels.

Promoting an academic learning climate

Academic learning climate refers to the quality of the environment of the school that is experienced by its members, influenced by its members behavior, and can be described in terms of the values and beliefs of the school (Owens, 1981). Principals are the most dominant force in determining the climate of a school (Clark et al., 1980). Effective principals are able to develop a school climate conducive to teaching and learning by: (a) establishing positive expectations and standards, (b) by maintaining high visibility, (c) providing incentives for teachers and students, and (d) promoting professional development (Murphy, 1990).

High expectations and standards have been related to school effectiveness more than any other variable (Hallinger, 2003). Despite this, studies have shown that both teachers and principals in schools with higher concentrations of minority and poor students have reduced expectations (Heck et al., 1990). These lowered expectations effect student achievement. Conversely, schools with high expectations have a staff that expects all students to do well, and believe in their own ability to influence student achievement. High expectations on the part of the principal, for student and staff performance, has also been associated with positive student outcomes (Leithwood, 2005). Specific leadership behaviors that are associated with high expectations include: being an assertive leader, being an excellent role model, developing a well-articulated school mission, using collaborative and inquiry-based approaches to planning and decision-making, emphasizing the importance of academics, maintaining an effective staff

development program, and regularly discussing staff performance (Sackney, 1988).

Instructional leaders that maintain high visibility in classrooms and around schools are more actively involved in the development and innovation of the instructional program, and are more likely to have committed teachers (Blase & Blase, 1999). Visible principals have positive effects on students' and teachers' attitudes and behaviors, and been correlated with improved school climate (Hallinger et al., 1990), decreased discipline problems (Kessor, 2005), and better communication between students, teachers, and administration (Waters et al., 2004). Effective instructional leaders are visible in day-to-day activities, modeling behaviors consistent with the school's vision (Andrews & Soder, 1987). Visible principals informally drop in on classrooms and make staff development activities a priority (Andrews et al., 1991). Principals that are visible throughout the school have opportunities to model their beliefs and to promote a positive instructional climate (Krug, 1992).

Effective schools are able to implement a clear, concise reward system for teachers and students (Wynne, 1980). Instructional leaders provide opportunities, within the classroom and on a school-wide basis, for teachers and students to be honored for their efforts (Hallinger, 2003). These rewards may be given in a variety of ways, but all rewards are meant to reinforce academic goals and develop a positive school climate. Principals that know how to balance their use of praise and criticism can develop and support the teaching and learning that takes place throughout the school.

Instructional leaders that use school-based shared decision making to create their staff development programs, empower teachers in the areas of curriculum and instruction (Louis et al., 1996). Principals that provide opportunities for staff to develop their skills relating to emerging instructional needs, are able to create an environment that supports innovative teaching, responds

to student diversity, and maintains instructional focus (Blase & Blasé, 1999). Schools that encourage teachers to redesign instructional programs develop teachers that are more reflective and more willing to try instructional approaches that before seemed radical or unorthodox. Effective staff development leads to teachers collaborating and critiquing each other's practice, and developing new approaches to problem-solving.

Principals who create a more engaging and reinforcing learning environment will find that students and teachers will be more motivated to do what needs to be done (Whitaker, 1997). Principals that have high expectations for students and staff, maintain high visibility throughout the school, and work to development the staff towards common instructional goals, can promote a positive learning climate.

Developing a supportive work environment

Instructional leaders that create a supportive work environment for teaching and learning infuse regular school routines with educational meaning (Marks & Printy, 2003). Effective principals provide teachers with individualized support and build collaborative cultures (Leithwood et al., 1999).

Principals that want to create a school climate conducive to learning must create a safe environment for teachers and students. Principals are largely responsible for setting the discipline tone of their schools (Murphy, 1990). Effective principals provide students and teachers freedom from violence, fear, and bullying (Butcher & Manning, 2005), and foster acceptance and caring by developing, articulating, and fairly enforcing clear expectations for behavior (Mabie, 2003). School safety also implies intellectual and emotional safety for all members of the school. Creating an environment where teachers are not afraid to experiment

instructionally (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001), and students are not afraid to ask questions or make mistakes, is equally important for creating a climate conducive to learning.

Schools that give students tasks of responsibility are associated with better student behavior, better attendance, and higher achievement (Rutter, 1979). Effective principals provide students with opportunities to learn responsibility, to practice leadership behavior, to identify with adult role models, and to learn the skills of participation (Murphy et al., 1985). When students take responsibility for their own learning, and become empowered, they are more likely to identify with instructional goals. Instructional leaders plan class and school-wide activities in which students can participate (Sackney, 1988). Principals that promote student involvement in activities outside of the classroom can help develop a shared set of goals between teachers and students (Murphy, 1990). Collaboration is essential for promoting professional growth in schools. Effective principals do this by encouraging reflective practice, communicating with teachers, expanding teachers' professional repertoire, and strengthening professional relationships (Fullan, 1993; Marzano et al, 2005). Instructional leaders' direct and indirect effects on achievement serve to create a school culture characterized by professional collaboration and learning associated with school improvement (Southworth, 2002). By providing time for collaborative staff development efforts, and advocating sharing and peer observation, teachers become more motivated and develop a higher sense of self-esteem. Effective principals ensure that the necessary resources are secured for their schools (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). Instructional leaders are adept at attaining funding and materials from their community and school district (O'Donnell, 2005). Effective principals actively, and assertively seek out resources in order to develop instructional programming and technology. They are also able to develop their human resources by hiring staff that reflect the mission and goals of the

school (Murphy, 1990). Principals that obtain resources for their school are able to provide teachers with unique professional development opportunities, and students with more hands-on learning experiences. Relationships between school and the students' home or family support student's learning, social development, and experiences of school (Christenson, 2000).

Principals that establish lines of communication and shared meaning between home and school, can develop a culture of success (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Principals that involve parents in school activities, and provide outreach programs within their school, are able to develop trust within their communities. This trust can help principals promote contact between teachers and parents, promote the school to community stakeholders in order to obtain resources, and develop systems that parents can use to align the educational goals of the school with those at home (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Schools that have a shared vision are able to develop more coherent instructional programs (Lambert, 2002). Principals that empower students, staff, and parents through collaborative decision-making, and provide them with the resources they need to succeed, can create a supportive environment for both teaching and learning.

A Shared Vision

Even though more decisions are now being made with shared goals in mind, there is evidence to suggest that both students and principals act from a group perspective based on the norms of their group. Therefore students' behaviors are based on the norms of youth culture (Morrill, 2000; Murdock, 1972) and principals' behaviors are based on the norms of adult culture. Allen's (1983) model (Fig. 2) of the relationship between student and adult perspectives is bidirectional (Hargreaves, 1972), based on symbolic interaction theory (Becker, 1968), and provides this study with a useful way for exploring how students can be more actively considered as partners in co-developing approaches to instructional leadership, and student

achievement outcomes.

This model has been adapted from a study on students' perspectives of teachers as classroom managers (Allen, 1983). It not only highlights the important role student voice plays in empowering students as learners, it also guides my query into how student perspectives can be used to shape and guide new forms of leadership. This framework allows me to position the research on how students' perspectives have been used in schools alongside the literature on leadership. While the theoretical framework does depict a relationship between students' strategies and goals and principals' strategies and goals, it is important to note that principals' perspectives and agendas may also be connected or developed in response to those of the students. Thus, my findings will also draw connections in the two literatures in categories one and two (see Table 2.2).

The framework places these two often disparate members of the school community side-by-side so as to highlight the bidirectional influence students and principals both have on outcomes such as academic achievement and school climate. This framework provides an alternative to more unidirectional approaches to understanding the connection that exists between principals' strategies for improving the instructional program, and students' strategies for succeeding academically in schools. The relationship between these two groups has been discussed at length from the perspective of the adult; this model serves to demonstrate the importance of developing a new line of inquiry that not only includes the students' perspective but also places it beside that of the administrator.

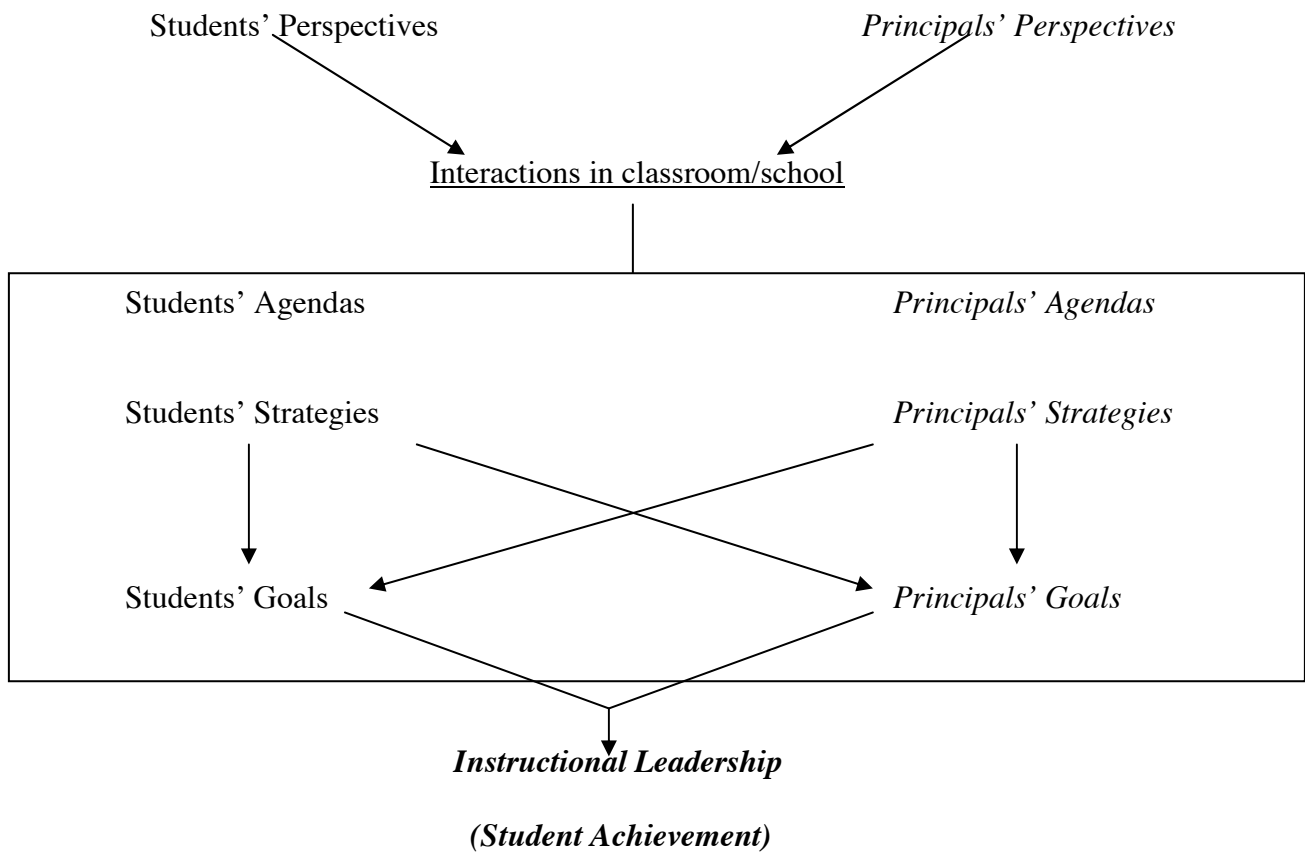


Figure 2.2: *Bidirectional Instructional Leadership Model*, adapted from Allen (1983).

I will use the framework headings to divide my review into corresponding sections, attempting to discover connections in, and develop an analysis of, the literature to more holistically develop a discussion and my conclusions. Each of the three categories; (1) Students' Perspectives, (2) Students' Agendas, and (3) Students' Strategies and Goals, will be broken up into subcategories based on emerging themes from both the student perspective and leadership literature. Because the literature on student perspectives is fragmented and minimal at best, the value of student perspectives as it relates to my research question has emerged from the literature as the first and most important thematic category. Not coincidentally, this category appears at the starting point for exploring the framework, and sets the foundation for our exploration of students' agendas, strategies, goals, and our overarching inquiry into student achievement as it

relates to instructional leadership. This model will also be used to highlight the relationships between instructional leaders, and those receiving the instruction in the past, present, and future.

While students are capable of articulating their thoughts and feelings on a number of topics, including leadership, these perspectives are rarely used to inform the practice of administrators. This gap in the literature presents evidence that there is room to situate a unique counter narrative beside those provided by researchers, teachers, and principals. The lack of research on principals' direct relationships with kids is surprising when one considers the significant roles that both principals and students play key roles in shaping school culture. This is a significant oversight because understanding how, from the perspective of students, leadership behavior influences students' success is critical if researchers want to more fully depict the relationship between leadership behaviors and student achievement. While much has been said about the indirect effects of principal leadership (Krug, 1986; Leithwood et al., 2004) there is a lack of data that discusses the potential for more direct effects on student achievement (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Principals have been disinclined to solicit kids' opinions because so many principals (and even teachers) argue that direct instructional leadership behaviors are unrealistic for principals (Browne, 2003). Despite this, there is evidence from research outside the U.S. that demonstrates how principals have adopted strategies that bring them into the classroom for more direct instructional contact with students on a regular basis (Clarke, 2002; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002).

Until now schools have given students few opportunities to help shape school culture, and even fewer chances to meaningfully structure their instructional program. Principals that fail to use student voice are missing out on opportunities to affect student outcomes vital to successful schools, social development and academic achievement. The role of the principal

continues to change, and as it becomes more focused on improving instruction in schools, students' perspectives of the work that administrators are doing will need to be utilized in order to develop schools intent on addressing more diverse sets of learning needs.

Students' Perspectives

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) placed accountability for student achievement at the top of the grade school agenda, and the burden for improving schools directly on school principals (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Until this point many principals were functioning as school managers whose key responsibilities included shaping school climate, providing professional development and guidance to teachers, and maintaining a visible presence at school (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996). While these roles may have been considered satisfactory until the arrival of the national reform agenda, it soon became clear that a more direct approach to improving instruction in schools would be required.

With this renewed emphasis on instructional leadership, principals began to re-allocate their time to have more instructional contact with their students. This contact often took the shape of behaviors adults determined to be correlated with higher student achievement (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). While classroom visits, visibility, and student and teacher observations were a step in the right direction, the bulk of the feedback and conversations about instruction and reform took place between adults.

According to Moos' (1979) studies on social-ecological perspectives, as students interact with an environmental system, they cognitively and emotionally review the situation. This review impacts how they adapt to their situation, which then impacts their attitudes, behaviors, self-concept, and learning (Wilson, 1994). While Moos has based his studies in the classroom, it is important to note that this social-ecological framework could be applied to other

environments, such as the school. If, as Moos (1979) suggests, educators can become more competent (school climate) by understanding the importance of how students perceive their environment, we can see that principals' perspectives should be, at least in part, shaped by students' perspectives of school.

These overlooked and undervalued consumers of education have had very few opportunities to talk about what they consider to be vital, or detrimental, to their own educations. Over 40 years ago (Becker et al., 1968), the research community had evidence to suggest that schools are the only service organizations that do not ask their consumers, in this case students, what they think about their experiences. Becker's (1961) study on how medical students use their thoughts and feelings to organize their behavior, looked for a group perspective, or a collectively held set of thoughts, to explain how students deal with problems in school. While this was a bold step in understanding the student perspective, its focus, and that of many other student perspective studies been conducted at the University level since then (Saunders et al., 1997), analyze the perspectives of students that are already intrinsically motivated to learn (Wilson, 1994).

When research has taken the time to ask grade school students about learning, it has found that these students are not only motivated to learn (Gentilucci, 2004), but that they were also capable of talking openly about what it is that motivates them to do so (Wilson, 2011). Students have had few opportunities to share their attitudes about classroom management (Allen, 1983), curriculum (Dickinson, 1997), and leadership (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007), and their perceptions of teaching and instruction have all but been ignored.

It is Gentilucci and Muto's (2007) study, conducted with middle school students five years ago, that has served as a key vantage point from which to understand my own research, and

develop new techniques for understanding how elementary school students perceive leadership. This landmark student perspective study, and others like it (Allen, 1983; Gentilucci, 2004), have concluded that students appreciate interactive teachers and principals that (a) got to know them (b) checked on their work, (c) helped them with assignments, and (d) were accessible for instructional and non-instructional support. These studies, and my own, provide a missing link between research on instruction and leadership that has been conducted by and for adults.

Students' Agendas

The students' agendas have long been a source of contention amongst teachers and administrators who believe they know what the students are looking for in their educational experience. Many of these adults are assigning meaning to behaviors of students from demographics that deviate dramatically from the predominantly white, middle-class population that makes up the majority of the educational workforce. Taking this into consideration, we can begin to see how difficult adapting to school might be for a minority student whose values may differ from those of his/her teachers, or an ELL transplanted from a village over ten-thousand miles away (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

This inability to understand the role outside forces play in students' perceptions of school are significant, but research and applied work has also failed to interpret many of the signals our students are trying to send in our schools as well. Teachers and administrators need to look beneath the outward manifestations of youth culture to better understand the internal struggle faced by many minority students and ELL as they try to adapt socially and succeed academically (Warikoo, 2010). Outsiders' approaches to understanding the learning problem students are having in schools have yielded results that suggest students do not value learning as important,

and posit that secondary students spend the majority of their time navigating the hidden curriculum (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Marks, 2000).

However, insider approaches (which are focused on going directly to the subject of the study) yield findings that question this argument's applicability to elementary school students (Gentilucci, 2004). Gentilucci's (2004) student perspective study on improving learning in schools quantitatively suggests that elementary school students care deeply about learning and perceive it to be the key reason for attending school. These same students were not only able to pinpoint flaws in pedagogy such as: unchallenging curriculum, overuse of cooperative learning, and inadequate instruction, they were also able to say that learning problems stemmed from issues they were having inside of the classroom, not outside (Gentilucci, 2004). While some of this research stems from data that was collected as early as 1978, it is strikingly similar to research that was included in the same study and conducted in the year 2000 in that no students mentioned variables outside the classroom such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or social class as a reason for poor learning (Gentilucci, 2004). This is due in no small part to the fact that the narrative around schools does not encourage students to see larger factors as systematically contributing to schools (Kumashiro, 2012).

Students are not alone in their frustration to find their way in schools. Research on effective leadership says that new principals also must navigate the hidden history of their schools in order to develop strategies for addressing school culture (Robbins & Alvy, 2004). However, there are many other items on the principals' agenda that influence school culture which are not offered to the students. These include: (a) creating a school vision, (b) developing learning communities, assessing instruction, curriculum, and leadership, (c) supervising and observing student learning, (d) managing human and material resources, and (e) developing

policies that support students' emotional and academic growth. While schools could benefit from incorporating students' perspectives related to each of these strategies, there are very few schools, particularly elementary schools, that afford them an opportunity to do so.

Diversity has been a continual challenge for school leaders in this country since the early 1850s (Riehl, 2000). Immigration has for decades had far-reaching effects on many schools in urban, rural, and more recently suburban districts. For over a century, educators have confronted the question of how to lead schools filled with diverse students towards success. Every generation of educators has struggled with what it has perceived to be an influx of new students (Grubb, 1995). While public school administrators have generally been supportive of equality of opportunity for all students (Baptiste, 1999), "complex tensions between the ideal equality and the realities of control and stratification permeate American life (Riehl, 2000, p. 56)."

These tensions invariably affect the principal, who now has to address questions of growing student diversity using a homogenous teaching staff and fewer resources than were once readily available. Add in the fact that in the past ten years the number of U.S. students enrolled in special education has risen 30 percent, and that three out of every four students with disabilities spend part or all of their day in inclusive classrooms (NCES, 2010), and the balancing act that takes place between the principal and students' agendas becomes even more complicated.

In addition to the new principals' strategies mentioned above, the growing literature on how principals can better serve these changing demographics focuses on (a) the social organization of schools and classrooms (Lee et al, 1991), (b) the relationships between schools and students' families and communities (Sheldon, 2003), and (c) the importance of teacher education and professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1994). What this research suggests

is that if administrators want to promote inclusive school cultures and instructional practices, they must move beyond the simple application of skills and begin to interact and listen to the students in their buildings. Principals that can open lines of communication between themselves and students, staff and parents, and that can use these discussions to guide their practice; will develop into more coherent instructional leaders.

Giroux (1992) argues that educators must become more engaged and reform minded in their approach to working with students. At the root of his argument, and other arguments rooted in issues of social justice, is a need for school leaders to address social pressures that challenge the principal's ability to reach learners that have until now been failed by the system (Grundy, 1993). School principals have been so concerned with accountability, productivity, and effectiveness in recent years that they often neglected to take the time to critically reflect on the many factors that influence their inability to have success with diverse student populations.

Student identity, and academic self-concept are another set of internal factors that compete with students' and principals' agendas as well (Silins & Mulford, 2010). Current educational reform thinking underestimates the importance of student agency—specifically the willingness of students to take on an academic identity and commit time and effort when peers are making other choices in school (Jackson, 2003). For decades schools have used student voice in relation to student councils that are designed to help students share ideas, interests, and concerns with teachers and principals. However, rarely have students contributed to transformational change or been empowered to actually make a difference in the overall culture of a school. School-established parameters have rarely been designed to include students' perspectives of teaching and leadership, arguably the two most important aspects of student life

(Warner, 2010; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Many adults, and principals in particular, struggle to view students as collaborators that can potentially inform their practice.

The key to unlocking the potential of student voice lies in school leadership. If the school principal can give students opportunities to make decisions that effect their experiences of school relating specifically to leadership and learning, not only will students grow in confidence and skill, but teachers will eventually follow suit as well (Warner, 2010). The implications of wholesaling reform efforts to all members of the instructional community will involve doing more than just listening to student concerns if principals want to create a more cohesive instructional climate. It will involve (a) giving student voice a strategic role in organizational transformation at a building level, (b) modeling ways that it can be used to inform best practice, and then (c) making sure it is implemented in classrooms school-wide to engage students in instruction. Instructional leaders that make meaningful connections with their students, allow them time to interact with their peers (Warikoo, 2010), and use student voice strategically to manage transformational change, can help focus students' agendas on three of the most important student outcomes: empowerment, social development, and academic achievement.

Students' Strategies & Goals

Allen's (1983) study on student perspectives proposed two essential research questions that relate to this study. The first was to establish that students use certain strategies to achieve goals which form their classroom agenda. The second was to establish the degree to which these strategies influence teachers in establishing how the classroom is managed. Allen's study was not able to determine which students' strategies influence teachers, and subsequent studies have failed to determine which strategies influence principals and their instructional leadership. Despite this, it is important to note that ancillary data from Allen's research suggest that adults

are influenced and school management effected by students' strategies. This highlights the bidirectional influence between how students' strategies and goals, can affect those of the principal.

As we can see in Figure 2.2, these questions have been adapted to analyze this query into issues of leadership, and for the first time the conceptual framework draws a connection between students' strategies and principals' goals. Just as students have an agenda that includes strategies to help them achieve their goals, these same strategies also help students adapt to, or circumvent, the goals of the principal (Allen, 1983). For example, an elementary school student may know (or learn) that if she avoids speaking and asking questions in class, she will be favored by her teacher and receive good grades. That same student may perceive the principal as someone who also prescribes by this approach, thereby severing any hope of connection between the student and her experiences of school.

Allen's (1983) study also established that students had two major goals they wished to achieve in class; socializing and passing the course. Six strategies were used by students to achieve these goals and they include figuring out the teacher, having fun, giving the teacher what he/she wants, minimizing work, reducing boredom, and staying out of trouble. While some of these strategies clearly reflect classroom coping mechanisms, it is easy to see that many could relate to school-wide strategies for dealing with administration. Therefore, just as principals' goals are influenced by students' strategies, so too are students' goals influenced by principals' strategies (see Figure 2.2).

Of the six student strategies identified in Allen's (1983) study, two (figuring out the teacher and giving the teacher what he wants) involved students needing to adapt to adult centered approaches. We know that when teachers are aware of student ideas and plan to

address them in instruction, students may be more aware of their own ideas and the role they play in their learning (Dickinson, 1997). By the same logic one could hypothesize that when principals are aware of students' strategies, goals, and perspectives, and plan to use them in more responsive models of leadership, that students will become more actively involved in their own learning.

Wilson's (1994) study on student perspectives revealed nine factors which educators can manipulate to enhance students motivation to learn: (1) competence, (2) control, (3) active involvement, (4) situational interest, (5) curiosity, (6) challenge, (7) honored voices, (8) belonging, and (9) play. The findings of this study suggest that cooperatively structured classrooms (as opposed to individualistic or competitive goal structures) made students want to "get better" and "have choices" in their learning and relationships. These cooperative classroom goal structures have also been characterized as motivational equity structures (Ames, 1984; Covington, 1992), which provide more equal opportunities for all students to pursue success in terms of exceeding one's own goals instead of trying to surpass those of their classmates (Wilson, 1993; Wilson 1994). This is not the first time this strand of literature has pointed to the fact that when students are placed in a collaborative learning environment they will become more empowered and engaged with their learning (Meece et al, 2006). This begs the following question; if research has proven that a classroom teacher can empower students using this model, can a principal not use this same model to empower students on a school-wide basis?

Many of the thirty key responsibilities included in Marzano's (2003) quantitative study of effective school leadership mirror those present in the classroom studies above; and yet there are some which are unique. Visibility is ranked as the eighth most important characteristic of effective leaders. Visibility is here defined as the extent to which the principal has quality

contact and interactions with students, and is characterized by principals that make systematic and frequent visits to classrooms, maintain high visibility around the school, and have frequent contact with the students. While instructional leaders have known for years that classroom supervision, teacher and student observations, and school visibility are important responsibilities, the quantity and quality of their interactions with students have received little attention in formal study. Administrator visibility comes in many forms including classroom walkthroughs, participation at school assemblies, during bussing, at lunch and in the hallways, and has been correlated with improved school climate (Hallinger et al., 1996), decreased discipline problems (Kessor, 2005), and improved communications among students, teachers, and principals (Waters et al., 2004). However, students in Gentilucci & Muto's (2007) study drew a clear distinction between the effects of principal visibility and approachability on their learning. This distinction, and the subsequent student narratives on what approachable principals present in this study, demonstrate the value of insider perspectives (Wilson, 1994; Wilson, 2011) for shaping the principals' strategies and goals. It must also be noted that visibility has not been connected with student achievement (Sorenson, 2010).

There is a significant body of research that speaks to the emphasis students place on the importance of socialization in schools (Catalano, R. et al., 2009; Osgood, W. & Anderson, A. 2004; Silins & Mulford, 2002; Silins & Mulford, 2010). A student's social competence develops out of their life experiences and interactions with others in school (Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2001). Students who develop relationships with adults and peers in school, including principals, report feeling both empowered and integrated in their learning (Forman, 1988; Rothman & Cosden, 1995). Conversely, a lack of social support is likely to give rise to lower social competence and feelings of estrangement (Vaux, 1988). This research into socialization supports

evidence from student perspective research that says students want to do well in school (Gentilucci, 2004), can achieve at higher levels if they are empowered and motivated (Wilson, 2011), and that adults, including principals, can help with that empowerment (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

The link between social development, empowerment, and academic achievement in schools lies in part with the role teachers are playing in the classroom. It also lies with the role principals have not played in structuring students' instructional climate. This connection between principals that work to empower their students, and student achievement appears to be a relatively straightforward solution, and yet is rarely the focus of educational reform efforts. Year after year, reformers pour their resources into well documented and politically popular issues such as curriculum and instruction in search of a quick fix to the achievement problem, and then stand on the sidelines to watch while the students and staff struggle to adapt to a new set of expectations. While there has been a push towards more collaborative learning in the classroom, and these experiences have been found to benefit students socially (Tolmie et al., 2010), students are given fewer opportunities than ever before to socialize with their peers and adults outside of instructional time due to the increase in testing pressures, accountability measures, and data-driven decision-making.

Clearly student empowerment should be at the top of principals' agendas if they are looking to reform or even maintain high levels of student achievement. While the principals' strategies and goals should essentially be linked with those of the students, we find that more often not students are left to navigate their experiences of school and learning on their own, particularly in secondary settings. Elementary settings have naturally been smaller and more supportive, but this does not necessarily mean that these principals are taking the opportunity to

have more contact, instructional or otherwise, with their students, nor have smaller schools or class sizes conclusively indicated a higher level of student achievement (Hoxby, 2000).

Until now, schools have typically only empowered particular students to take on leadership roles in the classroom instead of developing a more universal commitment to ensuring that all students are given opportunities to lead. Teachers and principals have bestowed freedoms on more “gifted” students that are rarely afforded to those who do not enter school with a baseline understanding of the curriculum. Schools intent on preparing students to make decisions that shape their lives, and those of others outside of school, must instead seek to empower all students (Ukpokodu, 1994) if they want to confront issues of diversity and inclusion. If elementary schools are in fact the place that either makes or breaks our students’ desire to become active participants in their own learning (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993), it is more important in this setting, than in any other, that their perspectives on leadership are not only heard, but utilized by administrators to shape their learning and experiences of school.

Summary

The extant research on educational leadership has served as a useful resource for developing the work of administrators, and improving the work being done in schools. School leadership is now widely regarded as second only to classroom instruction as an influence on learning (Leithwood et al., 2006). In addition to being recognized as school managers, principals today are expected to be initiators of change, educational visionaries, curriculum and assessment experts, and community builders (Darling-Hammond, 2007). In this era of accountability and data-driven decision-making, more principals are entering classrooms to observe teaching and learning. Principals’ responsibilities as instructional leaders have been developed (Murphy, 1990), analyzed (Marzano, 2003) and refined by a research community that is now placing more

emphasis on the work of school leaders. It is also now common for principals to consult with their staff and even their community before making decisions that impact the work of adults and children in schools (Blase & Blase, 2000).

While these developments have had a significant impact on how principals approach their role as administrator, gaps in the research that have implications for how principals can continue develop their approaches to school leadership still exist. While teachers have been involved in models of shared decision-making and efforts towards reorganization, school leaders and researchers have neglected to involve students (especially young students) in similar efforts (Gentilucci, 2004). There is ample evidence that effective instructional leaders make decisions with shared goals in mind, and use these goals to drive the teaching and learning that takes place in schools (Locke & Latham, 1990). There is also evidence that principals who are actively involved in the instructional program are better able to develop a sense of shared purpose and create a climate characterized by trust and commitment (Smylie et al., 2005). Data from countless studies like these however, has been gathered from research that has been conducted by and for adults.

Few practitioners, and even fewer researchers, have taken the time to ask students about their experiences of school, learning, and leadership. As a result, there exists a significant gap in literature that analyzes the work of school leaders and their impact on student learning from the members of the school that are actually being asked to do the learning. Students' perspectives of the work being done in schools by principals, developed in conjunction with the principals leading the same schools, could serve as a critical narrative to those developed in the past by adults alone. Such a narrative might be capable of informing the work being done by principals,

and perhaps more importantly, serve to empower students as learners, decision makers, and school leaders in their own right.

Subjectivity Statement

As a classroom teacher my key strength was my ability to develop strong relationships with students of all ages. I used these relationships as my impetus for change and reform in elementary and secondary schools filled with both at risk students and English Language Learners (ELL) for ten years. Most of the research on student perspectives has been likewise conducted to inform the practices of other teachers. These queries into topics such as classroom management (Allen, 1983), student motivation (Wilson, 2011), and factors influencing student learning (Gentilucci, 2004) have been useful for practitioners interested in understanding how to design their instructional program, and have largely been conducted by researchers acting as participant observers. While researchers and practitioners have recognized the value in gaining this insider perspective, neither group has been adept at allowing young students' narratives an opportunity to stand on their own, or even alongside adult or young-adult perspectives.

Shortly before arriving in the teaching and leadership department at Syracuse University (SU), I had the good fortune of being able to work with a building leader at an international school overseas that completely transformed the way I viewed school leadership. During this time I made huge strides as a teacher, collaborator, and as a school leader in my own right. This principal spent the majority of her time in the classroom, had direct instructional contact with all grade levels, small group instructional time with both at risk and gifted students on a regular basis, and was able to develop meaningful relationships with every student and staff member at her school. It was this administrator that inspired me to pursue my graduate study into issues of leadership and instruction here at SU, and this research project.

That being said, before starting my work at SU I was not able to discern which of this principal's behaviors was or was not an "instructional leadership" behavior. Research into instructional leadership has been extensive, and has largely focused qualitatively and quantitatively on measuring the importance of day-to-day tasks that lend themselves to "best practice." Many administrators have turned to these prescribed lists in hopes of developing or re-structuring their approaches to leadership. While some administrators may now be more aware of the teaching and learning that takes place because of this shift in practice, I do not find that they are necessarily better equipped to address the unique learning environments in their own schools. The source of school administrators' failure to be educational leaders lies in the organizational context in which they work, and the set of skills and expectations they bring to their role (Murphy, 1990). Many principals fail to engage in instructional behaviors not only because they lack the know-how, but more commonly because competing demands appear more achievable.

I find it important to mention that when I recently asked my influential administrator from abroad about how and why she structured her principalship the way she did, that she responded simply, "It's always been about the kids, they're why I am here." When I took the time to speak with a now-retired local public school leader known for her close relationships with students here in Syracuse, I was convinced that her explanation would be rife with jargon such as that which appears throughout the educational leadership literature and which some principals use to describe their work here in the United States. I was again disappointed however, as there was no mention of instructional, transformative, or even distributive leadership. Her answer was nearly identical to that of the other principal, and I don't believe this similarity is in anyway a coincidence. The focus of their work was on the interactions they had

with the students in their schools and all other responsibilities were considered secondary. As a result both principals were able to create a school climate where student achievement and social development was the center of attention for teachers like myself, parents, and most importantly students. If principals can begin to reflect in greater depth on how they influence student learning, and spend less time focused on what others have defined as “best practice,” schools can become more responsive, and principals can become more responsible leaders.

Student perspectives have been widely used to inform researchers interested in structuring the experiences of University students (Jenkins, 1998; Lieberman, 1994), and adolescents have been given opportunities to co-generate research that informs secondary education both here in the United States and abroad (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2002). Elementary schools however, frequently lauded by researchers and practitioners alike as the place that separates the wheat from the chaff (Kohn, 2002), have given their students the fewest opportunities to inform the practice of schools and administrators. As a researcher inspired by other teachers and principals that have used students and their approaches to learning as their impetus for change, I’m naturally focused on improving schools most like the ones where I went to school, the ones in which I taught, and that inspired me to teach. Unless researchers and practitioners significantly re-conceptualize their approaches to improving student learning, particularly the experiences of young students, problems symptomatic of elementary schools will continue to create far-reaching effects not only throughout the students’ educational experience, but in society as well.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present a qualitative research methodology I designed using the literature on educational leadership, youth studies, and student perspective research. This methodology was designed to carefully examine principals' and students' perspectives of school, learning, and leadership across four very different schools. Using Elden & Levin's (1991) cogenerative model of participatory action research as a theoretical framework, I explore the relationship between these two disconnected members of the school community, in order to develop a new shared theory that can be used to inform the work of principals and researchers, and empower students as learners.

Research Design

Principals are not the only ones whose reform efforts have fallen short. It is important to note that many researchers have also sought to find answers using an outsider approach (Gentilucci, 2004). Some researchers have made thorough descriptions of students' actions and then used these descriptions to explain what lies behind the actions (Mehan, 1979; Everhart, 1983). Others have focused on understanding what students think (Goodlad, 1984) or feel (Batcher, 1981) based purely on observation. Biklen (2004) also found evidence that ethnographers of youth often invoke their own memories in relation to their informants. These substitutions of adults' perspectives for that of the participant under study (Denzin, 1978) assigns meanings and motives to student actions that fail to explain why students relate to school and principals the way they do (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). While using adult viewpoints in their qualitative and quantitative studies of learning and instruction provided schools and the research

community with a significant amount of data they could use to improve schools, students thoughts and feelings regarding their experiences of school and learning were all but ignored.

Researchers interested in student attitudes have most frequently used participant observation (Garn et al., 2011; Gentilucci, 2004; Pacheco, 2010; McCaslin, 2008; Good & McCaslin, 2008; Konishi, 2007) to gain an insider perspective (Allen, 1986; Bacon, 1988; Wilson 1994) of schools from the students' point of view. This approach looks at the educational experience by going directly to the students to understand the problems they face (Mitchell, 1993). Using this approach the researcher shares the school experience with students, and in doing so gains credibility, insider knowledge, and learns how the students think and feel about situations (Wilson, 2011). While this approach allows the researcher to more fully immerse themselves in the students' world, there is also evidence that suggests this role may interfere with the researcher's ability to interpret the data they are gaining from students in this setting (Bouchard, 1976).

An alternative to participant observation that suits many researchers in the field of education is Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Raby, 2007). This approach is appealing for researchers concerned with the treatment of students as subjects and participants rather than objects of a study (O'Kane, 2000). Advocates of PAR make the case that it is the most powerful strategy for advancing both research and applied work, and that practitioners are more committed due to their involvement in the design, data gathering, analysis, conclusions, and actions stemming from the research (Whyte, 1991). The roles of researchers in PAR are different when compared with conventional research. PAR as a method of learning empowers the participants by allowing them to: (a) discover how to create their own explanations, (b) learn how to learn, and (c) learn how to create new possibilities for action (Elden & Levin, 1991).

Elden & Levin's (1991) insider-outsider model (see Figure 3.1) of PAR includes six dimensions: insider's framework, outsider's framework, participating in cogenerative dialogue, new shared framework, testing through collective action, and producing new general theory. This model was created by Elden & Levin to emphasize that the participants of the study (students), or insiders, are not subjects or data sources, but instead co-learners. This model does not promote prescriptive behaviors for researchers to impose on the students. Instead, its emphasis lies in the cogenerative dialogue that takes place between researcher and participant in developing a shared theory where meaning emerges as data is produced.

Elden & Levin (1991) define cogenerative dialogue as:

The empowering participation that occurs between insiders and outsiders—
insiders and outsiders operate out of their initial frames of reference but communicate at a level where frames are changed and new frames generated (p. 134).

This framework will allow me to explore: (a) the value of including students (insider's framework) in research, (b) approaches that researchers (outsider's framework) have taken in previous youth studies, (c) approaches that have been taken between students and researchers (cogenerative dialogue), and (d) discuss the value and significance of this collaboration. The bottom two dimensions of the framework will be the resulting theory I develop through my literature review, and the approach I decide to take when conducting my research in the field. While this model has been adapted to serve my own exploration of qualitative research methods, it is important to note that this framework could also be used to support the applied work of principals interested in using their students' perspectives of leadership to develop new approaches to leadership.

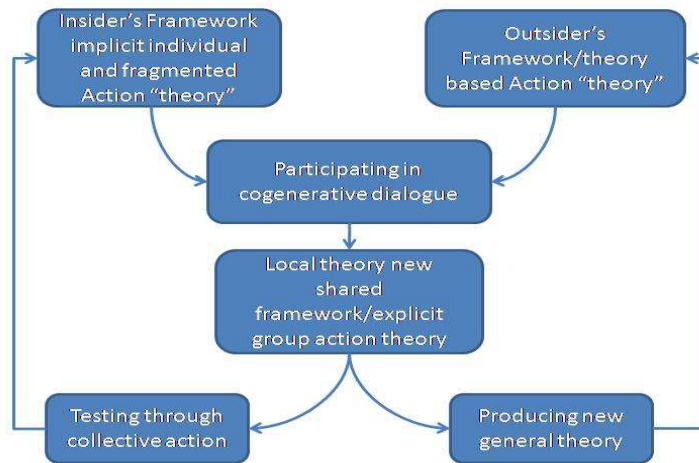


Figure 3.1: Elden & Levin's (1991) *cogenerative model of participative action research*.

This model will be used to develop my discussion of how researchers have used students' perspectives to inform their practice. This model will support conclusions drawn from this review, and provide a link between these conclusions and suggestions for future research.

Within schools children and adults are located in highly structured relationships with one another. Although the primary purpose of schools is to educate children, they are also places characterized by discipline and control (Leonard, 2007). This presents problems not only for researchers interested in exploring the relationships between students and administrators, but also for students interacting with adult researchers. Some researchers have argued that principals, teachers, researchers, and adults have spent a considerable amount of time providing explanations for student problems that at times run contrary to what students actually perceive (Cook-Sather, 2007). There is a growing group of scholars who are calling on youth researchers to develop an alternative to the dominant discourse of adults (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003). These student-centered researchers have found that children's perspectives are not only constructive, but that they align with much educational theory, and create conditions for dialogue

(Cook-Sather, 2009). These dialogues between student and researcher, and student and principal, are critical to the development of this review.

Good qualitative research is able to discover new processes, increase the volume of marginalized voices, produce thick enough descriptions of students' experiences for researchers and administration to transfer findings between contexts, and challenge the researcher standpoint bias that orients findings toward an adultcentric perspective (Ungar, 2002). Forced-choice and closed-ended designs, risk blinding researchers to the variety of forms of engagement that young people may be exploring, and quantitative approaches tend to focus on background variables, thereby rooting discussions in background or prior knowledge (Flacks, 2007). Student perspective research is more than just a counterpoint to the dominant discourse. Because young students have been excluded from conversations about leadership in schools, new methods and approaches need to be developed to detect the ways in which young people's actions today can help determine their futures. It is important that researchers are sensitive enough to detect the different ways that students respond to leadership, so that the relationships between principals and students can become more meaningful in the future.

Insider's framework

Large numbers of students describe their experiences of school in terms of anonymity and powerlessness (Noddings, 1992). Large schools, ability tracking, and the commonly held view of students as consumers of education (Erchul & Martens, 2010), have created distance between students and adults (Mitra, 2008). This distance has a significant impact on many students' ability to learn, social/emotional development (Fullan, 2001), and is a key reason why many students eventually leave school prematurely (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Researchers and practitioners have repeatedly cited external factors such as socioeconomic status, punitive home

environments, lack of parent involvement, and aversive communities, as root causes for disengagement (Mayer, 1995).

Students on the other hand have cited a host of factors inside the school as the reason why they are struggling to learn, such as unchallenging curriculum, teacher misbehavior, inadequate instruction, and overuse of cooperative learning (Gentilucci, 2004). These factors have in turn given students a poor academic self-concept and provided them with very little agency in their own learning (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993). This lack of empowerment is largely a result of the gap in understanding that exists between students and adults. As more subjectivist, student-based approaches to educational research and reform take root, a much needed and long-awaited counter-narrative to adults' perspectives may help improve the work of students and adults in schools.

Based on the assumption that the truth of a situation is best understood by those who experience it, insider approaches to understanding the educational experiences go directly to the students for answers (Wilson, 2011). Researchers that have taken the time to ask students about their experiences of education have repeatedly been surprised by both the depth and scope of students' responses (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001) on a variety of topics. Insider approaches to research have revealed students' thoughts and feelings matter and can provide schools and the research community with new evidence (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). While the agendas of adults are often intended to promote student learning, they have typically been imposed on the students, and often do more to get in the way of student learning than to support it.

Student perspective research has revealed clear connections between student voice, educational leadership, and positive youth development (Mitra, 2008). Student voice initiatives in schools have expanded notions of distributed leadership (Copeland, 2003), and collaboration,

to include young people in school-based reform efforts. These same initiatives have been shown to increase student agency, to more actively involve students in the instructional program, and help build a range of skills including collaboration and project-based learning (Kirchner, 2005). Many of these initiatives have been conducted at a classroom level and emphasize the relationships between students and teachers (Meyer, 1999). School-wide initiatives, or those that emphasize the relationship between students and principals, while scarce at best, suggest that principals who use students' perspectives as a resource for improving school climate, and informing their instructional leadership, can effect change in schools today (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

Recently, researchers outside the field of education have created what is commonly known as the youth development perspective (Lerner et al., 2006). This perspective challenges adult-centric viewpoints that have typically portrayed youth as resistant, and determined to isolate themselves from society (Males, 1996). This new perspective views youth as a resource to be developed (Benson, 2003), and emphasizes the strengths present within all young people for self-improvement (Dowling et al., 2003). It also invites researchers interested in exploring alternative methods to adult-based studies, an opportunity to use students as a resource for refining their approaches to understanding the problems that face schools, while concurrently developing new approaches to student empowerment. Researchers and practitioners have found that students' perspectives align with educational theory, are constructive, and can be conducted on an ongoing basis (Cook-Sather, 2010; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004).

Despite this knowledge, most schools do nothing to meaningfully include children in models of shared leadership, to empower students as learners, or promote student agency, and few members of the research community have explored student voice and its potential for

affecting the way principals do their jobs, structure their instructional programs, or the students' experiences of school. Adults that are able to design student-driven approaches to making schools better will find a valuable, abundant, and largely overlooked resource within the walls of public schools nationwide today.

Outsider's framework

Outsider status has implications on conducting research with students (Taft, 2007). There are a number of key conceptual and methodological considerations in the study of youth (Best, 2007). Race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, ability, nation, location, religion, and a number of other factors affect the commonality researchers have with students (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). These factors are relevant to the relations researchers have in the field, and also shape the theoretical claims researchers make after leaving the field (Wesley, 2005). Other issues relating to the researchers role with students are membership roles, rapport with students, trust, and acceptance (Nairn et al., 2005). With the growing popularity of autoethnography, personal narrative, and storytelling (Brooks, 2005), qualitative researchers interested in studying students are now focused on developing more innovative research strategies for addressing these differences (DeVault, 1995). One key overarching difference has been the researchers' position of power (Collins, 1990). Student perspective researchers have recently made efforts to reduce the power imbalance inherent in conducting qualitative research with children. This movement towards non-exploitative research methods has given rise to a more self-conscious and critical method of inquiry and analysis (Denzin, 1992).

Despite this, many students still typically perceive adults as outsiders, and as a result there is often a lack of trust and shared understanding between researcher and participant (Fielding, 2004). However, being an outsider can have its advantages. For example, students

may acknowledge or pay more attention to factors affecting their education if an outsider finds it to be significant. Researchers also have the advantage of being outside the tensions and hidden obstacles present in community relationships (Raby, 2007). While this may result in questioning that can sound naïve to the participants, it can also more directly address underlying factors that effect students and learning.

Most researchers studying children today adopt the position that children are worthy of study in their own right (James et al., 1998). Such a stance suggests that an ethnographic approach provides researchers with the insider perspective. Ethnographers typically spend an extended period of time at the research site becoming a member of the group under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Participant observation has been used in a number of qualitative studies that put students at the center of the research design (Gentilucci, 2004; Wilson, 2011; Guishard, 2005; Garn et al., 2011). This subjectivist approach is suited towards attaining student perspectives of leadership that are uninhibited by what Denzin (1978) termed the fallacy of objectivism (i.e., the substitution of one's own perspective, or that of another adult, for that of the participant under study) (Gentilucci, 2004). While direct observation and participation in the natural setting permits easy entrance into situations by reducing the resistance of group members (Hargreaves, 1967), it also affects the natural environment, can affect student responses during interviewing, and raises issues of inference and proof for the reader (Becker, 1958). Another key methodological problem facing adult participants concerns the membership role adopted by the researcher (Adler & Adler, 1987). Shared insider status may generate false perceptions of a common outlook or similar interpretations of school-wide factors (Raby, 2007). For example, an adult conducting research with young people is an outsider who may imagine to be an insider based on memories of his/her own experiences as students or children (Biklen, 2004). In cases

like this, the expectations of both participant and researcher are affected, and the researchers' interpretations of the data may be skewed.

Questionnaires and surveys are commonly used by researchers in educational research. While these methods often allow researchers to gather data more quickly and in a standardized way, these methods have several disadvantages for researchers interested in generating data for the purposes of a shared framework. Firstly, these methods, like many evaluation methods, occur after an event. As a result, participants may forget important issues, answer questions superficially, or feel as if they will not benefit from being meaningfully included in the research. Researchers interested in looking at student voice need be aware that the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of students must be unencumbered by any approach that limits their ability to be heard.

One approach that has been frequently used to supplement both non-participatory and participatory approaches to observation is the use of student interviews (Jonasson, 2011; Mok, 2011). This approach uses open-ended questions to gather details and allow for the students to answer from their own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Some researchers however believe that interviewing is too often treated as a means to an end, and as a transparent process of data collection, rather than as a medium for actively cogenerating data (Bleakley, 2005). One key implication of such an approach is that data may largely be constructed with the researchers' interests in mind. This approach can prove effective with adults when governed by a clear protocol. Some advantages for the researcher include: eliciting more in-depth responses or filling in information if participant does not understand the question, longer interviews are often tolerated, this method is convenient for the respondent, extensive probing can be used to collect detailed information, and respondents' body language can guide the interviewer and be recorded to help interpret comments (Cano, 2007).

Best (2007) identifies the following four principles outsiders must be cognizant of when conducting research with children:

- 1) A sustained concern for and consideration of the complexities of power and exploitation in the research encounter.
- 2) An acknowledgment of the connection between power and knowledge. Such an acknowledgment requires that we recognize that the accounts we provide shape and construct reality as much as they describe it.
- 3) A desire to conduct sound ethical research that empowers youth and children and to find ways to improve the conditions under which their lives unfold.
- 4) A commitment to a radical reflexivity that interrogates the varied points of difference that intersect in our own lives and those we study (p. 9).

Outsiders interested in solving problems in theory and/or practice must design and implement research that emphasizes these core values. Researchers play a significant role in structuring students' experiences of school, and can empower learners, through their approaches to, and interpretations of, problems in schools. When student voice is not genuinely attended to, and when students are not, or feel they are not a part of the change process, researchers can also disempower students (Cook-Sather, 2010).

Participating in cogenerative dialogue

Research theory is influenced by the local situation in which it is created, and research itself is a particular way of systematic learning (Elden & Levin, 1991). Many researchers believe that participatory action research (PAR) is an ideal approach for including young people in research about them (Alderson, 2000). This approach is best suited for researchers that want to treat students as subjects and participants rather than objects of the study (Raby, 2007). In

nonparticipatory research only the researcher or those interested in the research report learn (McTaggart, 1991). PAR gives the researcher an opportunity to produce knowledge and action that is useful to the student, thereby empowering them as a co-learner. PAR empowers students to discover and create better explanations about their experience of school, and new possibilities for action (Elden & Levin, 1991).

However, not all approaches to PAR have been empowering for students (Brown & Tandon, 1983). Researchers that do not emphasize the creative role the participant plays in developing the research, and afford insiders opportunities to create new meaning (Elden, 1985), disempower students and elicit findings that may be inconsistent with the research design. Principals also have the ability to disempower students when they fail to act dialogically (Freire, 1972). Elden & Levin's (1991) concept of cogenerative dialogue is unique in that it applies to any form of liberating learning.

PAR in schools has primarily been conducted in secondary (Sonn et al., 2011) and post secondary (Congdon & Congdon, 2011) settings. Teachers have also frequently used cogenerative dialogue with students to inform their teaching (Lavan & Beers, 2005), and with each other to support co-teaching efforts (Roth, 2001; Tobin, 2006). Principals, however, have largely ignored cogenerative dialogue with students, and research has only scratched the surface in its attempts to understand the inherent possibilities that lie therein (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Most researchers who enter the world of children assume a semi-participatory role, and many argue that this role is preferable to complete involvement (James et al., 1998).

Another approach that has proven successful at providing students with opportunities to meaningfully involve themselves in the research process is the use of narrative inquiry (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001). This method affords the outsider an opportunity to view aspects of school

through the eyes of an insider, and the insider an opportunity to share in a way they find most comfortable. These narratives have been most commonly presented by secondary students capable of articulating their perspectives in writing, and have focused on a wide range of topics including race, gender, sexuality, curriculum, and academic engagement. Narrative approaches to qualitative study allow researchers to establish credibility through the selection of the details (Richardson, 1997). These details can be presented using other forms of communication, such as images or illustrations to communicate meaning (Riessman, 2008). Narrative researchers choose narratives of their own or from students (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). Some researchers have used a combination of narrative approaches to stitch together a more complete study for both the student and audience (Polkinghorne, 1988).

When working with younger students, researchers must navigate a more delicate set of circumstances than they would ordinarily. These researchers work with teachers and students to define and redefine how deeply they are to be included in research activities (Hadley, 2007). Likewise, adults that engage in research with older children have to make shifts in their level and type of participation. As students grow older they gain more power and ability to decide when to give adults access to their lives (Fine & Sandstrom, 1998). Inevitably, it is the student's decision to provide the researcher with access to the information that is most vital.

Researchers and administrators interested in using cogenerative dialogue with students should be committed to not only listening to students, but also to responding (Cook-Sather, 2010). Other guiding principles of cogenerative dialogue include clearly explaining the focus of the study, and choosing methods that deepen understanding of student learning (Cushman, 2009). When educators view students as active participants in discussions about their experiences of school, and their voices are included in shaping those experiences, students and

adults can develop new ways of thinking about school and talk openly about the possibilities (Lodge, 2005).

An interviewing approach that has received little attention with pre-adolescent children is the use of focus groups (Hoppe et al., 1995). In a focus group one student's responses may provoke responses from others in the group. As a result, information that would not ordinarily enter a one-on-one interview, where students are more reluctant to share based on either preconceived or broadcast notions of authority, can be obtained (McDonald & Topper, 1989). According to Patton (1990), focus group interviews are essential in the evaluation process, and as part of a needs assessment. In an effort to provide more specific, nuanced information about students' views and experiences, focus groups are a valuable method for (a) gaining access to reports on a wide range of topics that may not be observable, (b) providing students with an opportunity to interact more openly in a permissive, non-threatening environment, and (c) ensuring that the data will be directly targeted to the researchers' interests (Krueger, 1988).

Most of the literature on focus groups fails to address the needs of people who cannot read or write and thereby excludes them from more formal channels of communication.

Liamputtong (2011) addresses these concerns in the following passage:

Focus group methodology allows the researchers to conduct their investigations in sensitive areas and with groups of people who, because of their conditions, may find other forms of research intimidating. Focus groups provide a forum for mutual support. Hence, they are likely to offer safer environments for vulnerable people to be able to express their needs and concerns. As such, the methodology offers remarkable possibilities for diverse research applications with vulnerable people including children, people with disabilities and older people (p. 124).

Ethical concerns and issues of social justice are here included in a discussion of how the methodology might relate to those who have been othered by educational research. While students may not appear to be a 'vulnerable population' by some, it is important to note that adults have often invoked meaning on research with young people in the past (Biklen, 2007).

Shared framework/Local theory

When models of cogenerative dialogue involving students are successful, the insiders and outsiders generate more concise and coherent explanations (Elden & Levin, 1991). Researchers and principals that learn to listen to and represent the students' perspectives, become inspired, challenged, reformed and taught anew (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001). While working with students to compose research requires more openness and flexibility on the part of the outsider, who typically come from worlds in which they lead more than follow, adults must actively develop strategies for eliciting student voice best suited to the population participating in the study.

Cohen's (2001) research revealed that by working directly with children to generate a local theory, the researcher changed and deepened both the relationship and the nature of the data. Researchers and practitioners that are able to develop strong working relationships with students can gain entrée into a realm of possibilities that other cannot, while empowering students in the process (Kreider, 1999). Working with students to compose research requires an openness and flexibility many researchers may not be comfortable with or for which they don't have the skill to conduct.

In order to develop a theory that is truly shared between researcher and student, reflexivity, and an awareness of the difference between methodological approaches that unknowingly effect the outcomes of a study, and approaches that are aware of the potential for

this effect, and which attempt to develop research that is free from outcome bias is necessary (Bourdieu, 1996). Interviewers must be aware of the social structure in which the interview is taking place, particularly when dealing with populations that have been marginalized from conversations about leadership in schools.

Having analyzed the methods researchers have used with students in the past, it has become evident that a new method for eliciting students' perspectives of leadership may need to be developed. Researchers that use different methods to understand a single topic can produce results that are both confirming and powerful (Denzin, 1978). Narrative inquiry, participatory action research, and the use of focus groups all appear suited to developing a useful dialogue between principals and students. These three methods are compatible because they give the researcher an opportunity to co-construct a shared framework with the subjects under study. Narrative methods focus on the meaning subjects make of what is happening, instead of what the research interprets. This is important for researchers examining subjects that have not been included in formal presentations of research, and will be critical to an honest study focused on student voice, and observations of the relationships between students and administrators in school. In exploring the ways that principals use student voice, while working to empower students, it will be critical for researchers to take a participatory approach and intervene between these two often disconnected members of the school community. In order to do this a new way of developing a cogenerative dialogue that can be used to inform the work of principals may be necessary. Face-to-face interviews with principals can be used to inform my line of questioning when conducting focus groups with their students. Likewise, focus groups of students can be used to inform my line of questioning with principals. By opening these lines of communication,

principals and researchers may have something they can point to in developing a local theory of their own.

This theory should serve to help solve real problems that the participants found important enough to explore, and not simply to open a line of communication for the sake of keeping up appearances. This means that the local theory must be collectively tested and improved by the participants (Elden & Levin, 1991). Research has found that when adults develop mechanisms for ensuring that student voice and participation are central to decision making practices in school, and build their educational contexts around the premise of listening to students, local theories that transcend traditional insider-outsider frameworks can emerge to transform the unique challenges faced in schools today (Cook-Sather, 2010; Elden & Levin, 2001).

Summary

The results of this synthesis reveal that principals now make instructional decisions with shared goals in mind. While shared decision-making results in a more coherent instructional program, most school-wide goals have been developed exclusively by adults. Principals that increase student responsibility and use student voice to drive their instructional leadership have empowered students (Warner 2010). This empowerment has resulted in better behavior, higher achievement, and the development of a shared set of goals between students and staff (Mitra 2008). Principals have done this by playing a more visible and accessible role school-wide and in classrooms, and by having more direct instructional contact with the students. The data suggests that instructional leaders must develop more specific goals using a shared vision which includes the students; if they want to create a school climate that is more inclusive, conducive to learning, and better equipped to respond to change.

There is also evidence that students' thoughts and feelings matter and can provide schools and the research community with new evidence that can be used to inform the existing research on instructional leadership and administrative function in the field. Principals that underestimate student agency, struggle to address diversity, and that fail to make themselves accessible to their students, are getting in the way of opportunities for reform. Principals that only use adult perspectives to shape their instructional leadership practices leave students to circumvent or adapt to an appointed set of goals that in many cases will not coalesce with their own, and may impede their ability to develop socially and academically.

In order to most effectively develop a meaningful conversation about school leadership with students, researchers need to take a more participatory approach and purposefully intercede to develop a discussion that has not yet been held between administrator and elementary school student. Focus groups of students, combined with in-depth interviews of the student's principal and critical observation of how the relationship between the two looks at each research site, will allow me to develop a unique lens through which to generate a well-informed and shared framework. Student perspective research is more than just a counterpoint to the dominant discourse, and its methods and approaches need to be action relevant if they are going to reshape the work that principals do.

Researchers are privileged in their access to resources most children do not have (Raby, 2007). This privilege has often put researchers in a place of power where their studies using students have supplanted the adult voice for that of the subject of study. While age, socioeconomic status, gender, culture, and race all impact the relationship between researcher and student, it is this abuse of authority that lies at the root of research that has failed to let the

students speak for themselves, and that has failed to include students' perspectives on one of the most dominant forces in their experience of schools: principals.

Method

This study is designed as a multi-site ethnography of how elementary school principals empower students and use student voice to develop their principalship. With this study I describe and explain how principals have (or have not) used students' perspectives to structure their experiences of school and learning. Here I will describe the study settings, participants, and methods for data collection and analysis. In order to build on what is known about how students perceive school, learning, and leadership, this study will answer the research questions listed above.

Participants

The participating principals included in this study have been recruited based on the following criteria: a) recommendations from colleagues at both Syracuse University and regional schools that have identified candidates based on my descriptions of principals that work directly with students to find meaningful ways of promoting student learning and shaping their principalship, b) face-to-face screening interviews I then held with possible candidates where I asked about specific strategies they had in place (or were developing) that incorporated student voice and/or empowered students, and c) principals that expressed excitement about being included in a study that is designed to support the work they do with students, by involving students in the work they do as principals.

Some general traits of instructional leaders identified for the purpose of selecting my sample include: maintaining high visibility in the classroom and around the school, a commitment to increasing student responsibility, active participation in student learning, and an

ability to improve student learning outcomes. More specific criteria include: accessibility, providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement, forging links between the home and school, and actively monitoring student progress (Murphy, 1990). During the screening interviews I asked the principals to talk about situations where they thought student voice mattered. I also had principals identify ways in which they interact with the students, make themselves accessible to students, and help children cope with the challenges they face, in an effort to better understand how they help students learn, utilize student voice, and increase student responsibility (My expectation was that I would have far more principals to choose from during the screening process. Of the five principals who expressed interest in being included in the screening process, all five expressed an interest in participating in the study, and saw the value such a study could have for improving their school. As a result, each was included in the final sample. One of these five principals was unable to participate after making an initial commitment due to time constraints. Limitations of this approach will be discussed in chapter six).

Principals were also purposefully selected from a variety of elementary school settings to inform this study. This study includes two urban, one suburban, one rural, and one site that admits both rural and urban students. Because few studies have investigated what students perceive principals do to influence their academic achievement (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007), and the majority of principals struggle to find the time to devote to working with kids (Walker, 2009), it is important to provide both researchers and practitioners with evidence of how these student-centered administrators lead in schools that represent a number of different populations.

During interviews I found that each of the principals selected for this study chose different methods for approaching their work with children. Despite these differences, two

common themes that emerged from my early conversations with these principals were (1) their emphasis on student development as taking precedence over staff development, and (2) their desire to enhance dialogue between students and administrators using a methodological approach I have developed based on extensive research into qualitative youth studies, educational leadership, and student perspectives literatures.

Another class of participants is elementary school students. Because I did not want to actively interfere in any of the students' instructional time in schools, I gave the principals opportunities to decide when I would be given access to small focus groups of students (4-6 students per focus group). In an effort to draw a representative sample of students I requested that each principal grant me access to groups of students at each grade-level (in kindergarten-fourth grade schools this would mean meeting with five groups of students, in kindergarten-fifth grade schools, six groups, etc.). While some principals were comfortable providing me with the requested number of students, others preferred that I meet with grade levels that they thought will be better able to articulate their feelings and attitudes based on their age. Because age does not appear to be a discriminating factor in this setting, I accepted their offer. Each focus group was randomly selected from classrooms at each grade-level and meant to be representative of the overall population of the school (across diversity areas such as race, special education, ELL, etc.).

After the principal and I decided which grades would be best suited for conducting the interviews, the principal then sent letters home to the parents in those grade-levels introducing the study (see Appendix A). The letters were sent home by way of the classroom teachers and to the entire class. These letters gave parents the option to allow their child to participate, decline participation, or learn more about the study before making a decision. The parents that

said they would first like to learn more were then sent another letter (see Appendix A) which provided more detail about the study and the nature of their child's participation. This follow-up letter also gave parents an option to decline or allow their child to participate. Parents that said they would like their child to participate were then sent a formal consent form they were asked to sign and return (see Appendix B). These consent forms were collected by the teachers and given to the principal as they arrived. When there were more than enough consent forms returned, the principal and I then sat down with the signed consent forms, and blindly selected only the amount needed (four to six) to conduct a well-rounded focus group.¹ Students that brought a signed consent form, but were not selected to participate in the focus group interviews, were notified by their teachers.

Finally, with my support, the principals appointed an adult representative to attend each focus group. This adult was neither one of the students' teachers or an administrator. Principals appointed teaching assistants, school counselors, and office personnel to moderate the length of time the students would be able to attend each focus group, and to help the students find their way to the research site from class, the lunchroom, or the restroom. While moderators typically remained silent for the duration of the focus group interview, there were two instances where they were able to help clarify points in the conversation for the students or myself. I will refer to these adults as 'moderator' in chapter four.

Data Collection

The research goals of this study are to understand how adults use student perspectives to structure their approaches to leadership. I have used Elden & Levin's (1991) cogenerative

¹ In all four of the schools principals agreed that selecting two grades to work with would be the best course of action. At the rural and suburban sites I met with one focus group of students in grade three and one in group four. At the two urban sites I was scheduled to meet with one focus group in grades four and in grade five. At one urban site I only received enough consent forms back to meet with one focus group of fifth grade students. Limitations to this approach are discussed in chapter six.

learning model as the theoretical framework for investigating the youth studies, student perspective, and educational leadership literatures. Research has shown that using different kinds of data to understanding a single topic can produce results that are both confirming and powerful (Denzin, 1978). My research produced a mixed-qualitative approach that principals and researchers can use to structure their approaches to leadership, empower students, and create more meaningful dialogue between children and adults.

In-depth interview

One approach that has been frequently used to supplement both non-participatory and participatory approaches to observation is the use of face-to-face interviews. This approach uses open-ended questions to gather details and allow for respondents to answer from their own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). This approach can prove effective with adults when governed by a clear protocol. Some advantages for the researcher and participant include: eliciting more in-depth responses or filling in information if participants do not understand the question, longer interviews are often tolerated, this method is convenient for the respondent, extensive probing can be used to collect detailed information, and respondents body language can guide the interviewer and be recorded to help interpret comments (Cano, 2007).

My first formal interview with the principals lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted before I spoke with the students near the beginning of the spring semester. Questions in the first interview included: descriptions of a “typical” day, success stories, challenges and hurdles, ways student-based initiatives were presented at the schools, and interactions with the students (see Appendix C). Data collected from this interview was used to inform my questioning during my subsequent focus group which was conducted with the students (see below). A second interview, which lasted between 60-90 minutes, was then conducted with the

principals after my first focus group with the students. The questioning from this interview was created in response to the analysis of my first focus group with students, was informed by my observations at the site, and gave the principals an opportunity to respond to any questions and/or concerns posed by the students.

Focus groups

Implications for conducting focus groups with vulnerable or marginalized populations, including children, have been considered and weaknesses of this methodology have been meaningfully reviewed. Focus groups are not immune to researcher bias, and they come with their own unique set of challenges. Recruitment and data analysis emerge as the two most significant hurdles researchers face when using this approach across a variety of disciplines. My inclusion of the contemporary qualitative research methods literature helped me to focus on more specific issues of reflexivity, narrative inquiry, and ethnographic approaches to using this method in educational contexts and with children. More current approaches to using focus groups across all disciplines, and with marginalized populations, point to incorporating the focus group as a way to summarize a series of observations.

There are a number of strategies that researchers have used when conducting focus groups with children. I have employed several of these strategies in an effort to conduct fun, age-appropriate activities focused on the research topic (see Appendix D). One such strategy was the use of a warm-up activity with students from all grades. This involved breaking the ice with the group, and practicing some of the basic skills necessary for participating in a focus group. I introduced the subject at the beginning of the first interview by using a free association activity where students were asked to identify images of various adults and take turns describing the same images. The photographs I showed the students were of a firefighter, a policeman, the

president, and finally their principal. A second activity I used to start my second student interview was to introduce the topic in a read-aloud of an age-appropriate children's book about principals (Creech & Bliss, 2001). After the story I asked the students to talk about the story as it related to our first discussion, and as a prompt for our more focused second discussion.

Immediately after introducing the topic using the free association activity I also asked students to provide me with drawings or words they create in response to an initial brainstorm about principals. Words are only one form of communication, and visual representations of experiences can enable others to see as the participant sees and feels (Riessman, 2008). In my attempt to provide the students with an opportunity to tell their story as transparently as possible, visual data was used to capture the perspectives of all students including those that a) struggle to express their thoughts verbally, b) are English Language Learners, and/or are c) more comfortable using imagery to depict their understanding of the research topic. Students were provided with colored pencils, a standard size (8.5" X 11") piece of paper, and were asked to draw what they thought their principal does before my line of questioning began (see Appendices F–L).

Focus groups were conducted twice with each group of students, once at the beginning of the semester after my initial interview with the principal, and once at the end of the semester after my second interview with the principal. The first focus group was focused on giving students opportunities to describe their experiences, relationships with adults, challenges they face in school, support they receive from principals, and the voice they are given in shaping school culture. The second focus group was focused on deeper probing and asked students to talk about data collected from the principals' second interview. Each focus group interview

lasted between 30-45 minutes, was conducted by myself, included another adult presence from the site, and was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Observation

I also used observation as a tool for understanding and interpreting the data I collected in my interviews with students and principals. At the schools I observed principals in their natural interactions with students. Because principals often schedule specific times for these interactions, e.g. during lunch, classroom walk-throughs, after school, etc., principals invited me to join them in these interactions at various points throughout the semester. I arranged for a minimum of four days of observation at each research site that coincided with my four interviews. After each observation, which lasted between one and two hours, I wrote a detailed set of field notes that were analyzed during the data collection process to inform my interviewing approaches with the principals and students, and after the data collection process was complete.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began during the process of data collection and was conducted by the students, principals, and myself. The initial interview with the school principal was used to inform my questioning during the subsequent focus group interview with students. Likewise, data collected from this focus group of students was used to inform my probing of the principal during our second in-depth interview. This approach is based on Elden & Levin's (1991) model of cogenerative dialogue and models of narrative inquiry (Bleakley, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008; Rolling, 2008). This theoretical framework suggests that more participatory approaches taken by the researcher and subjects during the data collection process can help the participants, in our case students and principals, develop a shared framework that can be tested

through collective action, or used to produce a new general theory that can be used to inform and improve their situation in the future.

The narrative inquiry analytical process depends on how present the researcher wants to be in the research story that is told. Since the researcher in cogenerative dialogue and narrative inquiry invites subjects to analyze the information they provide, the distinctions between description and interpretation, between data and data analysis in narrative research, are not always sharply defined (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). All researchers' perspectives are limited to a degree, and the task of any good narrator is to convince readers of the reliability of their data. In my presentation of the data in chapter four, I choose to place students' and principals' thoughts and feelings alongside my own in order to more transparently depict my role as interviewer, facilitator, listener, observer and data generator, and to indicate how I invited principals and children to interpret what others told me. Research demonstrates that layering multiple narrators' perspectives is useful in narrative inquiry to help the reader recognize that the reliability of a single narrator over the other cannot be assumed (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). Braiding or weaving student voices with a researcher's voice in this way may be difficult for some readers, who are more accustomed to research reports that "smooth" out the data to create the illusion of one clear view or a sharp distinction between data and analysis (Ely et al. 1997). Narrative researchers instead consider interrupting the suggested clarity in order to provoke questions while they represent reality. The effect this has on the presentation of data is as Ely (1997) suggests:

Kinetic, giving a dynamic quality and a sense of immediacy as the separate pieces deliver new meaning, at times complementary and at others contradictory (p. 100).

The purpose of this research was to listen to people's voices instead of speaking for them. In this study I have worked hard to present data generated by students and principals in a way that gives the reader a clear sense of how they see each other, themselves, and the challenges they face. It would be misleading to suggest that I could have done this without actively participating in generating the dialogue or without inviting principals and children to participate in analyzing each other's narratives. Both are included in the interview data.²

The extent to which an audience can trust researchers as data collectors is largely dependent on researchers' own admissions of fallibility (Michie, 2009), and I make no claims of being separate from the data or the story I present in this study. I am not unbiased. My participants (students and principals) are co-authors, and I am deeply invested in who these children will become, and the quality of leadership in public schools. It is because of this investment that I want these students to be heard, and principals to actively work to give students a voice in their education. I believe student voices should matter as much as the voices of teachers, parents, and administrators and, as a result, I too name my presence within the data.

Both during and after the data collection process was complete I used an analytically inductive method to develop codes for my data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This method allowed important categories to emerge as the data were collected, produced, and analyzed by the students and principals throughout the study. When kids and principals are made a part of this process, are responsible for a part of the data analysis, and are integral to the process of developing this study's conclusions, the meaning that emerges can be considered data.

² In many cases I had to be more active in presenting my line of inquiry to principals because I am studying something that was not happening in these schools. For example, while principals occasionally take the time to interact with students regarding matters of discipline, these interactions were typically unidirectional in nature, and rarely included students in the decision making process. Because of this I had to ask follow-up questions to differentiate between types of interactions. These questions forced the principals to expand on their preconceived notions about what using student voice could actually mean for their work as principals.

My two classes of participants, cogenerative learning model (Elden & Levin, 1991), and adapted bidirectional leadership framework (Allen, 1983) all suggested that I first develop two sets of codes based on the data collected, one for principals and one for students. I first read and re-read interview transcripts and field notes, and examined illustrations and artifacts on a school-by-school basis before I began to develop an initial list of codes that related directly to my research questions and my theoretical frameworks. In order to check for accuracy I then attempted to (a) define each code, (b) provide several characteristics for each code, (c) develop some specific conditions under which the code worked, (d) develop a proposition for each code, and (e) find several illustrations from the field research that demonstrated both positive and negative evidence of that code (see Appendix E). When I was unable to sufficiently develop specific conditions under which the code operated, or was unable to find a sufficient amount of illustrations that demonstrated evidence that the category was vital to my discussion, codes were eliminated or combined with other categories to form new codes. The method proved effective in my attempt to include only the information I needed to answer the research questions.

The resulting two sets of codes were then merged and assigned to field notes from my observations at the site, interview transcripts, and any artifacts I collected from the students during the focus groups. More general categories for coding the interview data were based on what students and principals said, what they did, how they interacted, and how principals helped students learn. More specific codes included student responsibility, challenges faced by the students, assumptions, personal inclination, high/low influence leadership behaviors, direct/indirect leadership behaviors, dialogue, communication, structuring student experiences, student voice, shared decision making, student achievement, and non-traditional role of the

principal.³ These codes were then organized into the four general categories described above, and each of these categories was then purposefully connected to one of the two research questions (see Appendix E).

Some of these codes were more easily identified based on the research questions. For example, codes such as students' perspectives of leadership (SPL), and challenges (Chall), were addressed repeatedly during interviews with both classes of participants and spoke directly to the purpose of the study. As a result there was more than enough evidence that these codes served a purpose in developing a baseline understanding of the research topic. Other codes emerged only after careful and extensive review of the data. One such category was focused on assumptions made by principals (Assum).

Using the analysis procedure described above I began to first define the code based on both my principal and student interview data. After analyzing all of the data it became clear to me that principals were saying things about their work that did not correspond with what the students had to say. For example, at Lodi the principal said the students were often unaware of his presence during his walk throughs. After speaking with the students, however, it became clear that they were not only aware of his presence, but that he made some of the students feel tense or uncomfortable during his classroom visits (see student illustration L4-5). The students also said they would like their principal to help teach them and not just observe. As a result I first developed the following definition for the code: "Principals often draw conclusions or make assumptions about their approaches to school leadership that don't correspond with what students are looking for in an instructional leader." Second, I attempted to characterize principals' remarks by identifying words or phrases that I thought best spoke to these

³ Illustrations in this appendix, in the form of quotes, observations and students' drawings, served as the basis for developing these more specific categories.

assumptions. I found the principals' assumptions to be naïve, instinctual, spontaneous, impulsive, and hypothetical. Next, I identified a specific condition under which this code operated in the schools. After reviewing dozens of illustrations from the data, most of which came from the principals' in-depth interviews, I determined that these conditions existed when principals develop and demonstrate leadership behaviors that underestimate what students understand about, and/or are capable of contributing to school.

I then revisited my literature review to identify elements of the literature that might correspond with what I had so far established about this category. I found ample evidence from the student perspective literature that spoke to this category and so developed the following proposition: Some principals assume that (a) only older kids are worth talking to about the work that's being done in school, (b) kids aren't able to answer specific questions about teaching and learning, (c) student voice should be limited to school established parameters, and (d) certain leadership behaviors are valuable for kids (Johnson, 2010; Richardson, 2001). Confident that there was also research out there to support my claim, I moved forward and developed a proposition of my own: These assumptions often don't match what the students are looking for in a principal and highlight the value of using student perspectives to inform principals' approaches to school leadership. Finally I went on to list several quotes from principals that exemplified when they were making assumptions that contradicted findings from the field and/or the literature. I did this by cross-checking the data with other codes I had already established. Some of these pre-established codes that spoke to this category were: principals' perspectives of leadership, principals' perspectives of students, principals' perspectives of school, principals' perspectives of instruction, students' perspectives of leadership, students' perspectives of school, and students' perspectives of instruction.

One strength of this analysis procedure is that it gave me multiple opportunities and means by which to triangulate the data and check for accuracy in determining which codes were critical to developing my discussion and spoke directly to the research questions. A second strength of this procedure is that it allowed me to develop a strong foundation from which to proceed with my cross-case analysis. In my cross-case analysis I further triangulated the data from each of the research sites using these codes. This process was made less difficult because I already had a great deal of data organized and ready to support my claims about where certain beliefs and behaviors were taking place.

The goal of this study was to include students' perspectives in the dominant discourse on educational leadership by giving students an opportunity to shape the direction of this study. Both researchers and practitioners have substituted adults' perceptions of problems at school as solutions to issues that would be best understood by going directly to the students (Denzin, 1978). Reform minded practitioners may find that developing this counter-narrative will help empower kids, structure their experiences of school, and impact their academic achievement. Students' thoughts and feelings matter and can provide schools and the research community with new evidence that can be used to inform the existing research on instructional leadership and administrative function in the field.

CHAPTER FOUR:

FINDINGS

In this chapter I will be presenting findings from my student and principal interviews, and observations, at four different elementary schools. I will start with Forrest Hills Elementary (FH)⁴. FH is the most affluent of the four schools and is located in a mid-sized suburban district. Next I will introduce the rural site, Lodi Elementary, which is located in a small town 30 miles from the closest urbanized center. In the final two sections of this chapter I will present the two urban schools. First I will present Everton Elementary, a school that was shut down at the end of the school year due to a daunting budget deficit being faced in the city district. Finally, I will introduce Carter Elementary, which is located in the center of the city, and has a principal that took over just months before this research was conducted.

Forrest Hills Elementary

At FH I was received by Joseph, a principal that has worked to develop the overall climate of his site in the short time he has been principal. Joseph characterized some of his key responsibilities as managing the ebb and flow that takes place during the course of each day, and working to move the whole building forward together. In the following section, I will report on how Joseph has served his school in these capacities. I will also present the students' perspectives of the impact his approaches have on their experiences of school. At the end of this section I will share how data gathered from the students, aligns with what this principal values about his role as school leader.

⁴ All names of people and places have been changed.

Creating a Positive School Climate

Joseph arrived at FH eighteen months ago along with 170 new students and a third of the now working staff after the previous principal retired. Upon entering this large suburban site I became immediately aware of physical changes that had been made to the building since my last visit.⁵ The hallways were brighter, and the walls were now adorned with glossy new posters of school wide philosophies where tattered student illustrations around the same topics had hung previously. These glossy and colorful signs featured characteristics of FH learners, anti-bullying rules, whole body listening cues, and the school's golden rule; Good Choices Equal Great Results.

The student work that now hung throughout the less cluttered and newly carpeted hallways was both more focused on content and more desirable to the eye. Paw points, the new character education incentive system, hung proudly outside of the principal's office marking moments when any member of the staff recognized student achievement. The school also now has a new media coordinator, and morning announcements are broadcast from their new media center, onto smartboard screens in every classroom.

Before arriving at FH, Joseph worked at Davidson Elementary (DE), a neighboring school in the district, as a principal for seven years, and as a teacher for seven years before that. His current K-6 site consists of predominantly white middle class students (only 25% of which are eligible for free and reduced lunch), and is the second largest in this study (498). FH is located amidst an area of suburban sprawl, just over fifteen miles from the closest city center. On each side of FH, and for miles in both directions, one will find restaurant chains, superstores, gas stations, retail outlets, and other places of business that could be found across the country.

⁵ In my role as school liaison for Syracuse University, I was able to spend hours in all of the research sites except for Lodi prior to this study. Interestingly enough, these opportunities to simultaneously work and observe all occurred shortly before each of these three principals entered the schools.

Despite the lack of a readily apparent community surrounding the site, one can see a much different picture inside the school. Teachers are collaborating, students are taking responsibility for their own learning and helping each other find solutions to problems as they arise, and the principal has his finger on the pulse of many of the student's and staff's situations both at home, and in the community.

Of all the principals selected for this study, Joseph was the most organized when it came time to coordinate with teachers, respond to e-mails, and orchestrate focus groups for this research. He, more than any of the other principals, was willing to take that time to show off his site during days when I was scheduled to observe. Joseph introduced me to members of the teaching staff, some of which shared stories about the relationships they had with Joseph the teacher from years ago. Joseph also introduced me to the custodian, and the three of us talked about ways they were working to make the school a safer and more comfortable place for students. Joseph is recognized as a leader not only of this school, and an experienced force in this district, but in his community as well.

In my first interview with FH's warm and friendly figurehead, I asked him to describe his role as principal. Joseph relayed the following statement.

Joseph: It's really supporting the initiatives that are coming down from the district, from the state, the federal government, and have them be able to efficiently, smoothly, flawlessly go into the classroom with the teacher. It's trying to figure that out.

True to form, Joseph appears to be doing a great job of actively coordinating the curriculum. Of all the sites included in this study, evidence from standardized testing coupled with observations of the work taking place in FH's classrooms, shows students and staff having the easiest time navigating the instructional program. Joseph's experience in the district, and his very natural

approaches to working with adults, place him in a category of his own when it comes to helping his staff understand and implement new and unfamiliar routines inside the classroom. From nearly every angle I can see this school firing on all cylinders. Outside the building at recess, throughout the hallways, in the lunchroom, and even inside the main office, things here seem to be running very smoothly. Students are smiling and skipping from class-to-class, teachers are able to focus on creative modes of instruction, and even the office personnel, school custodian, and visiting student-teachers are doing their work in a way that reflects a school climate that is positive and centered around the best interests of students and student learning.

FH is appropriate as the school to begin this analysis of how principals help students cope with the challenges they face for two reasons. First, the school appears to be running as well as any school possibly could. Students are actively engaged in learning throughout the day, and are being given opportunities to develop socially and emotionally in this very nurturing climate. Second, this principal's approaches to leadership represent what may appear to many readers as the most typical form of primary school leadership in the United States. Unlike Joseph's previous experiences at DE, a district site where behavioral and academic issues were more of a concern, FH's kids are rarely insubordinate, and the majority of students are testing at or above grade-level in ELA (51%), Math (69%) and Science (92%). This leaves Joseph to focus on more traditional, managerial functions from the main office where he does an excellent job coordinating his ample supply of support personnel and resources around a range of student and staff concerns.

However, here too I found this age-old tension between the principal's need to have control, and the student's experiences of school as they relate to this control, a tension I did not anticipate before entering the field as a formal researcher. Neither my experiences working with

student teachers at this site in the years before Joseph took over, or my screening interview with Joseph six months before the study began, prepared me for how this tension would eventually manifest itself. During my first interview with Joseph I asked him how students' opinions and attitudes about school or teaching influenced his agenda. He responded in the following way.

Joseph: Everybody needs to be led. Everybody needs to be able to look to somebody for guidance. But we also have to have expectations. As we work with kids, and as we work with adults, the expectation of where we're going needs to be out there. Because if the kids understand the adults understand. If the adults understand they can help lead students. So as kids work through it you want to listen to the children but you need to lead the children. You can't let them control what we do.

This passage allows me to articulate two sides of Joseph's approach to leadership simultaneously. There is the side that acknowledges the value student voice has for influencing the work of adults, and the side that chooses to ignore opportunities to do much more than listen in his role as school leader. Belief statements like these serve to highlight a critical disconnect in what Joseph, and principals like Joseph, say about using students' perspectives to drive their leadership, and actually do to provide students with a sense of voice and agency in their own learning. Statements like the one above speak volumes about personal leadership style on their own, and are clearly contradictory to using a student-centered approach, but when paired with students' comments, observation, and illustrations I can really see when and where this principal is having (or is not having) a direct impact on students' experiences of school and learning.

Ebb and Flow

After having a few opportunities to sit down and speak with Joseph about his practice it became increasingly clear that he had a great deal of freedom over how he chooses to spend his

time at school. Like most principals, he would come in before the rest of the staff to respond to e-mails, voicemail, and any concerns that took place between when he left the previous day and that morning. Like most principals, Joseph is present in the morning and making sure he is visible to both students and parents when school begins, during lunch, and at the end of the day during dismissal. Like most principals Joseph conducts a casual walk-through of the building once the kids and teachers become settled in their classrooms.

What I found particularly intriguing about Joseph's approaches to school leadership took place in between the buses and bells. When the walk-through was completed, and both students and teachers had been (in Joseph's own words) "acknowledged," Joseph had some choice over how he spent his hours at work. It is these choices that captured my attention and that represent what I believe to be this principal's core actions and what he truly values about his job. While Joseph stated that he had supported students academically, socially and emotionally at his previous site, he repeatedly brought questions I posed regarding ways in which he worked directly to influence student learning outcomes at FH back to statements such as this one.

Joseph: It's way beyond the little things of taking care of the kids; it's taking care of the community.

And take care of the community he does. At suburban sites like FH many parents contact their school principal when their children are having problems with a classmate, teacher, or subject area. As a result one of Joseph's primary functions, in addition to managing the ebb and flow that occurs throughout the day, is to respond to these concerns and support other adults in cultivating an image of a building community that truly is, as Joseph repeatedly said, "moving

forward together.” When asked to describe how this looks on a daily basis, Joseph relayed the following statement.⁶

Joseph: It’s a variety of things that can take place, and that’s usually by lunchtime. I very seldom have lunch, I eat throughout the whole day, and I don’t have a designated lunch. The afternoon continues on like that. I might get a phone call right now and I’ll have an issue here. It might be a bus issue. Or a situation where the parents are upset because something happened within the building and they didn’t go through the proper chain of command. Doesn’t happen often. But it does happen. It’s just a variety of things like that. Usually I’m preparing things to help move the building forward. I always try to model how to move a building forward as I work with the staff. But it’s a variety of things. It ebb and flows. I always try to meet and greet parents when they come in. It’s very important that I’m visible here, that they feel welcome here throughout the day. I’ll touch base with my psychologist, (or) my counselor about anything I need to know about kids. I’ll meet with the nurse. I’ll walk through her office and ask how things are going. Once in a while, they’ll (staff) stop me and ask to talk.

While many of these actions undoubtedly provide adults with opportunities to touch base and discuss a whole range of conditions that may be affecting students and student learning, I could not help but notice that the principal neglected to mention that he was doing much instructional leadership or interacting with kids in the classroom. Surely principals at high-achieving schools⁷ like this one are spending hours a day supervising instruction and monitoring

⁶This is just one of several passages where he mentioned that there was a great deal of ebb and flow to his day.

⁷ For the purposes of this study high-achieving schools can be characterized as those making adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English Language Arts, Math and Science. Likewise, low achieving schools can be characterized as those not making AYP in two or more of the three key subject areas. AYP is a measurement defined by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and indicates satisfactory progress by a school toward the goal of proficiency for all students according to results on standardized state tests.

student learning and progress. Or are they? While this principal did mention he was actively involved in framing and communicating school goals, and coordinating the curriculum, there were pieces of the instructional leadership puzzle missing (Murphy, 1990). Who is making sure students have opportunities to become meaningfully involved in their experiences of school? Who is providing students with incentives for learning?

After speaking with Joseph it became clear that in this site, it is often the teachers and/or the parents that are in charge of providing (or not providing) these incentives for learning, and students with opportunities to become more involved. This principal has created a culture where there are clear expectations for students and adults. He does this by making sure that all members of the school community are on the same page with the various tenets of the school. For example, when I accompanied Joseph on a walk-through of the site we entered a classroom where, after greeting the teacher, he asked what the class had been working on. On the smartboard appeared the characteristics of a FH learner, and almost as if on cue, the teacher lifted a rain stick as a signal to the students that they should demonstrate their knowledge of whole body listening, a school principle Joseph had just spoken with me about. The students knew the routine verbatim, as if they had been recently or repeatedly drilled in this exercise.

Despite the impressive display I could not help but feel this act had been staged for the principal, or perhaps even for my benefit. As we left the classroom I wondered if this was something that all teachers were prepared to do when visitors came by; and at the same time Joseph remarked “and that wasn’t even staged.”

Staged or not, he has created a climate and culture in his school where all members of the school community are aware of what he is looking for, especially when it came to knowing the school’s golden rule. Interestingly enough, I found that the students’ illustrations, which they

produced for me before any conversation about their principal was initiated, almost unanimously reflected findings I had been coming across on my own based on my conversations and observations at the site. Of the seventeen illustrations students composed during focus groups, eight were drawn of a principal that was making sure his whole school was aware of the golden rule either in morning meeting after bussing, during an assembly, or in the classroom (see FH4-5). Of the remaining illustrations, three depicted the principal as someone that was going about working behind the scenes (see FH3-1), three showed the principal checking in on classrooms during walk-throughs (see FH3-6), two showed the principal greeting students in the morning or at dismissal (see FH4-10), and one showed the principal visiting the classroom during instructional time (see FH3-3). The fact that these illustrations largely align with what the principal says he does, and what I observed, demonstrates that there can be some agreement as to this is how he is actually spending his day.

When I took the time to try to focus in on how the principal prioritized the variety of tasks he was responsible for each day he presented me with the following.

Joseph: I do start my day with a list (Joseph shows me list). Usually there's about five items on the list. For example today my list consists of my set meeting (with teachers) at eight. I always do encouraging words every month, on the first of the month to my staff. Show them I care and I help to support them. I have a meeting at ten with you, and then I want to make sure that I connect with my teachers (and tell them) that you were coming and you would meet with them today (this item is not on the list). Then after school I have a commitment. That's my checklist (there are three things on the list). Sometimes it's the whole page, sometimes only a few items like today. Which I like because it gives me a lot of freedom and flexibility to work with kids if necessary.

I really wanted to explore what the principal meant when he said “if necessary,” and so I asked for specific examples of what this looked like at FH. Joseph took this opportunity to share the following story from his previous principalship.

Joseph: If a student was really struggling with doing their work there were many times where I ended up having lunch with those kids, and we did study halls, and (I provided) academic support for those kids where I was very involved and helped supervise that work with kids. I don't do it as much here because the teachers have a handle on it. But I used to be very involved in my old school.

While roughly a third of the students interviewed at FH reported that the principal would provide students with opportunities to eat lunch with him as one of the choices for the school's character education incentive plan, they understood that necessary interaction to occur more often when students were misbehaving and teachers needed help with discipline. This necessary action on behalf of the principal was something that the principal reported he would always take care of immediately.

When I asked the students at FH to tell me about some ways they would deal with problems they were having with school I was able to group responses I received at this site into two categories. The first included students who said they would talk with a sibling (at FH or another site in the district), a parent, a classmate or their teacher about the issue. The second group said they would work to get the principal's attention, which was not surprising considering the context of many of my questions. What was surprising was the way this group of students would go about being heard. One example of focus group dialogue that occurred around this topic went like this:

Student One: You should act bad so that you can get the principal's attention.

Student Two: I would start meeting with kids and have a strike, or campaign, or write a letter.

Student Three: I don't really talk about my feelings but I express them with yelling and screaming.

Student Four: I'd go on strike or protest.

Student Three: Seriously though, I'd have my little brother go tell the principal for me. He's a crazy kid.

This exchange demonstrates how one group of students at FH said they would react to problems they were having with teachers, peers, classwork or at home. It also serves as our first example of how student voice could manifest itself when principals do not develop ways to honor student voice, and/or give students opportunities to actively share their thoughts and feelings about school.

These examples of oppositional, or resistant approaches to interacting with adults are nothing new, and are not unique to this site. Adults have for decades failed to use student voice as an opportunity to help structure student's experiences, and as a result have been dealing with a subversive version of voice. In schools like FH, where insubordination is a rare occurrence, and many of the students have strong academic and behavioral support systems already in place at home, adults in school are less likely to encounter this resistance. Still, these examples highlight a reluctance of students to go to their principal for help. This may stem, at least in part, from the limited nature of the interactions students have had with the principal in the eighteen months since he has arrived. It can also be traced back to a more traditional model of leadership where Joseph's direct interactions with students are primarily focused on issues of discipline, and where feedback and observation are typically focused on teacher performance.

Approaches to leadership

Joseph made some comments to me during our first meeting that I had to re-visit during a subsequent interview. Below is an example of how Joseph was able to talk about his work as it related to both his site and the work of other principals.

“There’s some people (principals) that don’t get the pedagogical understanding of what their job is. I find that there’s a lot of leaders that go into these positions and realize ‘Holy cow, I don’t know what I’ve gotten myself into.’ And they don’t work to make it better. But because they’re the person in charge they have to show that they’re in charge, and they end up leading out of fear. Fear is when you don’t know how to read people.”

After hours of interview and observation I have determined that Joseph clearly knows how to interact with and lead other adults. While Joseph said that he is still in the process of getting to know his new school community, he is very comfortable engaging with students and staff in a way that shows he is in control, and that as long as he is there no harm will come to them.

During walk-throughs and in the hallways Joseph would often shake hands or even embrace members of his staff who appeared happy to take the time to reciprocate his affection. This sends a clear message to Joseph’s teachers that he is there for them and that he cares. It also sends a message to FH’s students, who occasionally stood in line waiting during these brief hallway encounters, about which members of the school community the principal values the most.

Upon entering FH I could feel within a matter of moments that it is a safe and comfortable place to teach and learn. After spending some time at the school most kids and adults would also realize that Joseph plays a major role in making sure the entire school runs the way it does. Students’ illustrations led me to believe they understand that he is a problem solver

that is responsible for making sure the school runs smoothly (see FH3-5). In an effort to capture the ways principals help students deal with the challenges they face in school, I wanted to probe more deeply into both the student's understanding of what the principal does and what the principal would like to know about the student's experiences of school.

When I asked the principal what kinds of questions he would like me to ask the students during our first interview he circumvented the question in the following way.

Joseph: Some of the instructional information will come up and the kids probably won't say a lot about how I'm involved in that instructional understanding and that leadership. But what I wish would be able to happen is the conversations you have today with kids, I wish seven years from now you had the same conversations with similar kids. Because my relationship will become completely different with them seven years from now (the same amount of time he worked as a principal at his last site).

Joseph continued to talk about relationship building for a while longer, and I completely missed the fact that he was the only principal in the study that did not have any questions for the kids at the end of this lengthy first interview.⁸ Despite the fact that Joseph did not have any questions for the kids, Joseph was eager to see what the students had to say about his practice during my second interview with him. After sharing their illustrations and comments I took this opportunity to re-ask the question in hopes of developing some action-relevant dialogue⁹ that could be used to inform the work of the principal or students at the site in the future. Joseph relayed the following statement.

⁸ It wasn't until my first set of principal interviews had been conducted, that I discovered this in my pre-student interview analysis.

⁹ With the growing need for more relevant and practical knowledge in educational research, action-relevant dialogue (a phrase commonly associated with action research and participatory action research) has helped bridge the gap between research and day-to-day applications (De Zeeuw, 2003).

Joseph: What I would expect out of the child was ‘Do I feel safe coming into this building?’ Do they feel like they’re learning? Do they feel like they’re a part of the community and everybody gets the same message? That’s really to me what I would look for. I want a child to come in and feel totally part of a community and say ‘yeah, this is a special place for me to be part of.’ And not only knowing that they’re going to be working with the classroom teacher but that I’ve been able to help shape that.

Joseph seems like he has a clear idea of the questions that concern him. Still, I found it interesting that initially Joseph still struggles to develop a question for the students. I also found it significant that there was no pause, no moment of rumination where the principal reflected on what was an opportunity to receive feedback from a representative sample of students, around a question the principal found important enough to explore. I felt like Joseph’s attitude towards this unique opportunity at dialogue highlighted how he views his interactions with kids. While Joseph was insightful and did an excellent job talking about his work with kids, he was reluctant to actually engage with them (albeit indirectly) at this point of the study.

Students at this site said they feel safe, like they are learning, and get the same message from their principal. As a result, I am still wondering if the principal was at all curious as to what his kids really thought about school (apart from hoping they acknowledged him as someone that helps shape the school culture). The principal deciding to ask students questions for which there already appeared to be answers felt the same as not asking questions at all. Instead of asking questions where the students would have an opportunity to think and share an experience or their thoughts, he chose to ask yes-or-no questions. This too says something about what the principal might assume his students are capable of sharing.

During my final interview with Joseph, a conversation around student voice and shared decision-making was developed in response to a comment a student had made about how each class has their own form of government which makes decisions. Intrigued, I asked the principal about how this worked, and he replied with the following statement.

Joseph: I used to do that as a classroom teacher, and I used to set up our own student council and governing body, but usually it was just related to the curriculum that I was teaching. If we had somebody make an important decision, it wouldn't take the place of a discipline the teacher does, but maybe it was a decision about the movement of the desks.

I here wanted to explore how Joseph the principal, a self-proclaimed believer in having a student government, and providing students with voice, works to provide students with opportunities to talk about their experiences of teaching and learning. We had the following exchange.

Joseph: We also do have a student council, which is school wide. They meet monthly to do a lot of different things. Most of it is our school spirit days, our charitable events, so we do those kinds of things.

Jonathan: Do they ever get together to talk about anything regarding learning, school, or teaching?

Joseph: The student senate is more teaching about community, how it's an important thing, and how to give back to others. They don't get involve—(cuts himself off)...like many times I used to have a student council at my old school and the cafeteria always came up.

In this statement Joseph illustrates that there is a time and place for student voice to be used. For example, if the students want to decide where they sit in the lunchroom that is something that can be up for discussion. While students coordinating a new seating arrangement with adults at the

school is a step in the right direction for promoting student agency, it is clear that students have had few opportunities to be involved in change that is developed by the principal to enhance their motivation or morale at this school.¹⁰ Despite this, I found evidence to suggest that students at FH want to talk about a range of factors that affect their experiences of school during focus groups.

Moving the building forward

During my first meeting with students I asked them to tell me what their principal does. We had the following exchange.

Jonathan: What does your principal do?

Student One: He always comes around to the classrooms and checks on us.

Student Two: He writes reports about bus issues.

Student Three: I know he likes it when kids are quiet and nice to each other.

Jonathan: How do you know that he's the principal?

Student Four: Because he has an office.

Student Five: Because he's dressed up nice.

Student Six: Because he sits in the office.

Student Two: He also helps us learn about no-bullying, and goes around and helps people to see if they're being good to other people, or to see how people are being mean to each other.

While the students' responses varied, they aligned with both my observations and the principal's comments. During my second meeting with students I re-posed some questions to monitor their

¹⁰ On occasion students may choose to have lunch with Joseph as part of an incentive plan. During these lunches Joseph reported that he informally asks the students how they're doing. These conversations demonstrate the principal's willingness to interact with students in a non-traditional setting, but fail to highlight a systematic approach to using student voice or interacting with students at FH.

awareness of a topic (school leadership) that most of the students have had little or no opportunities to talk about in any depth before. During my final interview with a group of students I had the following exchange.

Jonathan: If you have a problem with school who do you talk to?

Student One: My mom

Student Two: My mom and my principal.

Jonathan: You talked to your principal?

Student Two: No I didn't.

Student One: I didn't either but I think you should.

I can see here that after being given opportunities to reflect on the work of the principal in greater depth, the awareness of a potential for interacting with Joseph increased and became a tangible concept.¹¹ Perhaps more interestingly, this exchange led the students to an extended conversation about problems members of this focus group were having with one of their teachers. These were fourth graders, all aware of the fact that I was recording this information, and that the information could be shared with their principal. During this focus group, and those conducted at the other three sites, one student would inevitably interrupt the focus group and remind the participants their conversation was being recorded. While this would occasionally subdue some members of the group temporarily, it never halted their train of thought or the direction of the conversation.

In the following example, this group decided to use this time to discuss something about school that had been bothering them, perhaps with the conscious or even subconscious hope or understanding that this information would make it back to the principal and that the teachers'

¹¹ Despite this awareness students did not give examples of times when they sought out their principal for help with solving problems. They did however say that their parents often would go to the principal to express concerns they were having about their children and their experiences of school.

practices be changed. Or perhaps it was just because sharing their feelings about this issue in school felt empowering. Regardless, this was one of the first times this normally happy-go-lucky group of students took the reigns and began to have some spirited conversation around a topic that impacted each of them directly or indirectly. Below is the beginning of this exchange.

Jonathan: Can you tell me about some challenges you face in school?

Student One: Gym (student somewhat apprehensive about talking). Our teacher only lets certain people not run and it's not fair to everyone else

All Students: Yeah, we don't want to run

Student One: He makes us do like tons of laps. One time we were running and something happened to one of our friends and this person hurt them self. And he kept making us run.

Student Two: That teacher is so rude. He always yells at people.

Jonathan: Did you ever talk to him about it?

Student Three: We have but he singles us out.

Student Four: One kid got hit in the face with a ball and almost got a black eye, and the teacher just made him come over.

Student Five: I got in trouble for burping. We get yelled at when we burp.

All Students: Yeah, we can't control that.

Student Six: One time there was a substitute for him and I got hit with a ball, like on the nose. I just sat there and I didn't want to go down to the nurse, and I felt embarrassed.

This conversation, which included all six members of the focus group, continued along these lines until the group and I realized we had exceeded the amount of time allotted for the final interview and the students had to return to class. When I stopped the audio recorder and

prepared to escort these students from the conference room (which was adjacent to the principal's office) back to their classes, the group was visibly excited. After exiting the main office on our way back to class, the students continued to talk quietly amongst themselves about their physical education teacher, and about the feelings they had about his class. I felt that this was the kind of excitement that stemmed from being able to do something that felt very daring, but important enough to pursue. I believe their conversation made them feel like their voice mattered because I was there to validate their concerns.

If principals could tap into and use these unbiased perspectives on any number of factors impacting students' experiences of school (negative *and* positive) than what implications might that have for their practice as school leaders? While students at FH struggled to cite specific ways their principal supported their learning, and had a hard time relating their experiences of school to their principal, they expressed excitement about being given these opportunities to meet with me to talk about the work of their principal and teachers.¹² Through this process the group developed a better understanding of what their principal does and they were able to talk about school in a new context that felt empowering.

Principal of the day

The suburban school district's website shows pictures of Joseph beside a young student beneath a caption that reads 'Principal of the Day.' Ideas like this, which Joseph incorporated at his previous school just months before arriving at FH, were certainly designed to empower students as learners and leaders in their own right. However, it is interesting to note that in being bestowed this honor of principal of the day, I can see from the nineteen photos posted that the 'Principal of the Day' is not once photographed in the classrooms working with students. She is

¹² Upon arriving to their second focus group students at both FH and Lodi enthusiastically said that they had been counting the days until they were able to talk with me again.

shown leaning back in a leather chair with her feet kicked up on the principal's desk while she pretends to talk on the phone. Another image shows Joseph pretending to pour her coffee while she reads the newspaper. Still another shows her in the office disciplining, or reinforcing a golden rule (which appears below a name placard made for the student on the principal's desk) to a stuffed animal. She is also shown accompanying Joseph on walk-throughs, holding a walkie-talkie, and riding an elevator.

In only one of the pictures is she posing (facing the camera) beside some students who wear headphones and work facing computers. This lone image of principal as someone that is associated with active student learning reminded me of another lone image. Going back to the students' illustrations I noticed there was only one of seventeen images where a student associated this principal with an experience of learning (see FH3-3 above). Interestingly, and perhaps not coincidentally, the same ratio I can see in these principal of the day images from DE (1:19), was nearly represented by a group of students at FH with no prompting (1:17).

These photos and this well-intentioned initiative send a message to students and staff, that the principalship is a position of authority that comes with certain managerial decisions, and where one is afforded certain privileges. These images broadcast to the entire school and district community what the principal values about his work, and they are not so different than the ones the students at FH drew before any discussion about principals was even initiated. Furthermore, they align with the students' conversations and the principal's responses during one-on-one interviews.

The aforementioned privileges come to Joseph in the form of choices, where he is able to decide what he is going to focus on during any given day. It is these choices that are made in between the buses and the bells that shape what this principal stands for. I believe that as

principal of this school Joseph is making decisions with the students' best interests in mind. He is still checking in on students, and giving them opportunities to engage on a personal level. The students respond to their principal, who is very approachable, and feel comfortable asking him general questions about school during his walk-throughs. While these behaviors reflect what were once non-traditional approaches to building leadership, Joseph chooses to exercise the privilege of leading FH by focusing primarily on developing the work of adults around initiatives that are passed down from above, and moving the entire school community forward together by spreading a clear and consistent message.

There is ample evidence to suggest that Joseph acknowledges the value of empowering students and making them feel like they belong in the school community. The question is whether or not acknowledgement alone has any real value for students who are more than capable of articulating their thoughts and feelings about a whole range of school wide factors.

Lodi Elementary

At Lodi I found a principal that has worked to combat what he perceives to be a “culture of poverty”¹³ in this small rural town. I will here present how this principal has done this on a large scale by developing programs for whole grade-levels and forming close relationships with the community. Next, I will share this principal's core beliefs about leadership. Lodi has an administrator that believes he can best impact student achievement by making sure he has the best teachers in every classroom, and providing them with the resources they need to succeed.

At Lodi I also found students that were willing to engage in meaningful conversations about the work of their principal and systems currently in place at the school. Finally, I will present how

¹³ Talking about the dangers of assuming a deficit perspective is a popular topic in education today (Gorski, 2010). I will address possible impacts of this perspective in my discussion in chapter six. References to a “culture of poverty” throughout the document highlight this principal's perspective and not my own.

these same conversations helped this school leader see the value of using students' perspectives to shape his work as principal.

Combating a "culture of poverty"

Just as Joseph was held responsible for managing his then new site through a transition that came in the way of new students and staff, Mark of Lodi Elementary is preparing his elementary site for big changes to come in the fall. Mark's high-functioning rural K-5 site will be combined with another rural elementary school in the district along with its students, staff, and principal in September. This major overhaul will involve moving both sites into the middle school where there will be a Pre K-second grade wing, above which one of the district's other principals (and one of Mark's former kindergarten teachers at Lodi will reside as co-principal), and a three through six wing, where Mark will work to lead his current students and staff, an influx of new students and staff, and even some returning students.

Lodi elementary is the fourth rural site in which Mark has been employed as either a teacher or administrator. Of the four sites included in this study, Lodi has the smallest number of students overall (238), the least diverse student population, serves the smallest number of students diagnosed with special needs, and is located the farthest from an urbanized area. The town of Lodi, though small, has a real sense of community. One student here told me stories about parents that cooked spaghetti dinners at the local firehouse. Others talked about members of the community that would pick them up from school and watch over them in the hours before their parents came home from work. Despite the close-knit nature of the community surrounding the school, the town and neighboring areas have very little to offer students and their families in the way of culture. As a result, the schoolhouse stands out as a real beacon for both intellectual

and social growth for many students that come from what Mark characterized as “a culture of poverty.”

On the surface, school poverty is represented by a 55% free and reduced lunch rate for students. When I asked Mark about rural education, and the challenges both he and his students face at Lodi, he spoke about their issues in the following way.

Mark: I would say that overall the most significant challenges are that a large percentage of them (students) come from a culture of poverty. Years ago I equated poverty with not having much money, but really that’s probably the least of it. It’s cultural and endemic in the sense that there are even different value systems in a culture of poverty than there are in middle class culture (classical music can be heard playing on the floor above). One of the things (members of this community think) is that ‘Education is something that I have to do, but it’s really not that important.’

Mark is clearly passionate as he talks about his role as someone who is working to make a difference in the lives of children. He openly admits during our first interview that he has “fallen in love with high poverty rural education.”

One way Mark has worked to combat what he claims to be a culture of poverty is by making music education compulsory for fourth graders at his site. During our first conversation in the main office, as Mark was talking about the “culture of poverty,” students could be heard playing classical music overhead. Lodi’s fourth graders, who were asked about their participation in music during focus groups, were very enthusiastic and shared Mark’s excitement for the program. During the same conversation Mark shared his perspectives on how the “culture of poverty” manifests itself in the community, and about how that affects the district’s aspiration rate.

Mark: We're dealing with that (culture of poverty) out there in society but with a very cloistered community that doesn't care about that (aspiration) because (mimicking parent) 'I dropped out when I was sixteen and if that's good enough for me, it's good enough for my kid.' And that's really pervasive. A lot of our kids see that as their frame of reference, that's all they know.

Here I noticed a shift in how this district is working to respond to the needs of a community that in some ways is very different from the ones at FH. Not surprisingly I found that this principal's statements again aligned directly with conversations I had with students. I present the following exchange initiated by the students as one example.

Student One: You're in college?

Jonathan: Yes.

Student Two: You're lucky then.

Student One: It's not to me. I hate college.

Student Two: You've never even been to college. How could you hate it?

Student One: My mom and dad never went to college so I don't have to, ha-ha-ha.

While Mark makes it a point to spread a message to his students about the importance of aspiring to success in life, he has not lost sight of what it takes to get students from less privileged backgrounds into a space where they can focus on the work at hand. Another way Mark works to combat this "culture of poverty" head-on can be found in the following passage.

Mark: It's making sure we're doing what we need to do for them academically while at the same time making sure that they're ready to do that academically. In a lot of cases before we can even begin to attack the cognitive or academic piece, we need to make sure the social and emotional are OK. That's one of the tenants of a responsive classroom.

This responsive aspect of Mark's leadership style is something that distinguishes him from Joseph at FH. While statements like these may be developed out of necessity in schools where students and staff are responsible for more than just instruction, I believe they reflect a core ideological belief held by Mark that forms the basis of his practice.

Despite the challenges of poverty, Mark has created a school culture at Lodi that is not unlike the one at FH. Students and teachers alike are proud of their school and stand behind the work of their building leader. Not unlike Joseph, Mark has created a culture where students can, as Mark says, "count on being safe, on being loved, (on being) cared for by someone who is going to do the best thing for you even though it may not seem it at the time, and give kids some consistency and structure."

While Lodi does not have the high tax base or the parent involvement that FH has, it still appears on the inside to represent a traditional elementary school. This school is run in much the same way as FH, by an experienced Caucasian-male principal from a similar middle class background in the region. The value systems shared among members of the FH and Lodi communities may vary, but the ways the principal's backgrounds are reflected in their school cultures are actually quite similar.

Where the rubber meets the road

Prior to arriving at Lodi Elementary all of Mark's experience had been working in secondary schools. In a previous role as vice-principal at a high-school just outside of the city, Mark was held responsible for dealing with issues of discipline and worked to get students that stopped showing up back into school by involving their parents. Before entering administration over a decade ago Mark worked as a teacher for six years. When I asked Mark about that

experience he made a comment that I believe says a lot about what has led to his leadership style at Lodi, and which helped me understand and interpret elements of our conversations.

Jonathan: So this is your twelfth year as a principal, and you taught for six years too right?

Mark: Yep. Didn't want to be a teacher. I wanted to be a principal. Thought I wanted to be a superintendent but I realized that this position has changed dramatically over the years and this person is no longer involved in education. They're a businessperson, a legal person, a politician. The closer I get, the more I say no way.

When I asked Mark to describe his typical day during our first interview, he shared many of the same tasks Joseph chose to share. Mark comes in early to check e-mail and voicemail. He makes an effort to be at bussing and at lunch duty, and he conducts walk-throughs after the classrooms are settled. He, like Joseph, mentioned that "there's no such thing as an average day," and that "there's probably a whole litany of other things" than the ones he mentioned, that he is responsible for on any given day. Mark was not trying to be coy about how he spends his time; he was just trying to highlight the vast array of tasks and responsibilities that he has taken on as both an experienced building leader, and a leader in this small rural district.

He drove this point home by focusing primarily on describing a wide variety of district and state initiatives that he has had to implement at Lodi. Mark, more than any other principal in this study, described the role funding plays in adopting these initiatives in significant depth. He also spent a considerable amount of time talking about teaching practices and school policies that had been affected positively or (more often than not) negatively by having to adopt certain approaches from above. He talked about cabinet meetings, meetings with other elementary school principals, and meetings with district level personnel that, "Can take anywhere from 90

minutes to most of the day depending on their focus.” He talked about observing teachers, conducting pre and post-observation conferences with teachers, and providing them with training around the common core learning standards. He talked about meeting with students to address behavior problems that are going on in the classroom, and his approaches to discipline.

Even though Lodi is nearly half the size of FH, Mark’s time at school is still largely spent managing the administrative functions of a building leader. Mark clearly values his role as principal, and has chosen to emphasize his role as school coordinator before that of instructional leader, or someone who needs to connect with kids, in our conversations. When the conversation did swing around to instruction and student learning Mark shared the following statement.

Mark: As the instructional leader of the building, as the principal of the building, it’s my responsibility to make sure that all kids are learning to the best of their ability. For me to do that as the building principal I feel that I can best do that through the people that are the where the rubber meets the road—and that’s with the teachers. For me to help Billy or Sally, I can best do that by helping their teacher.

Mark’s primary focus is working to make sure he has the best teachers in the classroom for his students. In each of our conversations Mark emphasized that student achievement is a direct result of the work being done by the classroom teacher, and that the most important part of his job is to provide his teachers with the resources, professional development, and feedback they need to make sure there is real evidence of student learning. While most of our dialogue around his instructional leadership came back to this idea of teachers being the ones responsible for student learning and the success of the building, I wanted to know more about what kind of a relationship he had with his students. When the topic of student interactions arose, I used this as

an opportunity to ask Mark to describe those interactions he was having with students throughout the day.

Jonathan: Let's talk about the interactions with the students you described taking place during bussing, lunch, and/or walk throughs.

Mark: I can walk in and in many cases they don't even know I'm there.

Jonathan: Can you talk to me a little bit about some times when you meet with students or talk to students during the course of the day? What do those interactions look like?

Mark: Typically they're one-on-one with a child, and if there's more than one student involved I will deal with it two ways. I must say that in my training in responsive classroom has given me a different view on student management and discipline. It's all about trying to go back to what the issue was, what led up to it, what we could have done differently prior to that. We have a school pledge we say every morning after the pledge of allegiance. 'I promise to obey the rules, in my class and in my school, I'll respect myself and do the best I can do.' I'll say to kids you say this every morning and I want you to say it again, and they will. Pushing Billy down on the playground, were you obeying the rules? Were you respecting him? Were you respecting yourself by acting the way you acted? It's trying to get them to understand that having come from a secondary background and dealing with discipline for as long as I did. I got wrapped up in the mindset that there needs to be an ouch.

While earlier in this same conversation Mark mentioned that part of his day involved meeting with students to address behavioral issues, I found it interesting that he returned to the topic of behavior with these interactions without my prompting him to do so.

Like Joseph at FH, many of Mark's more direct interactions with students are limited to issues of discipline. Notice that like Joseph, Mark emphasizes his school's golden rule as a way to send a clear and consistent message to students that are struggling in class. Here is evidence of Mark's approaches to discipline having evolved since his work as an administrator at the secondary level. Evidence suggests that his work as a primary principal has brought him closer to the students. Note the following passage Mark shared about his transition into an elementary setting.

Mark: Aside from (students) coming up to me and giving me a hug, which after I came here was something I really had to get used to. It was something that just didn't happen. My first day on the job I was like what are they doing? Why? Get them off. I've come to recognize that with a lot of our kids, particularly the kids that come from poverty, that giving me a hug is more of filling a need that they have rather than a need that I have.

Mark went on to talk about how being a male principal in an environment where there are a lot of single mothers, and female teachers, is something the students really responded to. In the passage above is evidence of how Mark has become more aware of how students needs play out in primary schools. That he is someone the students can count on being there for them is something he does not take lightly. Another example of the value Mark places on his new and more intimate relationships with kids can be seen in this passage.

Mark: I might get buried with stuff that was not on my to do list at the beginning of the day, or I come out of a very difficult meeting with a teacher or a parent, and out of nowhere a kindergartner comes over and gives me a hug and it puts everything into perspective for me.

Many of Mark's comments demonstrate that Mark has developed into the kind of principal that understands what students need not only from their school, but from their principal as well.

However, like Joseph at FH, it is unclear as to how this principal is reciprocating that understanding. One lengthy analogy of leadership that Mark shared with me during our second conversation went like this.

Mark: This building is like a car or a vehicle. There are people that are the engine of that car, and they're the ones that really make the building go. (They) are the doers, and they step up to the plate. They're here early, stay late, get involved in everything, are all about kids, and when I say we need to do something about instruction they say (mimics eager teacher), 'What do I need to do?' And then we have the wheels. They're the people that make the building move. They may not be the heart of the building but without them we don't go anywhere. And then there's the chrome and the trim. They are the ones that are along for the ride that kind of make us look good but don't really do anything. And as a principal, I'm sitting in the driver's seat and stepping on the gas, breaking, steering, signaling which direction to go, and together all of us somehow get the organization down the road and moving forward. Sometimes I try not to be that autocratic principal but there are other times when I'll say, 'This is what we need to do and we're going to do it.'

Notice, if you will, that students are omitted from this analogy altogether. Are they in the passenger seat? The back seat? Maybe the trunk? While it is unclear as to what their role is in making the car go, it is clear that this principal, like Joseph at FH, is in the driver's seat and making the decisions that effect all members of the school community, whether they are mentioned or not.

Meaningful dialogue

Even though I had begun to see how Mark was making a positive impact on kids in this community, I was still curious to see what the students had to say about their experiences of school and their principal. During my first focus group with students I presented them with four images. The first image was of a police officer in uniform, the second of a firefighter, the third of President Barack Obama, and the fourth of their principal. I asked the group to tell me what job each of the four people did, and how they knew that. The students effortlessly identified each of the first three images as police officer, firefighter, and president accordingly. When I asked how they knew that Barack Obama was the president, they pointed to the flag in the background, a pin on his lapel, and one student told me he knew because “He’s on TV. Plus, everybody knows he’s the president.”

When I came to a picture of Mark however, they first guessed office worker, and then office man, before a third student guessed principal. While this may seem like a minor observation, I found it significant in that this was the only site where a percentage of the students struggled initially to identify their principal during this warm-up activity. When I then gave students in both focus groups an opportunity to illustrate what they saw their principal doing most often, I found that three of the nine illustrations depicted the principal in the main office (see L4-1).

It should also be noted that one of these three illustrations, one was focused on a matter of discipline (see L4-6). When I asked the student to describe this picture she responded by saying “I’m drawing a picture of the principal asking a little child why he punched a girl.” The student described another one of the pictures drawn of a teacher asking the principal for help as follows.

Student: I drew MM helping a teacher because the teachers say, 'Help!' and he says, 'I can help' because he's very helpful.

Jonathan: What kinds of things do you think the teacher is asking him for help about?

Student: Like a student got in trouble or she doesn't know what to do next.

In both cases there is evidence that the student's perceptions of Mark as chief disciplinarian largely align with his comments during our first interview.

Other students at Lodi offered a range of responses when I asked them about what their principal did. One exchange between the students and I started like this.

Jonathan: How is your principal different from a teacher?

Student One: He doesn't teach much.

Student Two: The principal probably doesn't get paid.

Jonathan: Why do you think that?

Student Two: I think he gets paid a little bit but the teachers get paid a lot more because they teach all day and he doesn't. He just walks around.

Student Three: I know, but he's the boss of teachers.

Student Four: He (principal) keeps you on task. He doesn't teach subjects like math and spelling. He's more focused on keeping you safe, not hurting other people, not saying mean things, and just making sure he's helpful

These student perspectives serve as an example of how different students at this site hold vastly different opinions about what the principalship entails. Some see him as a teacher leader, some as an observer, and others see him as the one setting the tone for the building.

Despite Mark's busy schedule he is in classrooms for a minimum of 30 minutes every morning. All of the students interviewed mentioned that they saw him in their classrooms "hundreds of times." Two illustrations were drawn of Mark visiting the classrooms during this instructional time (see L4-4 & L4-5). In each, Mark is depicted as an observer. These illustrations align with my own observation of Mark's role in the classrooms. Instead of allowing me to shadow Mark on a walk-through, as I was given permission to do at other sites, I was invited to watch him observe a 30-minute piece of morning instruction. During this 30 minutes Mark sat with his laptop, while the teacher worked with the class on the carpet. While Mark took notes on how the lesson was going, there was no evidence to suggest that he used this "sacriligious morning meeting time," to interact with, or even acknowledge the students. Mark mentioned during our first interview that these visits were scripted and focused on providing teachers with feedback. While this 30 minutes undoubtedly provides Mark with opportunities to help teachers become better, many students, particularly young students, are left to wonder what the principal is actually doing there.

When I asked these students how they felt during these walk-throughs I received an interesting set of replies.

Student One: When he's (principal) coming into our classroom at morning meeting, because sometimes he does that, comes in, and watches us, and then leaves, and then usually I breathe heavy and say 'I made it.'

Here is an example of how one student felt when Mark paid his classroom a visit. During my first and second interviews with Mark I gave him opportunities to develop questions he would like me to ask the students. After taking some time to think about it Mark came up with the following question.

Mark: If you got to be principal for a day, what would you do as principal of this school?

Here is some feedback the students provided during my subsequent focus group.

Student One: I would have kids be the teachers and teachers be the students.

Student Two: I would do stuff like he does. Like make kids feel better, walk around school and asking questions.

Student Three: I'd walk around the school (like student two); go in classrooms to make sure no kids were acting up or anything. Cause usually when the principal is around everybody acts like an angel and then when he leaves boo-ha-ha-ha (student makes devilish laughter sound and puts finger horns on his head).

Student Four: I would see if there are any kids who are down and I'd give them a laugh and make a joke or something.

Student Five: I would make sure none of the kids aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing.

Student Six: I would collaborate and go around to make sure teachers were doing well, and encourage kids and teach kids more about the school, like when it was made and stuff.

It is clear that all of the students clearly took these questions seriously, and this opportunity to reflect on the work of their principal gave Mark some proof that they understand what he does (at least in part), and have opinions about it. After sharing with Mark the students' illustrations and comments from the first focus group, I gave Mark a second opportunity to develop questions for the students. Mark had clearly taken the time to develop a pair of questions based on the data I mentioned, and without hesitation presented them in the following way.

Mark: Actually there's a couple things. One would be, what would they like to see me do differently as their principal? The second thing is kind of timely, do they have any concerns about our consolidation? Do they have any concerns about moving to a much larger school with Tompkins Elementary and fifth and sixth grades and being Tompkins Lodi as opposed to just Lodi?

It was clear after speaking with Mark that these questions were not only timely, but they were developed in response to the students' feedback. Perhaps more important than the responsive nature of these well-formulated questions was this impression I got based on our conversation. After sharing my student data I believe Mark felt genuinely accountable for his questions as they related to the purpose of improving his practice and actively participating in a study that was designed to be action relevant. The value this new dialogue had did not stop here though.

During my final focus groups with students they, like the students at FH, had become more comfortable talking about their principal, and used this opportunity to provide me with an unbiased account of Mark's work based on these new questions. The following student feedback was generation in response to the first of the two questions.

Jonathan: What would you like him to do differently as your principal.

Student One: Make smaller speeches. Try something different. Like his speeches are really long.

Student Two: On open house he gives this really long speech and he says a lot of things over again and it can get a little bit annoying. Not that he's a bad principal, he's a really good principal.

Student One: I would like to have more programs. I don't think we've had a program in the last three months.

Jonathan: Programs?

Student Three: They (teachers/adults) said they stopped it. Programs are when everyone in school gets together in the gymnasium.

Jonathan: You like those?

All Students: Yeah. Sometimes.

Student Four: If we do things over and over again like the open house, we should make it shorter and have it so there's more time to show your parents what you're doing instead of just having a certain amount of time—(student five interjects)

Student Five: We normally go to our rooms. I think it should also be in the middle of the year or later in the year so your parents can see what you've been learning farther in the year. Because in the beginning it's just like you're there for a little while—(student two interjects)

Student Two: And they keep asking again and again what have you been doing in school, what have you been doing in school. And it can get harder to explain later in the year and as you get older because you do harder stuff. So we can have it in the middle of the year.

Student Six: It should be in the middle of the year because in the beginning the work is easy and when they ask us what we've been doing in school it gets harder each month.

Student Three: Because you start out with these simple things and then it gets super hard.

Student Six: Because we don't have programs that much, what we should do is right before we go on break when we have them, to do a program then and talk about why we have a break.

During this lengthy exchange is evidence that students have concrete opinions about not only direct leadership behaviors that Mark exhibits (long speeches), but indirect leadership behaviors as well (structuring open-house, scheduling programs, etc.). It is also interesting that the students were so involved in responding to this question that they were actually finishing each other's sentences. While students were enthusiastic about answering many of the questions I posed during both focus groups, this opportunity to provide some critical feedback in a safe, non-threatening environment was something they really took advantage of. The younger students at this site also were able to develop a response to this question, and though it is more succinct, it still demonstrates their capacity for informing the work of the principal in some different ways.

Jonathan: Your principal wanted me to ask you a couple more questions. What would you like to see him do differently about school?

Student One: I'd like him to make it bigger. Bigger classrooms.

Student Two: Just work with us. Like if we're going to have something fun like math he could be a student with us.

Student Three: I'd like him to make the classrooms have the same number of girls and boys and kids you get along with and change the way of making people get along.

Student One: Class pets, like a python for each class.

Jonathan: Did you ever talk to him about this stuff?

Student Two: No, I don't want to hurt his feelings.

Here students were asking for that human contact and instructional support in the classroom for the first-time in this study. Here too, students are asking for Mark to provide them with some indirect leadership support in the form of bigger classrooms, class makeup, and class pets. Even though some of these requests might be out of the principal's hands (e.g. having a python in class

or making the school bigger), Mark could address the second student's request while still being able to monitor instruction. Feedback like this can provide principals with cues that might not lead to organizational reform overnight, but when used over the course of time, could certainly have an impact on how the students not only perceived the work of their principal, but of their important role as learner as well.

There is evidence here too (in the final exchange with student two) that these students revere their principal. During my conversations with students it also became clear they have a very high opinion of their teachers. However, students here may not feel like they have a channel for sharing their opinions about what does or does not work in school. These students can talk to their friends about challenges they face, and many also share their concerns with their family at home, but like so many students in schools everywhere, they have been taught that keeping quiet may be the ultimate form of respect in schools.

When I took this opportunity to pose the second question, I was surprised to find out that many of the students and their families were still in the dark about their transition.

Jonathan: You all know next year you're going to join with another school right.

Student One: Yeah we're all going to be in a different school. I don't get why. I think that's going to make our parents pay more or something. Why don't we just stay here? They already eco-tested it. They're going to turn this place into something else.

Student Two: I heard they were going to make our school into a skate park.

Moderator: That's just the principal fooling with you.

Jonathan: What do you think about going to a much bigger school with different kids?

Student Three: I think it's going to be good because we'll be meeting new kids and we'll have more friends. One bad thing is there might be too many kids to remember their names.

Student Four: Or there will be bullies. I hate them.

Student Five: My best friend is going to be there, she's in Altmar. Her name is Anna and we're going to get our own locker.

All Students: We are (students getting very excited)?!

It is clear that the students have a range of questions and concerns. A conversation about lockers that was co-facilitated by the moderator turned into a conversation about safety. Students wanted to talk about going to school with strangers, and about how to deal with older kids. This conversation would have gone on indefinitely but I felt responsible for bringing the group back to Mark's question.

Jonathan: What can MM do to help you with this move to this bigger school?

All Students: Comfort us!

Student One: Have a program that's going to tell us what's going to happen.

Jonathan: Has he done that yet?

All Students: No!

Moderator: Actually he's going to be doing that tomorrow at the middle school and your parents have been invited.

The moderator's comment temporarily put the group at ease but there were a lot of questions for which they still wanted answers. While this interview was conducted with a couple months still left in the spring semester, I found it interesting how excited this group was about their upcoming transition and how little they actually knew about what was going to be taking place.

Surely many of these parents would attend the information session at the middle school and share their findings with their children later the following day. I could not help but wonder about the other parents though. The same ones that that Mark said do not value school. The ones that might have to work, or that would not be able to find a sitter. Would they be at this session? Would they be easing their sons and daughters through these changes? Should the kids not be the ones receiving this support and information from their teachers or principal early on? Why should a select few get to find out because they are a part of a focus group interview with a researcher from a university over 30 miles away?

Here again is concrete evidence that when principals develop questions for kids, students can respond in a way that is appropriate and focused on developing their understanding of school. Up until the point of this interview, many of these students had been left in the dark about what their next year of school would be like. This should serve as a cue to continue developing dialogue between adults and students in schools so that all members of the school community can, as Joseph at FH often said, “be on the same page moving forward.”

Of all the illustrations drawn at Lodi, one captured my attention more than any other (see L3-3). Here a particularly outspoken student drew a more creative illustration and provided me with the following description.

Jonathan: What are you working on?

Student: I got the principal staring at a wolf, and the wolf is stopping to listen and he’s (the principal) screaming in his mind.

Jonathan: Is he scared of the wolf?

Student: Yes.

Jonathan: Where are they?

Student: They're deep in the woods, deep down in the woods because he went hiking up in the mountains with the students for a field trip.

Jonathan: How is this going to end up? Is he going to make friends with the wolf or walk away?

Student: He's going to quietly hide behind the tree. The wolf turns around and starts walking and he (the principal) jumps up on its back and stabs a knife in the wolf's back.

This fictionalized account of the principal saving the school from danger during a field trip stems from the imagination of the same student who earlier in the case analysis remarked that he did not need to go to college because his parents did not. I believe this illustration is interesting not only because of the rich description, but because in this rural community, Mark is perceived by many, parents, teachers, and students alike, as something of a superhero.¹⁴ This story and illustration represent what I believe are the most powerful effects Mark has as principal. Mark is someone who looks out for his students' best interests, even in the face of adversity. To the awe of the students, Mark once rode a horse around on the school, and on another occasion, a motorcycle. While many of his approaches to the principalship can be characterized as traditional and focused on best improving the work of adults, he still has a strong sense of what his students are looking for in a principal.

When I asked students at Lodi about what their biggest challenges in school were they almost all responded by telling me about subjects they had trouble with, or statewide exams. When I asked them how Mark helps them with these challenges they responded by saying, "he helps by helping the teachers," or "he provides the students with encouragement." The student's

¹⁴ After our final focus group interview at Lodi, the moderator confirmed the stories of Mark riding around the school on a horse one year, and on a motorcycle another. She also spoke at length about the impact he has on the community, and the admiration he receives from so many of the students, parents, and staff.

perspectives on Mark's work are as varied as they are because Mark's interactions are typically limited to matters of discipline, casual greetings, or detached observation. In sites like FH and Lodi, where insubordination is less of an issue, principals have opportunities to become more proactive about their work and enter their classrooms to help structure a school climate where the principal can be perceived as more than just an office worker, a disciplinarian, or a friendly face.

Evidence of input in action

There is ample evidence to suggest that this research helped raise Mark's awareness of how student voice could be used in an elementary setting. Mark himself said that he has used student voice at the secondary level to help develop rules for the classroom, and at the primary level with fifth graders to increase their sense of responsibility by having them do peer mentoring with younger students. This is something that Mark says he would like to do again next year as he will have students that are both older, and returning students, to help lead the school towards excellence. While this seems like a step in the right direction I was most encouraged by the way Mark's comments on student voice, responsibility, and shared decision-making developed over the course of this study.

During my first interview with Mark, he made the following comment when I asked to tell me a story about when he thought student voice mattered.

Mark: To be honest with you until your study I never even really gave any thought to student voice. Two things (you're looking at have stood out). To have thought about student voice and/or about how student voice would impact what I do...I guess initially I thought I could see that at the secondary level. But what does that look like at the elementary level? How do kids know what's good for them? Isn't that our job? To be

honest I don't know. I hope that a lot of the decisions I make are done so with student voice in mind. But if it is it would have to be done subconsciously.

Here the principal is being very honest about his understanding of this topic. There is no pretense of using or having used student voice despite evidence that Mark, like Joseph, is a believer in having a student council. During our second interview Mark shared the following statement as evidence of his interest in using student voice and meaningful engagement with this research.

Mark: I have a pretty good idea of how I'm perceived by the teachers. A pretty good idea about how the parents perceive me, but I have no idea how the kids perceive me. I'm very interested in learning what they think of me and also about using feedback from kids more about making changes and engaging them.

Mark has taken to the time to share his feelings about this research with the two groups of adults, parents and teachers, that have until now been the focus of his leadership efforts. Mark has been as honest and upfront as any principal wanting to improve his practice could be. This willingness to engage in a meaningful dialogue with kids helped Mark to see the value this work holds not only for improving his work as an administrator, but the work of students as well.

Mark: What I think would be of a real help to the kids is if they began to see real evidence of their input in action. If they saw that they would begin to say to themselves, 'This is really important because the things that we're talking about are beginning to happen to some degree.' I gotta admit to you I wondered, 'What does that look like?' But I can see where there's a place for it at this level.

Whether this leads Mark, and principals like Mark, to adopting more active approaches to listening, and more importantly, active approaches to using student voice, is left to be said.

Everton Elementary

Everton, the first of two urban sites included in this chapter, has a principal that spends a great deal of time managing crisis both inside and outside of the main office. Here I will present how this principal has managed to maintain a sense of calm, despite the many challenges faced by her school and the community. I will also present evidence of how this hands-on principal has been able to impact students' experiences of learning by entering classrooms and working directly with students to support instruction. Everton's students were comfortable talking about some of their challenges, many of which they face on a daily basis and which will also appear in this section. Finally, I will present how this non-traditional principal's positive and open-minded outlook on urban education has helped her acknowledge and develop strategies for addressing more complex barriers to learning for her students.

Putting out fires

While students at FH and Lodi have had their share of academic and social/emotional challenges in school, students at Everton are dealing with a range of issues unique to urban education in addition to many of these same challenges. All of the students at Everton receive free and reduced lunch. This is also the only school that has an on-site mental health clinic to help students with special needs or those with emotional issues. Of the four schools in this study, this K-5 site has a higher percentage of students diagnosed with special needs (18.8%) than any other.

Like Joseph and Mark before, the principal of Everton was brought in to facilitate a transition. Unlike the other two principals, Leah's charge was to manage this school through what the district perceived to be a situation of crisis. Leah has been with this city district for 25

years, first as a teacher, than as a member of the district's staff development team, and more recently as a principal who has worked to lead four different schools over the last seven years.

Everton, like many schools in this city, is a school in need of improvement. 85% of Everton's students in grades two through five did not pass state assessments the previous year. Since Leah's arrival, office discipline referrals have been reduced by over 50%, but there is still lots of work to be done in a city where less than 50% of the kids that start school make it to graduation. Of all the schools I visited, the school climate at Everton was definitely the most chaotic. While this is a real community school where the majority of students either walk, or are dropped off by parents or guardians, it is clear that economic pressures have put a strain on the lives of many. Crime statistics in this area, where there are many boarded up homes, have students and staff watching their backs, and on several occasions Everton's principal and students made mention of the dangers lurking outside the school's walls.

Like Lodi, the school prides itself on being a safe haven, and a place of beauty, a place where resources, like the school based mental health clinic, and social workers, are provided to parents and students so they can get the help they need. While Joseph and Mark are preoccupied with supporting the initiatives that are coming down from above, and working with teachers around these initiatives, Leah's days are spent focused primarily on students and the complexity of many of their situations. At FH and Lodi the principals, staff, and students were nearly all Caucasian and most were also from a middle-class background. At Everton there is a white, female, middle-class staff and principal, working with a predominantly African-American population in a low-income area.

Where Joseph and Mark had ample amounts of time to help me coordinate this study, Leah did not. Where parents at FH and Lodi quickly returned permission slips expressing their

interest in having their children participate in this study, and some even wanted to learn more about what the study entailed, it took repeated recruitment efforts to coordinate enough students to even have focus groups at this site. Where all of the students at Lodi and FH showed up to focus groups ready to participate, one of the students here arrived moments after just being in an altercation with another member of the focus group, and another came from the nurse's office where they were having an emotional breakdown. Where the moderator served as a calming, familiar presence at the other sites, the moderator here was either busy doing other things, or unavailable during focus groups with kids.

Here too, the principal was unable to start our two scheduled one-on-one interviews on time because she was managing crisis situations with students elsewhere in the building. Our first interview got underway 75 minutes after our scheduled appointment time, and our second interview commenced 45 minutes late.

All of these differences signaled to me that the principal at Everton had her hands full in this mid-sized urban district that has been forced to cut 700 teachers in the last two years, and that is preparing to make another 200 cuts at the time these interviews took place.¹⁵ Leah is as responsible for keeping this building functioning as she is for providing the instructional support these students so desperately need. The fact that the building is even open this year came as a surprise to many after the district made a decision to shut the school down in January of 2011, only to reverse the decision during April of that same year.¹⁶ When I finally was able to sit down to ask Leah about how she has managed the school through these difficult times, she was surprisingly calm considering the nature of the crisis she had just worked through that morning.

¹⁵ While all of the sites in this study were being forced to make significant cuts, they were most apparent at Everton, where the physical appearance of the school, and the impact of those cuts appeared to be causing the most damage.

¹⁶ One year before these interviews were conducted. Before arriving at Everton, Leah worked at another elementary school in the district that was shut down after her second year as principal.

During our first formal interview Leah made a series of belief statements that I will present here. Unlike Joseph and Mark, who chose to share a more concrete definition of their role as principal, Leah offered a few different versions of what her primary function as building leader was. Her first belief statement came directly after my very first question, and is presented here.

Jonathan: Describe your average day here at Everton.

Leah: My role as principal is to make sure that resources are available for students to achieve.

Simple enough. After this statement Leah went on to describe how her first task was to make sure staffing at her site was adequate each day (clearly teachers are a school's most valuable resource). Her second key belief came shortly after I asked her to share a story or situation where she thought student voice mattered. After sharing a story about a time when she analyzed an annual research survey conducted by Say Yes to Education Program (SYTE) focused on understanding student perspectives on school climate, and their relationships with teachers and the principals, she revised her original statement.

Leah: And I think that's my role as principal. To be there for kids and using their voices, and looking at what it is they need.

A little later in the interview I asked another question about whether teachers stand behind the school's character education incentive plan, and here she provided me with a third belief.

Leah: So that's what I feel my role is as principal, is advocating for the school climate for kids, and advocating that all those systems (like the incentive plan that involves student and teacher participation) are in place and going well.

Towards the end of the same interview we shifted gears and talked about her work as an instructional leader. Here she responded in a similar way.

Leah: What's going to have the biggest impact on student achievement is that leadership role that I show that classroom teacher.

It goes without saying that principals from rural, suburban, and urban sites all have a number of different hats they need to be able to wear on any given day. As a result, it is no surprise that Leah has expressed herself in these ways. However, I believe that all these strong belief statements spread across one interview sends another message and begs a few questions as well. Which one does she really believe? Which does she do the best? What hat will she be wearing during the days I observe at this site? And why does each response (with the exception of the first one) coincide directly with a question?

Despite the fact that Leah and her vice-principal have set up a system they jokingly refer to as triage¹⁷, in order for the two administrators to oversee both the disciplinary and instructional support that should be taking place on any given day, Leah spends most of her time putting out fires. As a result, answers to the questions above came in stops and starts. Still, they came. In between the fires there is a principal that is trying her best to maintain a positive outlook on urban education during this, her 25th and “most stressful” year as an educator.

Maintaining calm amidst the chaos

After Leah resolved the crisis situation, which took place before our first scheduled interview, she came into the office waiting room and introduced me to Ms. Holley, a parent of one of the students in the focus groups and a school helper. Before starting my formal interview with the principal the three of us entered the conference room where Ms. Holley asked me to

¹⁷ Triage (def.)-(1) The process of sorting victims, as of a battle or disaster, to determine medical priority in order to increase the number of survivors. (2) The determination of priorities for action in an emergency.

briefly clarify a few key points of the research, and then offered some comments about how she thought it could benefit the school as a whole.¹⁸

It was exciting being able to have this opportunity to speak directly with a concerned parent for the first time. While a select group of parents at Lodi expressed interest in learning more in the form of a letter, and dozens of parents across all grade-levels were willing to allow their kids to participate at that site, this more personal interaction, facilitated by the principal herself, put me at ease and really got me excited about my work with the students at Everton.

As an experienced urban elementary practitioner, I was also impressed by Leah's poise after having dealt with a crisis that involved a student diagnosed with severe emotional disturbances, a visit from social services, and a phone call with an angry parent all before Monday at 10:30 a.m.

Like Joseph and Mark before, Leah began by describing her routine by focusing on her early arrival, her involvement with the buses and bells, and her walk-throughs. Unlike these other two principals Leah's focus throughout her description was on providing me with examples of how each of her duties related to specific interactions with kids. For example, a voice message left by a parent that was concerned about an altercation on the bus the night before, prompted Leah to share how she dealt with the two students involved when they arrived at school early that same morning. Instead of choosing to talk about how pressures from outside the school distracted her from this work, Leah shared specific dialogue from a conversation she had with these students.

She went on to share what her interactions with students in the morning after breakfast look like. Where Mark and Joseph emphasized the importance of being visible and

¹⁸ The parent affectionately referred to Leah as the 'Big Mama' of the school. A name bestowed upon her by the students and this community. She also said the study was a great idea because she thought students would be honest about they felt, and that they should have more chances to talk about school.

approachable, Leah focuses more on proactively going to the kids and asking the how they are feeling, or if there was anything they might like to share before starting their day in class. Unlike FH and Lodi, Leah and her vice-principal have devised a scheme where one administrator is always in the office to deal with parent meetings and usual “principal day stuff,” while another is conducting focused walk-throughs of the site in the morning and afternoon.

Leah shared a story about some of the other ‘stuff’ which had occurred just that morning. I would like to share this passage as an example of the work being done in these schools, and to contrast the work of this administrator with the work of Mark and Joseph.

Leah: This morning there was a conversation I was having with a grandmother where we talked about her being more of the parent role instead of her (current role). The young man’s (student’s) biological father is incarcerated for seventeen years for a murder. So it’s like how do we help them through all of that? I think sometimes our systems are pretty complex in the city in terms of all the pieces we’re trying to put together for families.

This is no doubt a simplistic account of the actual conversation that took place. After taking into consideration the other two scenarios this principal has already met head on the morning of this interview, it appears that she has less choice over how she spends the time that transpires between the buses and bells than do Mark and Joseph, even with the support of an assistant principal.

During my second visit Leah greeted me in the waiting room and said it would be a few minutes while she worked with a student that was having some trouble. After ten minutes the principal came to get me holding the students hand, and invited me into the principal’s office where she was working to calm a student down. This particular student was typically medicated

for emotional/behavior issues Monday-Friday, but not on the weekends. On this Monday morning, he had a problem in class, due to the fact that his medication had not been given to him before arriving at school. The principal was working hard to calm this student down and decided that he might need to walk a bit to relax. From inside the main office I could hear the student clapping. Later, after returning the student to his room Leah came back to share the following story of why he was doing so.

Leah: When he went in the bathroom he was clapping, and he says ‘Ms. Leah you hear those gunshots!’ And I said Rondell, we’re in school, there are no gunshots here in school, you’re safe here. Then he would do it again (and I’d have to repeat myself). But you saw me (when we were in here together) keep bringing it back to being a quality learner, and needing to see him do a task so it’s like the reality of saying you have stressors, and get him calm, and follow direction one, two, and three before I can bring you back to class.

In this example, Leah and I were exposed to a young student that has some problems related to his life in the community, and his behavioral plan/medication. Leah explores the differences between the work she does, and that of principals in less urbanized areas at several points throughout this study. These are problems that principals in schools with high levels of parent and community involvement, and that have the time to focus on specific student issues, would most likely be devoting a lot more attention to than there is time for at Everton.

Like Mark at Lodi, Leah also chose to talk about student achievement data, and how it relates to holistic approaches being taken by the school psychologist and her to help address the whole child. Like Mark, Leah knows that she is impacting lives on a daily basis. Like Mark she also wondered if students in the more affluent suburban districts in the region could handle the

nature of the work they do on a daily basis. Leah is passionate about trying to create healthy families and a sustainable community for her students. When I asked Leah what she liked best about her job at Everton she shared the following statement.

Leah: I know that I'm impacting lives. I've had the opportunity to interview at the more affluent and higher-achieving suburban districts. I didn't feel like that's where my skills were needed. Because I can think systemically and not let the challenges of urban education overwhelm me.

There is clearly a big difference between schools that have 25 % free and reduce lunch rate, and sites like Everton where an entire school has been deemed eligible whether they are on the list or not. Still Leah is actively working to lessen the impact of the realities students have to deal with on a day-to-day basis in their home and their community while at the same time maintaining an academic focus. Leah is the first principal in this study that is actively supporting students in their learning through direct and focused interactions that can take place anywhere, inside or outside the site.

After my first interview with Leah she invited me to accompany her as she went to assist with lunch duty and later walk-throughs of the site. This was the only site in the study where the principal allowed me access to almost an entire day of work, and this gave me an opportunity to observe many of these interactions first hand. On our way to lunch I was excited to see different students, younger and older, approach her in the hallway for hugs, ask her if they could meet with her to talk, and present her with art work they had done and were planning on bring to her in the lunchroom. Upon arriving in the lunchroom, I noticed that due to its small size, it was extremely noisy despite the fact that kids were sitting and having normal conversations. Leah received students as they were dropped off for lunch by their teacher, and lined them up outside

the door where they would go to take their tray. She then proceeded to let students into the serving area three at a time, and this gave her an opportunity to talk with, touch, observe, and engage nearly every student that ate lunch in her school that day.

Once all the students were seated and had lunch, Leah continued to make contact with students at their tables. Some conversations were more focused, and dealt with issues students may have been having in class. Others were more general and involved talking about members of the student's families or life outside of school. This was clearly not staged. Leah was a natural with the students and they reciprocated her genuine warmth with kindness and in many cases what I interpreted to be a sense of adoration.

While Leah made her way around the lunchroom, I was approached by students and support staff who were genuinely interested as to why I was there. Both Joseph and Mark took the time to introduce me to members of their staff during my visits to FH and Lodi, but these opportunities to interact on a more natural level made me feel like I was really part of the community. Even though, conversations with students were typically brief, each member of the staff I spoke with had kind things to say about Leah's work that mirrored the parent's statement from earlier that same day. Leah is indeed the matriarch of the Everton community.

While Leah offered various versions of what her role was during our first interview, it is clear that this is how her staff, parents, and students perceive her. Not only is Leah fighting a battle to support student's social/emotional needs, but she is also fighting the same battle in the classrooms. After lunch Leah returned to the office to check in with her secretaries and grabbed a clipboard upon which she showed me the city district's checklist for classroom observation, and a notepad. As we left the office Leah mentioned that each grade-level did their planning

together, and this walk-through was an opportunity to focus on how each grade was following through with their co-designed approaches to the content.

During our walk-through I could not help but notice that Leah's approach was radically different than the approaches of Joseph or Mark. Leah knew what those teachers were teaching at that day and time, and she used this knowledge to actively support the instruction the teacher was doing when she entered the classroom. The students were not alarmed to see her, and the teachers did not appear to tense up. It was almost as if another teacher had seamlessly entered the room and began working to support the lesson. In some cases this meant asking students questions. In others it meant working to get students in small groups focused and back on track. Leah is using these walk-throughs as an opportunity to simultaneously monitor best practice, check on student progress, and teach. I also could not help but notice that the support Leah provides during walk-throughs seems almost necessary in classrooms that feel over-crowded, understaffed, and that often seemed to lack a strong teacher presence.

These opportunities to have direct instructional contact with students, on the same day that she has mediated a conflict, coached a grandmother through a problem at home, managed a student through crisis, been interviewed, and run lunch duty, show a principal that is focused on making changes in her school from the inside-out. A principal that is able to use her many years of expertise in urban education to directly improve the lives of kids. Will she have to conduct formal observations of teachers and provide them with feedback and training at some point throughout this year? Absolutely. She, like all principals, will also have to make sure initiatives from above enter the classrooms in a way that makes sense for students and teachers. Like many principals wanting to have that direct instructional contact with kids, she too will experience roadblocks to instructional leadership.

While much of Leah's time at Everton is dealing with conflict resolution, it is clear that she still takes the time to interact with kids on a meaningful level, and values their important role as learner. Leah is working to develop a partnership with adults, but her emphasis is on the kids, and for Everton, this appears to be the only way organizational reform can become a reality.

The principal teacher

At a site like Everton, where the principal is more directly involved in the lives and instruction of the students, students are naturally going to be more familiar with the work of the principal, and how that work impacts their experiences of school. Leah also mentioned that students at Everton were used to being in focus groups since SYTE became a real presence in the city schools. When I sat down with Leah to ask her what she would like me to focus on understanding during my focus groups with kids, she shared the following questions.

Leah: I thought this study would be so interesting because it's asking me how I'm setting up systems to work. So I have my idea of systems and what makes a strong school system and there's all that research behind that. And then from the kids' point of view...that's what I'm so interested about. Do they feel supported? Are those systems really working?

I decided to probe further and ask if she could be more specific. The comments below were similar to Joseph's in the sense that she pointed out what the kids might say, but she chose to take it a step further and focus on a more solid question in the following passage.

Leah: I'm making the assumption that students are going to say they feel safe in school. Or that Leah tries to make us feel safe or something like that. I'm really curious about do they feel academically supported. Do they feel their teachers really believe they're going to go to college. I know the parents

want their kids to be successful in school, but I don't know if our kids understand what that means. How do you help your kid to do that? I want to know if we've created that message here in this school that you are capable and can go to college.

While Mark had mentioned his rural district's focus on improving the aspiration rate at his site, this was the first principal that talked about college in very concrete terms. In a district where graduation rates are extremely low, principals like Leah along with the SYTE program, are trying to set the tone for students early on so that expectations can remain high throughout their educational experience.

When I sat down to ask the students about their experiences of school, and their impressions of this support I found that students' challenges at Everton were almost exclusively focused on barriers to learning present in the classrooms themselves. Take the following exchange as an example.

Jonathan: What is your biggest challenge in school?

Student One: Tests

Student Two: The hardest thing is when people talk about, or talk directly to the teacher, and when people are trying to talk and people are disrupting you—

Student Three: You be getting distracted—

Student Two: And you might be saying the same thing that they say and it's not what you want to say.

Student Four: My biggest challenge is when people try to help you out and you feel like you don't need or want them to give you answers. Sometimes you say something the

wrong way and hurt somebody's feelings and then they don't like you anymore. Or they say 'I think that you should say you're sorry.'

Student Three: My biggest challenge is when people get in trouble and they get mad for what they did, because it's kind of annoying.

Jonathan: How does your principal help you overcome those challenges?

Student One: (She says) 'We need to learn from our mistakes.'

Jonathan: Does she ever help you learn?

All: Yes

Jonathan: How?

Student Two: She talks about what the question was about (like on a test) and was it hard for you to do or was it easy. And some people might lie and say it was easy and they know it was really hard because they want the teacher to think they're smart and stuff.

Jonathan: So she does help with schoolwork? How else does she help with other challenges?

Student Four: She helps us also with our math if we don't understand something she just helps us with something but she doesn't give us the answer she gives us a clue. And also when we get hurt it's a challenge for her to help us so we won't get really hurt.

Here is evidence of several challenges students face and approaches the principal has taken to help them with these challenges. Here I can also see issues of safety being a real concern for students and a major part of this principal's job. I found it interesting when I posed Leah's question to the students that the topic again came back to issues of safety, and the important role that played in the students' experiences of learning.

Jonathan: Do you feel supported academically here at Everton?

Student One: Yes.

Student Two: Yes.

Student Three: Yeah they try working with us. Like in each subject that you're struggling with, they can try to get you a tutor as quick as they can.

Student Four: Leah keeps us safe because sometimes she tells us, 'You should feel safe,' and when there's a bad person inside the school trying to get the child because what they did to the other child the teachers should lock the doors and stuff. If she didn't do that the child would get harmed and that would mean she wouldn't care about that child.

Whether this final scenario is fact or fiction is irrelevant. Like the student at Lodi, who drew a picture of his principal saving the school from a wolf, this student perceives her principal to be someone that is there to protect the students in times of danger. It also points out the important role SYTE plays in providing students with additional academic support and the message that going to college is important. When it came time to ask the students if they feel there is a clear and consistent message being spread that they can go to college, all of the students replied in the affirmative. However, only two students were able to elaborate.

Student One: She be telling us to stay focused on our work, get an education, go to college and be successful as who you are.

Jonathan: When does she say this?

Student One: She will say it over the loudspeaker.

Student Two: She says, 'You need to work to get a scholarship so you can go to college.'

It's about work. Gotta get your job, education, and scholarship.

Here I can see evidence that the message is being spread to students. Whether or not the tools are being provided is another matter entirely, and one she chooses to explore in greater depth

during our second interview. After sharing my illustrations and interview data with Leah she spoke to me at length about specific students that took part in one of the focus groups.

Leah: When I saw your older group I noticed Student one, who is a gifted student. I saw Student two, who is an LD/Language and an 8:1:1 student. Student three, who is a really gentle kid. Student four, who is also LD language, has an IQ of 71, and the counselor has recently mentioned to me that she may have multiple personalities. That's the thing with Student four is one day she's telling the kids I'm her godmother and the next day I don't know. It depends on who you're getting that day.

This intimate knowledge of each student involved in her focus groups is further evidence of the close relationships Leah has with all of her students. When I asked Leah if she would like to ask any follow-up questions she took a moment to think and presented a question that helped her explore her understanding of student's experiences of school in greater depth.

Leah: If I could make the teachers do one thing different what is it you would want me to get teachers to do?

Notice here that Leah is phrasing the question in a way that addresses the students directly. Also notice that this is an open-ended question that asks the students to develop a discussion instead of answering with a reply of yes-or-no. Like Mark, Leah too gave the students an opportunity to think hypothetically about what they might do if they were principal, an empowering experience in itself. The student's responses to the questions were as follows.

Student One: I would have her tell the teacher to put the people that I don't like and that don't listen and always get PIR's¹⁹ in a different class.

¹⁹ Proactive incident reports are what Everton calls what have traditionally been known as office referrals. Students that receive these reports are given an opportunity to leave this classroom, go to a reflection room, and self time-out.

Student Two: I wish there was a teacher that would take all the bad kids. If there was a different teacher in a different school that could handle difficult children and take control of them even when they're not looking at...like every time they (the teacher) walk out the room to use the bathroom or get a drink the children should still be good.

Student Three: We never go outside. Sometimes when we don't go outside people get mad and they want to go outside.

While this group of younger students took all of my questions very seriously, I had a great deal of trouble with the older group. This group entered their first interview in a very giggly mood, and came into the second focus group in bits and pieces after two of the students in the focus group were in a fight earlier that morning (one was suspended), and another was having an emotional breakdown in the nurse's office because of the fight at the start of the interview.

During this second focus group the moderator was also being pulled out of the interview room at various times to deal with other tasks, and as a result the students who were already prone to distraction, became more so and even aggressive at times. This exchange from our second interview serves as an example of how conversations went during both interviews with the older students.

Q: If Leah could make your teachers do one thing different in class what would that be?

Student One: Tell them to stop talking and shut up and do they work. My teacher talk too much.

Jonathan: Would that help if Leah told her not to talk too much?

Student One: Yes. All she do is blah blah blah, I can hear her in my sleep.

Student Two: I'd ask to see if my dog could come to school.

Student Three: We've got a fashion show coming up.

Student Four: I should be able to sleep in school.

Student One: Our teachers tell us to sit down and shut up.

Student Five: If I were principal I will do work and avoid kids because kids be acting dumb and hitting they self in the face. One time Ms. Leah had to grab one boy because he hit himself mad hard, so she had to sing him songs about not hitting himself.

I can see here that the conversation with this group took on a different tone than others involved in this research study. Still, it does say something about how the school feels for adults, and how the classrooms feel for students. During both interviews with this group Student one responded very negatively to all of my questions, and this set the tone for both of the interviews.

Of the seven student illustrations submitted²⁰, each depicts a different principal behavior. This site was also unique in that it was the first where students preferred writing their illustration as opposed to drawing it. It was also the first site where students became immediately anxious when I asked them to draw what their principal does. This was not because they did not know what to draw, as you will see, the content in each of these illustrations, and the ones that were never submitted, were quite original compared to those at FH and Lodi. It merely illustrates a point that Leah had made to me during our first interview that I will share here.

Leah: You start to see that they're down really young in urban education. In kindergarten you see kids that are really eager beavers. There's nothing they can't do. By the end of first-grade some kids are already seeing themselves as not-readers, or not-learners, so I have to fight that battle all the time.

True to form some of these students saw themselves as non-drawers, and some of the students preferred distracting the group from conversation instead of actively participating.

²⁰ One student tore her illustration to pieces during our second focus group and another student was not able to participate due to a fight he had that morning.

Still, illustrations captured a memory or vision they had of their principal that was only theirs. One student drew a picture of the principal breaking up a fight in the cafeteria (see E4-3). One student drew a picture of the principal taking his hand and welcoming him into school in the morning (see E5-1). One student drew a picture of the very office in which we sat from a bird's eye view, where Leah is represented only as a faint circle behind the principal's desk (see E5-3). One drew a picture of the principal checking student's test scores, and one of the principal leading the school in a singing of the pledge of allegiance at assembly. Of the three written illustrations, there is one who wrote a passage about the principal's presence during walk-throughs, and one who wrote about how the principal wanted them to get a scholarship. The most outspoken girl from the younger focus group wrote the following passage, with an image of the principal looking up at the audience from the page (see E4-4).

The wide variety of perspectives on what Leah does may be directly related to the many hats she has to wear at this site on any given day. To these students Leah is more than just a principal; she is also a teacher, a disciplinarian, a resource provider, a calming presence, a counselor, a liaison, a caregiver, a motivator, a social worker, and a role model. Leah's devotion to this community, and to this school, is reflected in the way she treats each of her interactions with students as an opportunity to help them grow socially, emotionally, and academically.

Acknowledging barriers to instructional leadership

While Leah has spent most of her administrative career reacting to problems in high poverty areas where student behavior issues and academic concerns go hand-in-hand, and where school resources have been at a minimum, she is trying to keep a positive outlook on the work that she is doing. The challenges of doing more with less in this urban district have been difficult for Leah, who at 52, is beginning to wonder how many years she can keep working at

the frenetic pace she is currently at. Here she talks about how her situation contrasts with that of principals in other schools and districts.

Leah: The people that I go to (for support), that have the same vision, have that luxury of being in it (one school) for the long haul. So I look for that and I long for that. Maybe I would feel better if I had that sense of efficacy because I've been able to put in. Maybe I could carve out that (additional instructional) time because it's a priority for the student. But right now I still feel like everything is reactive to budgets, to cuts.

When I introduced a hypothetical situation to Leah, and asked what she would do differently if she did have the time and the resources she shared the following passage.

Leah: The first thing I would want to do is start a student cabinet and I would like to be directly involved with that. So if I were in an elementary school it would probably be third through fifth graders working in an advisory capacity. I would present them with problems that we're facing as a school. So maybe, bullying, or community service projects, or it might be around science and math, and I'd ask them how to get kids more excited about science and math. I'd like to create an advisory board and maybe have a tape recorder and have the school leadership team (teachers) listening to students talking about these issues. That's what I'd do if I could have my dream time.

I found this passage interesting for two reasons. First, it is clear that while Leah would involve students in dialogue about school wide factors like bullying, and community factors like service, she said she would focus on asking the kids specifically about learning as well. Second, she has thought through this hypothetical scenario far enough to have considered the value student's perspectives would also hold for other members of the building. While I presented a

hypothetical scenario similar to this one to each principal in this study, Leah's response was the first that made me believe a scenario such as this one could become a reality.

As we continued to discuss the state of urban education, I asked Leah if there was any person or principal she looked to for inspiration. Leah took this opportunity to talk about, 'go-to administrators' that have shaped the way she thought about her work as a staff developer and a principal in the district these many years, and then shared the following passage.

Leah: Like David (for example), who's new to the district. I find that the way they (go-to administrators) think about the work, that they're going to be new go to people to help us with the day-to-day realities but not losing sight of that big picture of what we need our urban schools to look like. I think you need to have people that understand those stressors.

I found this passage interesting because I believe it highlights Leah's own positive and upbeat approaches to urban education. This is a principal that has kept her calm, and who remains optimistic 25 years after she first answered the call. I also found it interesting because David, who just arrived in this urban district three months into this same school year, is already being referred to as one of the go-to principals in a city that has 34 schools. In the short time that David has been a principal at Carter he has made a big impact on Leah, and myself, as he is the last principal included in this study.

Carter Elementary

At Carter, our second urban school and the final school included in this chapter, is a new principal that has made a big impact on his site in a short period of time. In this section I will present the changes that have taken place since his arrival. I will then share how this principal's

core ideological beliefs about leadership differ from that of more traditional school leaders, as well as how they have been used to shape his unique approaches to running the school. In conversations I had with Carter's students, there was evidence that many of these beliefs were already embedded in their own perspectives on leadership, and these perspectives will be shared below. Finally I will present how this principal contrasts his student-driven approaches to leadership to the work of his peers.

Cleaning house

Carter Elementary has a great deal in common with Everton: a 97% free and reduced lunch rate, large classes of students, and a low-rate of students succeeding academically. Only seventeen percent of the students in grades three and five passed the statewide ELA assessment and only nineteen percent were able to pass the math exam. Like Everton they are facing the same job cuts, which are scheduled to sweep this urban district between this school year and the beginning of the next.

Carter is the largest school in this study (538), and serves a community that is not unlike the one at Everton. This Pre K-5 site lies adjacent to some of the oldest housing projects in this city. It is also located one mile from the city's center, and just down the hill from a major university campus. Despite its proximity to two of the liveliest areas in town, the neighborhood itself has little to offer students and their families by way of support. On one end of the housing project facing the school is a corner store, and on the other end a church and liquor store. Vacant lots, cracked sidewalks, and some residential housing are what flank the site, and to the rear a highway overpass cuts the site off from the aforementioned university.

Despite the dire situation of this neighborhood, Carter, like Everton, strives to be a one-stop shop for students and the community. This site is unique. It houses an adult education

center which includes a GRE class as well as a classroom for adult ESL students, a full health clinic for both the students and the community, a Pre-K wing, and due to its recent remodeling, feels like a brand new school inside and out. The music room, technology center, professional learning center (PLC), and classrooms are all stocked with new technology and resources for both students and teachers. It is unique to Everton in another way as well. While the challenges faced by many of the students in Everton's community manifest themselves in the school during the day, creating a sense of chaos and disrupting the work of students and staff, Carter appears to be calm, quiet and orderly.

At Carter, none of my interviews were interrupted by situations of crisis taking place throughout the school. Where I often got Everton's voicemail when calling the school during normal business hours, Carter's fleet of secretaries and support staff not only answered, but they were able to schedule appointments for me to meet with the principal, and answer questions I had about the site on the spot. Where it might take a first-time visitor some time to locate the main office after being buzzed into other schools, Carter boasts a friendly and ever present security worker who sits at a desk just beyond the only public entrance.

Like FH, there is also evidence that the new principal at Carter has cleaned up the hallways and made the school appear more efficient. For example, Carter and FH both have dozens of areas throughout their sites where students and teachers can explore learning outside of the classroom in common areas. During my previous visits to Carter, many of these areas were often cluttered, dark, or were completely un-used. In one case a student hid from her teacher in the corner of one of these same unlit areas. On my first walk-through of the site with the new principal, the site looked and felt noticeably brighter, even on a grey and stormy early spring day.

As I walked through the site the principal did something that caught my attention and that provides evidence as to why the school currently looks the way it does. It also represents a shift in why the school feels so much differently as well. After walking out of the office and past the adult education rooms, we climbed a set of stairs and walked towards our first set of classrooms. This would not be a guided tour of the school like the one I had received at FH. Nor would I be observing the principal passively interacting with students as I did at Lodi. There was a sense of seriousness to his approach as he entered the first two classrooms and got right in there to work with specific groups or individual kids. These focused interactions were on making sure students understood the work they were doing, and providing them with support they needed academically.

Like Leah at Lodi, the new principal here now has Carter's teachers planning together in grade-levels, something that he says did not exist at the site before his arrival. As a result, he knows what each teacher is teaching and is focused on simultaneously monitoring and supporting their instruction in much the same way as Leah. Just minutes into our walk through we approached a third classroom. The door to this room was closed, and there was no window where one could look in. The principal proceeded to open the door and dismantle the door display that showed a faded homage to Mark Jackson that looked like it been hanging there for a significant amount of time. This caught the attention of both the students and teacher in the room. Still, the lesson continued while the principal quickly and quietly sent a message to the teacher in that room. Once the display had been completely removed, the principal left the door opened and discarded the display in a nearby garbage can, while remarking that he had asked the teacher to take down the display some time ago.

This opportunity to shadow the principal on his walk-through was not extended as a courtesy to me, as it was at FH. Nor did we take the time to view just a select group of classrooms. This was a complete walk-through of the entire site. During the walk-through the principal would occasionally take a moment here or there to describe some of the changes he has implemented. For example, in the PLC center, he showed me all of the student achievement data that now hung clearly on the wall to help guide his conversations with teachers. During our five or so minutes in the center, one teacher worked quietly at a laptop, while another came in to check something on a computer quickly before leaving and heading back to class. The room was spotless. The floor had been recently polished, and new tables were arranged in a semi-circle at the center of which sat a projector. This room which just a year before lie vacant, sent a message to staff that they were valued as professionals and as collaborators.

The rest of the walk-through was spent in classrooms interacting with kids, observing teachers, and touching base with his various support and custodial staff that worked in the common areas or hallways. Not once was instruction halted due to his presence. When there was a pressing matter in the office, the principal was sent a text message and he would check in with his staff by using one of the hallway phones to handle the issue. On one occasion this meant being re-directed to a classroom we had already visited where he took a moment to speak with two students about an argument they had in class earlier that morning. On another, it meant telling the secretary to tell a parent to set an appointment if they wanted to speak with him in person.

In between the buses and bells this principal is in the classrooms. When I asked the principal how he managed to do this with all the distractions that seem to keep other principals bogged down in the office he responded with the following statement.

David: Once we get kids into class and make sure everybody is fed I tell my secretaries, 'I'm in classrooms. Unless there's an emergency you need to get it done.'

I found this statement interesting in how direct and simple it was. Was it really that easy? While other principals described their day in terms of the variety of different things that kept them from having instructional contact with kids, this principal seemed able to delegate many of these same tasks to his support staff in the office, or put them on hold until he was done with time in the classrooms. While this principal had more support personnel than at the other three schools, he also had a lot more students and a site that served a great deal more of the community than just its kids.

When I asked other principals to describe their day they talked about the buses and bells, and each even about their various approaches to being around the school. However, they also spent a great deal of time describing a whole host of other factors that were getting in the way of their work with kids and teachers. In comparison, this principal was quite brief. He was either out in the hallways setting the tempo for his building in the morning and at the end of the day, working with teachers in the PLC, or in the classrooms and lunchroom interacting with kids. This self-described "out-of-the-office principal" has made it clear how he spends his time. The following statement highlights why he has decided to spend his time the way he does.

David: I feel like I'm a mechanic in so many ways; a kid mechanic or a tool. I don't see myself as a principal. I see myself as an instructional leader and I have to be a coach and model for teachers, but at the end of the day I see myself as a servant. The principalship is a position of service. That's where the work is.

This core belief shared with me early in our first interview represents a shift in how this principal thinks about his work. Where principals at FH and Lodi emphasized more autocratic approaches

to leading students and staff, this principal has chosen to emphasize his role as someone that works to make kids better.

A sense of servitude

David, the only African-American principal included in this study, arrived at Carter midway through the fall of this same school year. Before David, the youngest and least experienced of our four principals, Carter was run by an African-American woman that was beloved by her students and community. This principal, who taught for fourteen years before leading the reform of some of the city's toughest schools before arriving at Carter, had a reputation in this community and district for developing strong relationships with her students, while finding creative ways to re-structure urban schools. Despite her sudden departure at the beginning of the school year, students and staff already seem to have embraced David as one of their own. His confidence, compassion, and seriousness about the nature of his work, coupled with a sense of urgency in getting that work done, have convinced members of the community that I was able to speak with during my time in the site, that he is working in all of their best interests.

Before arriving at Carter, David worked first as a teacher and later as an assistant principal in the metro-Atlanta area for eleven years. During both interviews David chose to share stories about when he has taken his lead from students at this site. This first scenario points to how he chose to manage a behavioral issue with a fifth-grade student who has struggled with his behavior since arriving at Carter in first grade. After meeting with this student proactively and providing him with a verbal warning shortly after arriving at the site, the student was later referred to the principal for a consequence.

David: I'd had it. (I said) 'Young man didn't I tell you?' He said, 'Yes sir.' So I left him in my office to let it stew on it a little bit. So I come back and he wants to make a deal. So he says, 'David, I want to make a deal with you.' So I said 'Hey, start talking,' because you never want to send a kid home but sometimes you have to. So the kid says, 'How about, because I don't need to be at home, I need to be at school and learning, how about instead of being suspended I spend five days at in school suspension (ISS).' So I asked him if he understands what he's saying and I explain to him that he can't get in trouble there or else he'll be doing that time at home. He said, 'Yes I understand. I don't want to be at home I want to be in school.' That let me know, like most kids, they love school. It's a place of refuge, it's a place of calmness, from all the stressors that many of our kids deal with. I said, 'I'll tell you what, you go talk to the assistant principal (AP). Whatever he says I'm sticking with it. Don't tell him I sent you. You go talk to him like an adult.'

It turns out his student did not have to get sent home, and the AP, who is typically in charge of dealing with issues of discipline at this site, decided to grant this student his request for ISS.

This passage highlights a few non-traditional approaches this principal has taken to the work that he does and also points to how he empowers both his students and staff. Of all the schools that I visited this was the only site where a principal had a story to share about when they took their lead from students or made a shared decision that would impact a student's experience of learning directly.

The passage above also represents how this principal holds his students responsible for their behaviors and learning in school. Like Joseph, Mark and Leah before, David talks about how he gave the student an opportunity to reflect on their behavior and develop a possible

solution. But here David also took that crucial next step and used the student's solution to solve a problem that may also increase the student's sense of responsibility in the future. Below, David excitedly shared a statement that speaks to his work around student responsibility as principal at Carter.

David: I'm big on responsibility. If kids make a mistake, whether it's minor or major, I'm so elated if I can get that kid to take responsibility and communicate the choices that should have not been made or talk about what should have been done. That's the real work. That's priceless and is going to get you further in life than math, ELA, & science.

In a school like Carter, where there is clearly room for academic improvement, David's emphasis on responsibility and communication between students and principal is unique in that here, systems are set up for these key elements to move in both directions. Not only is David communicating school goals and working to maintain a school vision, he is also asking the students to own this vision and to share their own visions for what they think works (or does not work) in school.

Another example of a situation where David used student responsibility to focus his school reform efforts is evident in the following passage.

David: We want parents to communicate with teachers, and teachers to communicate with parents, but why don't the kids have agendas and planners like the adults have so they can take responsibility for their own learning?

Students, and their own experiences of learning, have so often been excluded from the school reform agenda. Here at Carter is a principal who starts with the students and looks to see what pieces of their puzzle are missing in an effort to solve problems on a larger scale. David's focus is not only on matters of discipline and organization however. In the short time that he has been

at Carter he has motivated the students to take responsibility over their own learning as well. Here David shares a story about how he revamped the curriculum for black history month so that students could have more meaningful and engaging experiences with the content.

David: We had kids in an oratorical contest upstairs. So this morning we announced the winners. And the kids were running up and asking when we were going to announce the winners all last week. I said thanks for reminding me. The kids were asking who won the oratorical contest? And when kids start to ask Jonathan?! The kids recited, retold, and re-enacted the 'I have a dream' speech with excitement. So they were judged by a rubric and a five-judge panel that included an instructional coach, two teachers, the AP, and myself. And Jon, I had about 25 kids who participated in the oratorical contest of all ages. It was open for three-five (grades) and we ended up with a first grader.

This active involvement in extending content coverage and this contest mark a time where David was able to make school and learning fun for kids of all ages at a school assembly where learning and participation were represented as something that the principal valued. David went on to talk about how there is so often a disconnect between what principals say they want from kids, and actually work to give them.

David: So my thought is this. How can we continue to perpetuate a lie for kids? We sit here and tell kids they should be lifelong learners, they should value education, and we've got a major university center—my classes upstairs, they can see the university. We're practically right here on campus. They can almost spit on it, and they've never been on campus?! Are you serious? So when you say do I respond to kids, I say yeah. When kids are not being exposed to things that I think they need to widen their view of the world and the community, it's my job and responsibility to get them that.

And give them that he has. On one occasion he took 100 plus kids and 30 teachers to a basketball game at the university on a snowy winter night. He is also planning on taking a group of fifth graders on a trip to a black historical college in the fall of his first full year as principal. Trips like these serve to reinforce what principals in urban schools say students should value. With SYTE working hard to promote the reality of a postsecondary education in a district where only half the students make it to graduation, it is becoming more important for principals like David to represent these possibilities and make connections to the real world as well.

The reality is that kids at schools like Carter have traditionally been underserved by principals that are going by tradition, in schools that do not have the same sets of problems as the ones in FH or even Lodi. Carter serves more English Language Learners (ELL) than any other school in this study, and has more students diagnosed with special needs than Everton. Like Leah at Everton, David has worked hard to fix problems that enter the school from the outside. In this example, David talks about his student's parents, and how many of them have been trying to drop students off, or pick them up early.

David: That (parenting style) has an impact for these kid's lives. Whether they're going to be more at risk for teenage pregnancy, or juvenile delinquency, or dropping out, or living below poverty level as an adult, meaning they will not get the quality of life that you and I experience. So for me, when I come into schools, and I see where parents are allowed to check students out early, or drop them off early at a higher rate...I'm not talking about one or two (parents), a lot. I'm talking about being out in the lobby when it's 1:00 or 2:45 (p.m.), and I'm asking the security guard my second day on the job, 'Why is it like a mall out here?' And he's like, 'Oh Doc, they've been doing this for years.' My thought is criminal behavior. Criminal malpractice.

David's comments here highlight his unwavering commitment to providing his students with a high quality education. They also speak to his willingness to go against the grain if the situation necessitates. David went on to describe altercations he has had with parents who were used to the old way, and once even had to involve the local police to have an angry father removed from the school. David went on to talk about what has driven him to change the school climate and culture the way he has.

David: Everything I do is predicated on what's in the best needs of the children. Not what's in the best need of teachers. Not what's good for me, because it's not about any of the adults. We've had our chance.

True to form, nearly both of our conversations were focused almost entirely on talking about kids. School and district wide initiatives, resources, and policy never entered the equation. While David took some time to talk about how problems in the community shape the kids' experiences, and about his work as an instructional leader of teachers, he alone has taken responsibility for whether or not test scores at his site will rise.

David: I tell my teachers. If I'm here in five years and we've not made solid gains and you don't understand academic rigor, giving focused teacher commentary, don't have a good grasp on the common core, or (don't) use formative assessments, and take that data to drive and adjust and tweak your instruction, that's on me. The first thing I told my teachers when I got in here I said 'You guys have been failed (by previous administrator).'

Here I can see a difference between not only how principals like Joseph, Mark, Leah and David talk about their work with teachers, but also that he is largely holding himself responsible for the quality of instruction in the building, and the academic success of the building. While David

acknowledged the challenges many of these students face, he also made no excuses for the students.

David: Kids are bright anyway. The new type of baby is totally pre-wired. They're packaged in a different way. These kids in all schools across the board, even the ones that come from the most impoverished damaging environments are some of your most brightest students you'll find. Because they have a level of resilience about them. If your life has been tough, and if it gets even a little bit better, you watch those kids just take off.

These optimistic comments align with Leah's impressions of David's work and with the kids' thoughts about their new principal.

In the following section I see the students having a chance to talk about specific challenges, needs, and interests they have when it comes to their experiences of school. Students' perspectives are influenced in no small part by a range of conditions that affect their learning both inside the school and out.

When I gave David an opportunity to pose questions to his students he took a few moments to reflect and then came up with the following three questions. One asked the students what he could do better to improve their experiences of learning, a second was focused on finding out what students like best about coming to school, and a final question asked the students how they feel about the lack of teachers and role-models at Carter that look like them (are African-American), and whether or not having more African-American adults in the school, would make them want to perform better. These three questions, the last of which aligns with David's own dissertation research²¹, highlight the confidence David has in his student's ability to

²¹ Of all the principals in this study David is the only one that has pursued study after obtaining his master's degree. He has a doctorate in educational leadership.

articulate their thoughts and feelings about a range of topics that principals have typically reserved for conversations with adults.

Constructive feedback

Carter was unique in that it was the one site where I was only able to speak with one focus group of students. Like Everton, parents here were less likely to respond to letters introducing the study sent home with the students. Of the few parents that did express interest, only a handful signed the consent form. However, after meeting with these five students, it was clear that despite the smaller sample, I would have a range of constructive student responses that rivaled any of the sites in this study. During both of our afternoon meetings this group of randomly selected fifth graders came prepared to engage with the activities and questions I presented in a very serious way that reflected the attitude of their new school leader.

At the start of our first interview, I asked the group to draw me a picture of what they saw their principal doing, and then describe what they saw. The very first student provided the following commentary when I asked him about what his principal does (see C5-3).

Student: So I wrote David walks to classes and sits in there. I think he tries to see what we are learning. He talks with students. He sometimes talk to students about they are learning. David is a good principal.

While many students across the three other sites drew pictures of their principals observing instruction, this is the first student at any school in this study that mentioned the principal observing *and* talking to students about what they are learning. In just a matter of months the students at Carter already see their principal as someone who is concerned about what they are learning, and who is in control.

A second student chose to draw a picture of their principal looking into the classroom from the outside, but notice if you will in the illustration that she too writes about a principal that is looking to see that students are learning and paying attention (see C5-4). A third student chose to write about what she saw the principal doing (see C5-2). Here again, I can see from the student's comments that she feels like he does a good job of making sure things in the school run smoothly (e.g., "keep the school in check"), while keeping the focus fun and on learning. A fourth illustration shows the principal greeting a group of girls in the hallway (see C5-1). Of the five pictures drawn at this site only one shows the principal as a disciplinarian, and here the principal is pictured in the hallways dealing with a consequence. This image is also situated beside an image of the principal complimenting a student on his/her work (see C5-5).

Of the five illustrations this is the only one that depicts the principal dealing with a negative student behavior. Like almost all of the other pictures this student also chose to depict a principal that is focused on student work and learning (e.g., "Nice work."). When I went on to ask the group whether they saw the principal on the day of the interview they all replied in the affirmative. When I asked where they saw their principal that day, the same student from the final illustration shared the following comment.

Student: I see him in my class today and we was doing a project and he came to see what type of project and then come in and says questions about our projects.

When I asked how often he interacted with students in this way the group came to a consensus that he did so about two times a week.

Another key aspect of my first conversation with students at Carter that caught my interest took place after all the students were finished sharing their illustrations and stories of

their out-of-office principal. I asked here asked the students if they ever went to talk to him and the following exchange ensued.

Jonathan: It sounds like he comes to see you a lot. Do you ever go talk to him?

Student One: Sometimes, like if I have a problem or something I'll go talk to him.

Jonathan: What do you talk about?

Student Two: Like if we're having problems with somebody, and we want the problem dealt with we go tell him and he'll probably call the person down and talk about the situation and how to fix the problem, how do we get along.

Student Three: Or sometimes he talks to you about something is going on at home.

Jonathan: How does he know if you have a problem at home?

Student Three: You could tell him and he'll talk to you about it.

Notice that three of the students in the focus group identified that their principal as someone they or others felt comfortable going to with problems they were having. This student data is dramatically different from the data at other sites where students said they would not go to their principals for a variety of reasons. These comments also represent what many students at Carter identified as challenges they face in school. Like students at other sites this focus group talked about challenging subjects, but in addition to that, they talked about the drama that can take place in the fifth grade between girls, and the challenges they face outside of school. Take the following exchange as an example.

Jonathan: What are the biggest challenges you face in school?

Student One: Being in one big classroom with all the kids.

Student Two: Drama.

Jonathan: Can you explain?

Student Two: Like basically worrying about every girl, like they have more clothes, and the new sneakers, and that stuff.

Jonathan: That bothers you?

Student Two: Sometimes, something like that goes on one day and it bothers me and gets me off track.

Student Three: Gossip too.

Jonathan: Is that something you've always had to deal with?

Student Four: More and more as we got older.

Student Two: Basically it started when we were in third grade.

Student Five: Bullying and stuff too.

While these challenges are not unique to Carter or even urban schools, the fact that students feel like they can go to their principal for help with dealing with these problems is not something I found at other sites in this study. While other principals in the study address many of these same concerns on a regular or semi-regular basis, students at Carter know they can go, and often do go to their principal before problems escalate, and/or as an alternative to more traditional outlets like parents, siblings, or friends. When I asked the group whom they would go to if they wanted to change something that bothered them about school, they all replied in unison, "David."

When it came time to ask students the questions David posed during our first interview, they were very attentive and their comments were thoughtful and direct. Take this exchange as an example.

Jonathan: Your principal wanted me to ask you what he can do to help you do better in school?

Student One: Come visit our class more and help us with our work.

Student Two: See the students more often.

Student Three: I'd like the principal to work with us in grade levels. Like (have) assemblies for just grade levels. Like early in the morning we could sit down and plan our day and start thinking about something that happened between days. Because usually something that happened at home can effect our day in school.

Student Four: He could also come every morning and get us and ask us like if we have a problem or not, then if we have a problem he could talk to us about what we did wrong.

Interestingly enough, during our first conversation David mentioned that he is currently in the process of revamping the master schedule to make room for a program that will help diminish or alleviate concerns like the one student three has been having. Starting in the fall each classroom at Carter will be doing intervention services for all students for 30 minutes at the start of each morning. He will also use Monday mornings as an opportunity to have those class meetings focus specifically on topics of "bullying, mutual respect, understanding, respecting and embracing differences." David's awareness of what his students want and need from school is acute, and there is ample evidence that he is in the process of creating systems that respond to or anticipate other academic and non-academic concerns his students are having in school as well.

When I asked the students David's second question, the students responded by saying that the teachers and students were the best parts about school.

Jonathan: What do you value most about school?

Student One: The teachers.

Student Two: When you really like the teacher it will make it easier for you to learn and stuff. It'll make your job easier to do and you'll just get through school quickly.

Student Three: I like it because they see things. Like if somebody come in and do something they would know because they right there and that's why.

Student Four: They teach us good stuff and help us learn.

Student Five: They give us good advice.

Student Two: The students also make the day go by faster because they have humor and they laugh a lot.

Student Four: If there was just one person in the class it would go by slow I think.

Jonathan: You might not learn as much because you learn from your peers as well as your teachers right?

All Students: Yeah.

These student responses prompted me to ask David's third question. This school, like Everton, serves a predominantly non-white student body with an almost exclusively white teaching staff. Apart from David and the moderator (both of which are African-American), most of these students have never had an African-American teacher apart from the school's music teacher. When I took the time to ask the students this question during our second interview all members of the group, including the moderator were eager to share.

Jonathan: Speaking of teachers, your principal wanted me to ask how you feel about having teachers in your school that don't look like you.

Student One: I think about it sometimes. I'm OK with it. I just talk about it sometimes.

Student Two: It doesn't bother me that much. Everybody is different so it doesn't really matter.

Student Three: It would be nice to have more people we could relate to, like us. Like it would be cool if our teachers were more the same because we could talk about like my mom works here, or my mom works here.

Moderator: So when David says people who look like you what is he saying?

Student Five: Like dark-skinned.

Moderator: He's talking about African American teachers. Do you think that would make a difference in how you're educated?

Student Four: Not with our education but the way that some students act because they think about race.

Clearly without any prompting the students knew exactly what I was asking early in the conversation. Like most conversations about teachers with students the responses were on the shy end at first, but became more candid after the moderator asked some terrific and unanticipated probing questions. Students here would clearly like to be able to relate a bit better to the lives of their teachers, many of which drive in from suburban or less urbanized areas, and drive out shortly after the last bell rings.

While principals like Joseph and Mark were able to connect with members of the community outside of school, and teachers in these sites shared similar social circles, there is a definite gap between the home lives of students, and the lives of teachers and their families in this building and at Everton. This is a gap that most adults do not feel comfortable addressing in classrooms with kids, and yet this principal acknowledges the important role student's perceptions of teachers and leadership, play out in his own school. By taking the time to talk with students, albeit indirectly, he has raised their awareness around these differences, and

helped himself better understand a topic he found important enough to pursue as a doctoral student just a few years ago.

The confidence that the principal has in his students and his sense of seriousness about the work he does, was reflected in all of the student's responses. While the majority of students interviewed across all research sites were comfortable answering most questions, this group seemed particularly invested in providing answers that held real potential for improving the work of their principal. The quality of the student's responses, and the free and unbiased accounts shared, may have something to do with their level of maturity, or the strong presence of a moderator, or the time of day. However, it might also be attributed to a principal that sets the tone for his school by being a real presence throughout the school and in the classrooms each and every day. A principal that sets up systems so that students can be heard, and who uses their voice and experiences of school, to help solve real problems being faced at his site.

Defying tradition

While I saw some plain differences in how this principal chooses to spend his time, I wondered if David was able to identify why he chose to spend his time the way he did, and how his choices contrasted with that of other principals. He shared the following statement.

David: I don't think we have enough folks that know their job and that have the interpersonal relationships skills to meet the demands of the clientele. If you go visit a lot of urban schools that meet the mark, all you have to do is look at the principal, and it's going to tell you a whole lot.

While new students and teachers enter the building each year, and others leave, little else has changed at Carter over the years. For years students at this school have struggled academically, and while the last principal was able to create a culture where many of her students and staff felt

like they belonged, I was able to notice significant changes in the climate and culture of the building within moments of the beginning our first walk-through²². The appearance and feel of the school, the nature of the instruction taking place in the classrooms, and the students comments at Carter, all reflect what this new principal is about. Whether or not David's style of leadership will help this urban school meet the mark academically, can only be seen over time.

During our second interview, David again chose to supplant the word leadership, for servitude in the following statement.

David: I come with a sense of servitude, period. It's not about my title. When you come with that spirit of servitude, and as a guide, it's one of those things. When you get down to that level, when that's how you live, you don't say this and then when you're with your friends being a jerk. They (teachers, parents, students) know it.

In the short time that he has been here the students, teachers and parents have identified David as a force that has taken control of the school. Whether this sense of servitude he refers points to represent the theoretical underpinnings of his approach to the principalship, or is meant to characterize more practical dimensions of his work, is difficult to ascertain after only a handful of conversations and a limited amount of observation. Regardless David's comments about how he spends his time have aligned with both observation, and unprompted student's illustrations.

Furthermore, the ways in which David has chosen to talk about his approaches to leadership and the role kids play in making schools work represents, at the very least, an ability to think about student-driven methods of reform in a different light. Take for example the following comment.

²² Since my last visit less than a year ago

David: No matter what you say about your clientele if they were to all go away what would happen to you? We merely exist by the fact we have kids to serve.

David looks at the principalship as a privilege and here refers to students as his clients. His enthusiasm and passion for serving his key customers, the often-overlooked consumers of education, was also transparent during each of our conversations.

David: I get up for this. I live for this. When I wake up in the morning I get another day. It's not 'I have to,' it's, 'I *get to*', go in here and impact the lives of kids. I'm on fire man. That's the difference. When you have this opportunity you have to take it and run with it. This is not work; this is a lifestyle.

While Mark had expressed that he has "fallen in love with high poverty rural education," I was excited to see another principal included in this study, particularly an urban principal, express how much his work, meant to him on a very personal level. David's thoughts and feelings about the work of school leaders can be best summarized in this final statement.

David: We have to change the way we think. We have been going by tradition.

Principals that are taking this cookie cutter approach have an egotistic self-centered mentality.

Changing tradition is not something that has come easy in the field of education, where adultcentric, and time-honored philosophies from generations past still dominate the so-called 'progressive-minded' landscape. Schools today, particularly urban schools, face a new set of challenges, and students need their leaders to do more than they have typically had to do. In the following chapter I will summarize our findings from these four schools, while exploring in greater detail how these principals have helped students with the challenges they face, and how their choices around using (or not using) student voice, may impact their lives in the future.

CHAPTER FIVE: CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

In my previous chapter, I shared the case studies of four different groups of students and their principals, across four schools in the Northeast. I addressed two key research questions: (1) What, from the perspective of students, are the most significant challenges faced by students in schools? (2) How do principals help children cope with the challenges they face? In this chapter, I will be analyzing themes across all four schools in an effort to find similarities as well as differences.

Before I provide a cross case analysis for my research questions, I provide first a brief description of each of the schools. This will be followed by an analysis of the demographic data, and an overview of some common themes which were constructed from the data, were used to disaggregate the data, and which led to my conclusions.

Forest Hills Elementary

Forest Hills Elementary (FH) is our lone suburban site and has the smallest number and percentage of students on the free and reduced lunch list. The students, staff, and principal here make up what may appear to represent the traditional American elementary school for many readers. Joseph, an experienced teacher and principal in this district, is also a prominent figure in the community. Joseph took over the FH principalship just eighteen months before this study began, and brought with him 170 new students and nearly a third of the current staff.

One of Joseph's key strengths at FH has been his ability to coordinate the curriculum and help the teachers navigate the school's instructional program. Joseph has also developed a positive school culture where teachers are able to focus primarily on instruction and students

enjoy learning. Joseph appears to do an effective job managing his resources, support staff, and a talented group of teachers to meet students' academic and social/emotional needs; as a result, he spends the majority of his time in between the buses and bells managing the ebb and flow of managerial responsibilities that come his way during the course of an average day. These responsibilities include coordinating with other administrators in the district, handling parents' concerns, training teachers around the common core learning standards, and touching base with his support staff around the school to make sure everyone is on the same page and moving forward together.

The students at FH are happy to be in school, are rarely insubordinate, and are doing well academically. Students' challenges at FH were with specific subjects, or with teachers. When asked how students dealt with the challenges they faced in class, they report that they are likely go to a parent, peer, or sibling before speaking with an adult in school. It was only after mid-way through our final interview that they began to consider their principal as someone they might be able to approach about problems they were having during or outside of school.

Despite (or perhaps, because of) the high level of student achievement at FH, students have had few meaningful opportunities to interact with their principal. Joseph is a strong leader of adults, and spends his time helping them with the challenges they face at his new site, and as a result, students perceive him as someone that is there to spread a clear and consistent message, help the school run smoothly, and occasionally act as a disciplinarian. While Joseph acknowledges the role students play in making the school function, he is not inclined to take their lead or use their voice to support their experiences of school or learning.

Lodi Elementary

Lodi elementary is the smallest site in the study. It is located the furthest from a city center, and has a free and reduced lunch rate of 55%. There is significant poverty in this rural community and it plays a role in the lives of many of these students. Mark, an experienced teacher and administrator at other rural districts in the region, is passionate about boosting the aspiration rate for students in this area. Mark sees his primary role as making sure he has the best teachers working in each of his classrooms, and that they have the resources they need to help the students achieve. When asked to describe his day Mark talked a lot about state and district initiatives, meetings, observation, and providing teachers with feedback. When I asked Mark to describe the interactions he was having with kids he chose to talk about how he worked to manage behavioral problems at the site. Due to the small size of this rural district, Mark has responsibilities that take him outside of the school more than he would like.

Because Mark's walk-throughs are largely focused on observing the adults in the building and providing them with feedback on their practice, many of the students perceived Mark to be more of an office principal, who works behind the scenes to make sure they are supported academically and to make sure they are safe and cared for in school. When I asked students about their challenges at Lodi, they spoke about tests, and classes where they had trouble with content, and when I asked how Mark helped them with their challenges they naturally responded that Lodi's teachers were the ones they would go to for help with these problems. Students here were very responsive to questions Mark posed during our first interview, and a meaningful dialogue developed between the two that was focused on direct leadership behaviors such as Mark's approaches to speechmaking, and his passive role as observer during walk-throughs, as

well as indirect leadership behaviors such as the program schedule, open house, and the classroom makeup.

Mark, who admitted he had not thought about using student voice before this study, began to see real value in how students' perspectives could be used to inform his work, and empower students as learners. While Mark has given students opportunities to make decisions that reflect those traditionally made by student governments in the past, he remarked that he could now see the value student voice had for impacting his approaches to leadership, and mentioned that he considered the students' comments as useful to his work.

Everton Elementary

All of the students at Everton Elementary receive free and reduced lunch, and of the four schools in this study it has the highest percentage of students diagnosed with special needs. Students and staff at Everton are dealing with a range of challenges unique to urban education, in a community where crime rates are high, and parental involvement in their children's education is low.

Leah, who has 25 years of experience working as a teacher, a staff developer, and an administrator in this urban district, was brought to Everton two years ago to manage the school through a situation of crisis. At Everton the challenges students' face outside the school often manifest themselves inside the classrooms. As a result she is as responsible for keeping the building functioning, as she is for providing the instructional support her students so desperately need. Leah's key responsibilities included her role as a resource allocator for students, someone who listens to students and looks at what they need, an instructional leader of teachers, and someone who is actively involved in shaping the school culture. During my visits to the site it became clear that Leah has little choice as to how her days are spent. While systems have been

set up to deal with academic and behavioral supports for kids, Leah spends most of her time at Everton putting out fires. Despite the frenetic pace of her work, she has managed to maintain her poise and serves as an excellent role-model to students who value her patience and passion for working with kids.

Students at Everton listed distractions in the classroom, physical challenges of the building, and misbehavior as their biggest challenges in school. Leah helps these students cope with these challenges by being actively involved in working with students in classrooms, and students seem to thrive on the extra support she provides. Leah's focus is on making sure the students first feel safe and supported in communities where she says "high-levels of academic and emotional support do not come naturally to many parents, and student efficacy often begins to diminish as early as the second grade." While some of the students were distracted and even aggressive during focus groups, others saw their principal as a teacher, a counselor, and even a caregiver. The students also remarked that she tries to keep their expectations high, and focused on going to college.

While Leah has spent most of her time at Everton reacting to problems associated with urban schools, she manages to keep a positive outlook on the work that she is doing. Near the end of the study Leah mentioned that she would like to develop a student cabinet whereby she could ask students about problems they were facing academically, in an effort to get students more excited about learning, and adults prepared to develop more responsive approaches to working with kids.

Carter Elementary

Carter is another urban site where nearly every student qualifies for free and reduced lunch, and where there is a low-rate of students succeeding academically. The largest school in

this study, Carter also serves as a beacon for this community and provides a range of services to help students and their families experience some degree of stability and success in their lives. Despite the challenges faced by students outside of the school, the new principal here appears to have everything under control.

David arrived at Carter midway through the school year and has already had a significant impact on the school culture. David is the youngest of our four principals, and the only African-American principal in this study. David delegates most of his managerial responsibilities to his support staff, which frees him up for more instructional contact with students. The majority of David's time is spent in Carter's classrooms where he is able to monitor student progress, have direct instructional contact with students, and observe teachers. David has created a school climate where teachers are valued as professionals, and has taken responsibility for developing the work of his teachers and students. This principal's work with students, has allowed him to develop specific student-driven approaches to reform, in an effort to streamline the instructional program, and provide opportunities for meaningful student involvement.

Students' perspectives at Carter reflected the seriousness and sense of urgency David brings to his work everyday. Students identified their key challenges as being confrontataion in the classroom, bullying, and factors outside the school that get them off track. All of the students interviewed at Carter cited their principal as someone they could go to for help in dealing with a range of obstacles to learning. All of the students at Carter also saw their principal as someone who helps them learn, and who is out-of-the-office and available to students when they need him. Still, these students wanted more of the instructional and social/emotional support he provides them. They were also able to respond to very grown up questions posed by their principal that even adults rarely feel confident enough to address when talking about schools.

David has not been afraid to defy tradition and go against the grain in an effort to provide his students with academic and behavioral supports they were not receiving before his arrival at Carter. The appearance and feel of the school, the nature of the instruction taking place in the classrooms, and students’ comments all reflect what this new principal is about. David also chose to talk about his approaches to leadership and the role kids play in making schools work from the vantage point of a servant or guide.

Demographics

Table 5.1

School Demographics

Elementary School	Forest Hills	Lodi	Everton	Carter	Across Sites
<i>Locale Classification</i>	Suburban	Rural	Urban	Urban	
<i>Highest Grade Offered</i>	6	4	5	5	
<i>Lowest Grade Offered</i>	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Pre-K	
<i>Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch[1]</i>	25%	55%	95%	97%	
Total Students	498	235	383	539	1655
<i>Male</i>	50%	52%	54%	52%	52%
<i>Female</i>	50%	48%	46%	48%	48%
<i>American-Indian</i>	1%	0%	1%	0.50%	1%
<i>Asian</i>	4%	0%	0	1%	1.00%
<i>Black</i>	5%	2%	71%	90%	43%
<i>Hispanic</i>	3%	2%	10%	5%	5%
<i>White</i>	87%	96%	10%	3.50%	50%

Of the four groups of participants, the two most in need of academic improvement fall within our mid-sized urban district. Everton and Carter enroll (1) a large number of students who fall below the poverty line, (2) a higher concentration of non-white students (including Asian, American-Indian, African-American, Hispanic, and students of two or more races) , and (3) high numbers of ELL (see Table 5.1). This district is one of the largest in New York State

and includes just under 20,000 students in grades K-12, and an additional 1,300 in Pre-Kindergarten. The district's facilities include: five High Schools, six Middle Schools, six K-8 Schools, fourteen Elementary schools, and four alternative Schools/Programs to help students with diverse needs.

Both of our urban schools provide all of their students with free and reduced lunch whether they qualify or not, as eligibility rates in each site exceed 95%. While the principals are both highly committed to their place of employment, and in some cases mentioned that the complexities of urban school districts were what got them out of bed in the morning, one of the principals also has experience working at a higher-achieving school in the district. This principal was moved by the district to manage crisis in another struggling urban site that closed after two years, before being located at Everton where she is again been asked to get the school through difficult times. David arrived at Carter from another urban district out of state where he worked first as a teacher and later as a vice-principal. This is David's first full principalship and both his work and perspectives on leadership have already received a great deal of attention from colleagues at his site, across the district, and in the community.

Our suburban and rural schools are both led by Caucasian-males, who oversee the educations of a predominantly caucasian student body, and work with an almost exclusively caucasian staff. Before arriving at FH and Lodi both of these principals had experiences working at sites that were more urbanized, and where there was a higher free and reduced lunch rate. The similarities between these two schools end there though. Only a quarter of the students at FH are eligible for free and reduced lunch as opposed to 55% at Lodi. FH, twice the size of Lodi, serves three times as many students diagnosed with special needs and the most of any of the schools in

this study.²³ FH is just over fifteen miles from the city and is located in an urbanized center.

Lodi is roughly 30 miles from the city, and is located five miles from the closest urban cluster.

Table 5.2

Focus Group Demographics

Elementary School	Forest Hills	Lodi	Everton	Carter	Across Sites
Total Students	12	10	9	5	36
<i>Male</i>	50%	50%	44%	20%	44%
<i>Female</i>	50%	50%	56%	80%	56%
<i>American-Indian</i>	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Asian</i>	16%	0	0	0	6%
<i>Black</i>	0	0	100%	100%	39%
<i>Hispanic</i>	0	0	0	0	0
<i>White</i>	84%	100%	0	0	55%
<i>ELL</i>	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Special Education</i>	0	0	33%	0	8%

Focus groups in this study were selected at random from classrooms where parents were willing to complete and submit consent forms. The intention was to collect a sample of students representative of the overall population of the school across diversity areas such as gender, race, and special education. This method proved particularly useful at each of the sites. FH had a higher percentage of Asian students than might have been expected, and nearly a third of the students interviewed at Everton were receiving special services. At Carter and Lodi there were few exceptions to the overall population of the school (if we juxtapose this Table with Table 5.1 above). Looking across sites, I see that there is a more than adequate balance across categories of gender, and even a fair balance in categories of race if I take into consideration the lack of students who were able to participate at Carter (based on difficulty retrieving consent forms). Hispanic students and ELL were underrepresented in the research sample.

²³ This suburban district clusters students with special needs from around the district into integrated co-teaching (ICT) classrooms at FH.

While Joseph, Mark, and Leah have all experienced the effects of consolidation and relocation throughout this region first hand, David, the lone African-American administrator in this study, was specifically recruited by a foundation to come to this area to work with his group of students. Rural, suburban, and urban schools each have different sets of students that effect the work of the adults who teach and lead in these schools. In many cases, there is evidence that adults' approaches are developed in response to the students they work with. In other cases, as I will illustrate below, they may develop in spite of their students. When this happens, agendas, strategies, and goals may be developed by principals that conflict with what the students are looking for in their school leader (Allen, 1983).

Cross-Case Analysis

My first contact in the schools was with the principals. These first interviews resulted in the principals sharing a variety of belief statements, which I later used to inform my observational analysis, as well as my conversations with students. Data from student interviews was then analyzed and used to inform my subsequent meeting with principals. This process repeated itself one last time, with a final interview being conducted with students based on all of the conversations, observation, and analysis conducted up until that point.

After speaking with students and principals, and conducting observations at the schools, I constructed some common themes. I chose to group these themes into four categories which will be presented below: belief statements, behaviors, interactions/communication, and empowering learners. During this analysis I will present some similarities and differences in how principals across sites thought about their work, and actually went about doing it. I will also share similarities and differences in how students across sites perceived their schools and the work of

principals. Finally, I will be taking advantage of these differences to develop my discussion and draw my conclusions in the following chapter.

Beliefs

I first separated the belief statements into several subcategories including: principals' perspectives, principals' assumptions, personal inclination, students' perspectives, and students' challenges. In the following section, I will present how the unique beliefs of the principals and students in each of these schools shaped each of their behaviors, approaches to communication, and level of engagement with the instructional program.

Principals' Perspectives

In this section I will present and contrast principals' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about their approaches to school leadership and the approaches of other administrators. I will also present and compare principals' perspectives on school, instruction, students and student learning.

While there was a great deal of variation between how the principals perceived their roles as administrators in these four very different sites, a few similarities emerged with regards to how these school leaders thought about their practice. Principals at all sites are held responsible for making executive decisions that impact the practices of teachers and the experiences of students (Nye & Capelluti, 2003). At FH and Lodi, both principals mentioned there were times when a more autocratic approach to leadership was necessary in order to keep the school running smoothly. At Carter, the principal also mentioned that upon arriving at his new site in the fall, he made decisions based on his preliminary and very early observations that did not involve consulting members of the staff. While these more authoritative approaches to school leadership

are similar across the three sites, it is interesting to note that these belief statements emerged from three very different conversations.

Joseph's statement emerged from a conversation that was focused on using student voice. In his statement he referred to not letting the students control the work he was doing. Mark's statement emerged from a conversation about building and staff leadership. Here he mentioned that executive decisions needed to be made to keep the school moving forward. David's statement involved implementing new practices around teacher leadership, and school-based decision making that had not been present at Carter when he arrived. Interestingly, both Joseph and Mark mentioned that these decisions were made to keep the whole school moving forward. This implies that these principals know what is in the best interests of both teachers and students. Another interesting finding was that Leah, the lone female administrator, and the one principal who had strong perspectives on both instruction and the work of the students, never mentioned that she made decisions at her site that did not include others. While this does not mean it never happened, it does highlight a difference between how these principals talk about the work that they do.

At all four sites principals emphasized the importance of creating a safe, nurturing environment for students. Each of the four principals also emphasized that the challenges of poverty and stability at home, played a major role in determining the success rate of many of their students. While students at FH were less affected by issues of poverty than urban students who are living in areas with higher crime rates, the principal still took an opportunity to share stories about when he was involved in making sure students and their families in his community were protected. At Carter and Everton, where more students are living below the poverty line

and crime rates are higher, principals and students mentioned the importance of having a principal that protected them from the dangers outside the school.

While all of the principals said they worked with students and families that were struggling, and both the suburban and rural sites have resources that do not exist in the city, our two urban sites are in some ways better equipped to deal with the range of challenges. Of the four principals, our two urban principals were able to identify with and appreciate the unique skill sets many students of poverty brought with them to school. David talked about resilience, and how many of these students, when given an opportunity to grow, may begin to achieve at higher levels than their peers based on challenges they have experienced growing up. Leah and David also believed that like students from any background, students in their sites came to school ready to learn, and it was factors inside the classroom (as well as outside) that convinced students they were non-learners as early as the end of first grade. These comments align with research that says when schools and parents do not work together to provide students with academic support early on, students sense of self-efficacy will decrease (Berger, 1995).

When asked about instruction at FH, Joseph said that creativity in the classroom has become a major challenge because of the mandates that were coming down from above. While opportunities to be creative in the classroom are certainly valued for all teachers and students' experiences of learning, the other three principals talked about their roadblocks to instruction in terms of first having to make sure students were in an emotional and physical state that was conducive to learning. At Lodi and Everton, Mark and Leah talked about how important it was for their teachers to have the resources and support they need, and how important it was for them to make sure their students were in a space conducive to learning. Notice the difference in how these principals' perspectives, and the realities facing these schools and communities, impact

their students experiences of learning. Here I can see a dramatic difference in how issues of poverty affect students, teachers, and the perspectives principals have about their role as instructional coordinator.

At every site in this study principals commented that the biggest challenge they and their students face was the lack of parental involvement and/or the family dynamics at home. Still, principals' thoughts about parents also varied across sites. Where our suburban principal felt that parents were overly involved in their students' education, urban and rural principals both felt like that lack of support was a big reason why their students struggled to achieve. While none of the principals explicitly blamed the parents for their different levels of involvement or for student failure, it is important to note that these beliefs represent, in part, a disdain for parents, and what may be an inability to effectively coordinate parents as a resource even when they are available. At FH Joseph mentioned that at his previous suburban site he struggled to get parents on board with supporting kids learning. He then went on to mention that at his current and more affluent suburban site parents often became enablers of children, and that they often did not give their children opportunities to be independent. After speaking with principals, students, and even a few parents at these schools, it has become clear that for school leaders, finding a balance between the two types takes time, and that there may be no ideal 'middle type parent.'

There was also a great deal of variation between how principals perceived students' impressions of the work they do. Both of our urban principals had an acute sense of how the students perceived their work, based on their extensive amounts of engagement with kids around instruction and behavior. In our suburban and rural sites however, principals had less of an idea about how students felt because they did not engage with students on a regular or direct basis. Joseph appeared almost unconcerned by how the students perceived his work, and Mark

mentioned that while he knew how he was perceived by the teachers and parents, he had no idea of how the kids perceived his practice.

Assumptions

Principals often draw their own conclusions and/or make assumptions about what is best for the school when deciding how best to structure their role as administrator (Sabanci, 2008). In this section I will illustrate how these assumptions about leadership often do not correspond with what students are looking for in an instructional leader.

When principals did not understand how students perceived their work, principals developed assumptions about what the students were looking for in a school leader. These assumptions highlight the value of using student perspectives to inform principals' approaches to school leadership. In all of the schools principals believed student voice held some value for the work they did. However, they also thought only older students would be able to articulate opinions that could hold real value for the work they do. Mark, who came from a secondary background, was initially unsure as to how students at an elementary level could possibly contribute to his understanding of how a school works. Mark also made the assumption that students in many cases did not recognize his presence in the classroom during his classroom observation. After speaking with his students however, it became clear that they not only were very aware of his presence, but that some also felt anxious during his visits and modified their behavior accordingly. Other students wondered what he was doing there.

Mark and Joseph both perceived it to be the adults job to know what is good for kids. At FH, Lodi, and Everton, principals thought students in grades three through five would be capable of working in an advisory capacity, and at Carter the principal said students in grades two-five

were worth speaking with.²⁴ Students in kindergarten and first grade were all but excluded from the conversation because principals thought these students might not understand what they were being asked.

While younger students may be less able to articulate their thoughts and feelings about the work of principals, their thoughts are also often less affected by what their peers, parents, teachers, and even popular culture has taught them about what leadership means (Cook-Sather, 2002). Research indicates that school principals, in their effort to make sense of how students perceive schools, develop approaches for effecting change in schools that often do not match what their students are looking for (Denzin, 1978).

Students' Perspectives

These perspectives or beliefs can inform the work being done in schools when researchers or practitioners take the time to ask or listen to what students have to say. Principals that use students' perspectives to meaningfully structure their experiences of schools and learning can create more responsive schools and a more responsible principalship. In the following section I will present students' perspectives of leadership, school, and instruction.

Students across sites perceived their principal as someone that helps keep them safe and that helps the school run smoothly. Students at both urban sites saw their principal as someone that enjoys school and who likes to talk with kids. At FH and Lodi students' comments about their principal also aligned with observation. The difference was that students at these two schools saw their school leader more as someone who helped them learn about school-wide initiatives like no bullying, and the school's golden rule. Students at these sites also saw their

²⁴ It's important to note that these are also the grades in which students are taking statewide exams, and where the principals are measured by how well these students do.

principal more as a disciplinarian. At FH and Lodi, students were also more apt to identify their principals as office workers and leaders of teachers.

When I asked students what they thought about their school, similarities at our urban schools also appeared. At both sites, students were able to identify that their schools helped them develop as learners, and that they might one day be able to graduate and attend college because of their schools.²⁵ Students across sites also felt like their school was a safe place where they could be proud of their work and try new things.

Students at Everton and Lodi both had concerns about how their school was designed and wished that classrooms and desks could be made bigger. Students at Everton also wished they could make the school more comfortable by eliminating bad odors, broken ceiling panels, or by lowering the temperature during the warm early summer months.

When the topic came around to instruction, the students were candid and forthright in their responses. Students at Everton, Lodi, and Carter appreciated the extra support teachers, tutors, and even student teachers were able to provide in classrooms. Students at Lodi appreciated when teachers were able to prepare them for success on homework, quizzes, and exams. Some students, like the ones interviewed at FH, were also critical of their teachers, and were plainspoken when it came to saying what it was they did not like about some of their approaches. At Everton, students said they wished their teachers were better able to cope with the range of challenging behaviors in the classroom, and provided possible solutions for dealing with students that were having trouble behaving in class.

It became clear after sitting down with kids and having these conversations that their perspectives occasionally aligned with both the principal's comments and my own observations.

²⁵ This is due in no small part to the Say Yes to Education program's philosophy, and its recent adoption by the urban district (Nolan, 2012).

Students' perspectives also contrasted with my principal interview data and observation, and they were able to identify times when they felt frustrated with various school-wide and out of school factors.

Challenges Faced by Students

In this section I will present students' and principals' descriptions of situations and experiences they felt caused students to struggle with school and learning. Students and principals reported these challenges when they felt frustration with various school-wide and out of school factors including (but not limited to), teaching, learning, physical appearance of the school, relationships, school climate, school culture, trouble at home, and experiences on the bus.

At each of the sites, students described situations and experiences where they struggled with their experiences of school and learning. In an effort to help principals improve students' experiences, it is important to go directly to the students to ask them what challenges they are having. While principals at FH, Lodi, and Everton cited stability at home, resources, and conflicts of time brought about by having to implement initiatives from above, students more often than not focused on a range of factors inside the school that affect their learning.

Students across all four sites cited bullying as a major challenge that gets in the way of their learning. Overcrowded classrooms also contributed to student hardship at our urban schools. Problems stemming from these overcrowded classrooms included being disrupted by teachers, drama between other students during lunch and recess, and students that misbehave and get them off track when they are trying to concentrate. At all four sites students also cited homework and tests as being difficult when teachers were not able to prepare them for hard questions. Perhaps not surprisingly, students at Carter and Everton also did not like getting yelled at, or the lack of field trips they were able to go on. While many of these challenges are

universal to the elementary school experience, it is important for principals to note when these concerns are coming up so they can focus reform efforts at their site.

Principals that are interacting with students on a regular basis are able to make adjustments in a more timely fashion and in my cases are able to anticipate students' concerns before students are even able to articulate what it is they are having a hard time with. In the following sections, I will begin to look at these interactions between principals and students. Here I can begin to see how principals use these interactions to structure students' experiences, and communicate with their organization.

Behaviors

After speaking with students and principals, and observing their interactions in school, I was able to develop a second set of themes based on what each group actually does while in school. These behaviors were broken into the following subcategories: high and low-influence leadership behaviors, direct and indirect leadership behaviors, and personal inclination. In the following section, I will present how these behaviors affect the principals' abilities to lead the school, and the students' abilities to engage academically, socially and emotionally.

High-Influence Leadership Behaviors

In this section, I will be addressing certain leadership behaviors that principals and students believe have a high impact on students' experiences of school and learning. These behaviors occur when principals are able to effect a change in student outcomes, develop strategies for streamlining instruction at both the classroom and building level, develop relationships with students, and work with students individually or in groups to support their academic and behavioral needs.

At FH and Everton, principals will occasionally invite students to have lunch with them, or sit and talk with them while they eat in the lunchroom like they do at Carter and Lodi. Joseph and Leah occasionally have small groups visit the principal's office, where they have opportunities to ask more focused questions about students' experiences of school in a non-traditional and empowering setting. These behaviors are perceived by students as being fun, and help principals develop more meaningful relationships with kids.

At Carter and Everton, principals are providing individual students and small groups with extra instructional support. In these overcrowded urban classrooms, principals often act as a kind of second teacher and students reported wanting even more of that valuable instructional contact. Students also appreciated opportunities to go to both of these principals with problems they were having with school. These supportive, and more approachable roles had a greater impact on students than principals who were merely visible, or who limited their contact with students to greetings or matters of discipline (Cotton, 2003). Research demonstrates that principals can exert direct and powerful effects on student achievement by using their leadership time to engage in what students identify as high influence leadership behaviors (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

Low-Influence Leadership Behaviors

Principals also engage in behaviors that can be identified as having a low or negative influence on student learning outcomes. Examples of these behaviors include: managerial tasks, meetings with staff both inside and outside of the school, office work, feedback that is limited to discipline, and adult interactions. Principals that do not interact with students cause students to wonder what the principal sees and thinks about their work. In Gentilucci & Muto's (2007)

study on students' perspectives, this communicated to the students that the principals do not really care about the quality of learning in the classroom.

One example of a low-influence behavior at FH involved the principal using his time during the day to make phone calls to teachers or district personnel. These calls were made to congratulate, provide feedback, and discuss how district-level initiatives were going. While these responsibilities are important for principals that want to develop a rapport with adults in the school community, a principal's time is valuable, and might be better spent supporting their own instructional program in a more direct fashion. At Lodi, a district that is heavily dependent on state aid, staff have adopted educational programs in the past that the principal and staff did not necessarily agree with in order to make ends meet. These decisions are often made out of necessity, but alternative approaches to receiving support might make more sense when the staff is confident they can find a better way. Despite the system design at Everton, principal's comments and my observation led me to believe that there are many days where disciplinary issues completely disrupt the instructional leader's time in the classrooms. In low performing and under-resourced districts, this is where schools can really get in trouble. Principals like David, that are able to minimize, distribute, or eliminate distracting behaviors, can spend more time focusing on the academic needs of the students as a result.

Direct Leadership Behaviors

Direct behaviors exhibited by the principal often, but not always, have a positive impact on student learning. These behaviors describe when principals actively engage with students.²⁶ Often these behaviors can be defined by the principal and his/her students as having direct individual or group contact in a classroom or other school or community setting. They can take

²⁶ As perceived by both the students and researcher

place during classroom visits, can involve monitoring student work, meeting with students, discussing academic progress and problems with students, publicly and privately praising individual academic achievement, and providing individual or group tutoring assistance.

At Lodi, the students appreciated that their principal always had a smile on his face and came to encourage them during exams, but they did not like that his speeches during assemblies were repetitive and lengthy. At FH, the principal is always there to greet students entering the building in the morning, and when they leave at the end of the day. This consistency was something the students knew they could count on. At Everton, the principal often has mini-counseling sessions with kids, and she helps students calm down when they are dealing with anxiety or conflict. At Carter, these direct behaviors most frequently took place when the principal entered the classrooms to work alongside students, asked them questions, and provided them with feedback.

Indirect Leadership Behaviors

These behaviors can often, but not always, be associated with principals who operate more as school managers, or coordinators. Examples of indirect behaviors include: manipulating school-level factors such as resources, climate and the master schedule, providing instructional support to teachers, and communicating with staff and parents. These are behaviors that are perceived to be indirect by the students and researcher. It is also important to note that indirect leadership behaviors can also be identified as high-influence behaviors, just as direct leadership behaviors can be identified as low-influence behaviors.

One indirect leadership behavior that has had a big influence on the school culture at Lodi is Mark's compulsory fourth grade music program. Students do not perceive this to be something that Mark does directly, but the program itself was developed by Mark to combat

what he perceives to be a culture of poverty within his rural region. At Carter too, I can see a principal that has managed to delegate the majority of his managerial tasks to a very capable office support team. This indirect behavior has a high influence on student outcomes because it frees him up to spend his time in the classrooms on a regular basis. Other examples of indirect leadership behaviors take place at Everton and Carter where students receive breakfast for free whether they are on the free and reduced lunch list or not, and at FH where the principal works to make sure his staff is prepared to best implement instructional initiatives that come down from above.

Principals at both large and small schools can have a direct effect on student achievement when they engage in behaviors that are focused on the student's best interests. Whether direct or indirect, the choices to focus on students' needs are made on a daily basis by each of these principals. These choices, many of which are informed by years of experience in the classroom or main office, can be informed more directly by listening to what students have to say about a number of school wide factors including teaching, learning and leadership. In the following section, I will present students' perspectives as they relate to many of the same beliefs and behaviors I have discussed here, in an effort to analyze how different groups of students think and feel about their principal and his/her approaches to leadership.

Personal Inclination

Based on my observations and interviews at these four schools, I believe there is evidence that principals who do not use student-driven approaches to guide their principalship are going by personal inclination or are using externally derived models in their quest to provide structure to the school's instructional program. In this section, I will present how the

overwhelming complexity of the principalship appears to become more complex when principals begin making decisions based on instinct or by using traditional methods.

David set up systems at Carter whereby he could have extended and routine daily interactions with students and teachers throughout the school. Other principals, like Joseph at FH, chose to spend the majority of their time managing the ebb and flow that occur throughout the day. Mark mentioned that there were a number of things that got in the way of his time in the classroom, and that because he is a principal in a small district, he has additional responsibilities that pull him away from his site on a semi-regular basis. While Joseph mentioned that he spent a great deal of time interacting with kids in his last school, his new approach to leadership is based on a different set of circumstances. At FH, Joseph has become less involved with the work of kids because he says teachers at his new site have a better handle on things. Leah and her AP at Everton have attempted to set up systems similar to David's, whereby there can always be one administrator in the hallways and one in the office, but based on observation, these systems rarely worked.

While the push from more teacher-centered to student-centered classrooms has taken root in even some of the more traditional public schools (Kohn, 2000), it is important to note that few administrators have developed ways for the thoughts and feelings of the least empowered members of the school to be heard by the most empowered (Mitra, 2008). All principals claim they are predicating their work on what is in the best interest of their school. There was evidence that Joseph was aware of this choice, based on evidence of previous approaches he had taken to working more directly with students in the past. While Mark didn't have concrete examples of how he used student voice, there was evidence that he too was aware of how student voice could be used in secondary settings and with older students. However, only Leah and David are

choosing to interact in more direct ways with students, and more progressive ways with teachers. These choices, based largely on personal preference and experience, say a lot about what they value, and the influence their behaviors have on their students.

Interactions & Communication

At each of the four sites, principals had different approaches to interacting and communicating with their students. These behaviors have been broken up into the following categories: principal-student interactions, structuring students' experiences, communication, dialogue, non-traditional behaviors, shared decision-making, student agency, and student voice. In this section, I will describe these differences and the important role they play in shaping each school's climate and culture.

Principal-Student Interactions

In this section, I will describe interactions that take place between the principal and students. These interactions can be characterized by any situation where the principal and student interact physically or verbally. These visits can take place in the classroom, main office, principal's office, hallway, cafeteria, during bussing, at any other place within the school, or during extracurricular activities. Research suggests principals are better able to meet accountability demands by focusing their leadership time on the interactions they have with students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). While it is often difficult to study these interactions in schools because most principals do not consistently take the time to fit them into their schedule, and some may also be unplanned, there is evidence from this study which shows principals that meaningfully structure their approaches to these interactions can have a positive impact on students' experiences of school.

At Everton, students walking to or from class were allowed to approach the principal in the hall to ask questions, share illustrations, or give her a hug. During these situations Leah would take the time to warmly greet each student, talk to them about how their day was going, provide them with some encouragement, or develop a more focused discussion about whether or not they have been working to improve certain aspects of their academic or social performance. At FH, Joseph mentioned that conversations between him and the kids were just like conversations he would have with anybody. Joseph's comments represent his willingness to engage with students in a respectful and mature way. At Lodi, interactions between students and principal came most noticeably in the form of a greeting ritual whereby Mark would ask the students how they were doing, and they'd have to respond using any word but 'good,' or 'okay (see L4-2).' Finally, at Carter these interactions were seen taking place throughout the school at different times of the day.

In each of the four research sites, I saw principal-student interactions taking place outside of the classroom or office. They also occurred in settings where principals have not traditionally made themselves available to students for support (e.g. at PTO meetings, during after school enrichment activities, during field trips, at barbecues, random encounters in public, etc.). These interactions are one of many ways that principals begin to impact students' experiences of school.

Structuring Students' Experiences

Principals also play a significant role in structuring students' experiences of school and can empower (or disempower) learners, through their interpretations of, and approaches to problems in schools. This structuring occurs when principals make decisions or act in ways that have an impact on individual students, groups of students, classrooms, or the entire student body.

In this section, I will describe situations where principals directly or indirectly impact students' experiences of school and learning.

At Everton, and FH principals used an incentive plan as part of their character education program. At both of the sites, kids get rewarded for exemplary behavior or student work, and their awards can be used to purchase any number of items or experiences ranging from school supplies, to lunch with the principal, or even a ticket to the school dance. At Carter, where the principal is rarely in the office, the school leader believes his mood sets the tempo for the school each day, and will determine how students experience their education. However, not all experiences structured by the principals are positive, and a few are done unintentionally or without the principal's awareness.

For example, at Everton elementary, the lunchroom feels very loud and chaotic. This occurs despite the fact that the principal is usually there on lunch duty and the students are not necessarily being loud or misbehaving. The experience is a jarring one for both the students and staff, many of which drop their kids off and flee for the solace of the staff lounge to escape the deafening volume. On the way to lunch, many students also asked the principal if they can have lunch in her office. This daily experience no doubt has an impact on how the students experience this crucial opportunity to socialize with their peers, but also sets them up for a potentially difficult afternoon when they return back to the classrooms.

At Lodi, students across grade-levels remarked that they used to attend schoolwide assemblies every week, but that they were now too busy because of the state tests. Whether or not the state tests are actually the reason there are less school assemblies at the site is irrelevant. Somehow the message has gotten across to the students that preparing for statewide exams is more important than coming together as a school and this bothers them.

Communication

In this section, I will describe and compare the communication that takes place between members of each school community. Principals that are aware of a range of schoolwide factors, and that are able to structure students' experiences in a positive way, are typically strong communicators. That communication might take place between parents, students, staff, or other members of the school community. Communication between members of the school has traditionally been both hierarchical and one-way (e.g. from principals to staff, or principals to students, etc.), and has typically come in the form of morning announcements, classroom visits, phone calls, and letters sent home to the parents.

After speaking with principals and students, it became clear that principals today are using a range of methods to communicate with all members of the community. Principals at FH and Lodi now regularly send mass e-mails to members of staff and parents. David at Carter generates voice messages that are broadcast to the students' home telephones on Sunday evenings. Most school districts also have websites that include individual school, principal, and in some cases even classroom links. Principals included in this study expressed that they are now more willing to interact directly with students and students' parents when students are struggling academically, and often are able to provide students and their families with extra support services. With accountability pressures bearing down on individual teachers, more teachers are asking their principals what they can do to improve their work with students (DePaul, 2000). Schools now have to disclose their school report cards online, and as a result many parents are making more informed decisions about where to move and send their children to school.

Despite the increased efforts schools and principals have made to communicate with their students, staff and community, most are still traditional in the sense that they involve communication flowing in one direction from the top to the bottom (e.g. Federal, State, District, Principal, Teachers, Parents, Students). If I look at schools like FH, where Joseph's main responsibility is making sure initiatives passed from above make it effortlessly in to the classroom, and where parents have a voice in making sure their kids' concerns are heard by the principal, it is not hard to see that students are at the bottom of the communication chain. I saw this too at Lodi, where the entire student population is being moved into a middle school along with another elementary site in the fall, students were the last to receive details about this consolidation. I also saw this at Everton, where just a year ago the district decided to close the school at the end of the year, only to reverse their decision months later. Finally, I saw this at Carter, where just weeks before the beginning of the school year, the school's much beloved and longtime principal took a position working for the district, students were the last to know.

In every case, it has been the students who have been at the bottom of the communication chain. While many might argue that students are incapable of reversing decisions involving the budget and recruitment, it is important to make explicit the following concerns on their behalf. Students at Lodi are finding out details regarding their upcoming consolidation for the first time because of comments the moderator made during one of our focus groups. A struggling urban district that claims to value relationships and the work of dedicated and experienced principals like the one who preceded David at Carter, relocated her just weeks before the start of school, leaving the site without a true leader until November. Finally at FH, we have students that are more likely to go to parents or peers with their problems because it feels more natural than communicating directly with their teachers or principal.

Opening up lines of communication between members of the school community around meaningful student driven initiatives can help practitioners and researchers develop new approaches to solving real problems taking place in school. This type of communication is also more likely to lead to focused conversations (dialogue) between members of the school community and develop a shared understanding that may not have existed before.

Dialogue

At each of the four research sites, I gave principals opportunities to engage in action-relevant dialogue with kids. These opportunities were unique in the sense that it was facilitated by a third-party (myself) around questions the students and principals found important enough to explore as they related to their own schools. In this section, I will present the value this dialogue held for developing a shared theory that could be used to inform the work of principals.

While each of the schools faced a very unique set of challenges and had very different principals, there were similarities when it came time for principals to develop questions for their students. I chose to group the three kinds of questions principals had for students into the following categories: Yes-or-No, Opportunities/Changes, and Other. At Everton and FH, the first questions principals asked fell into the Yes-or-No category. These questions were more general and involved the principal asking the students if they felt safe and whether or not they felt supported academically, to which all the students invariably responded in the affirmative. When I took the initiative to ask how their principals made them feel this way, their responses were focused on ways that principals had gone about communicating their support to the students. For example, at Everton students said they felt supported because the principal would make announcements over the loudspeaker. At FH, the students said the principal sent a clear message during morning assembly.

While Leah had an opportunity to develop new questions in response to the students' feedback, Joseph did not as he circumvented an opportunity to ask questions during his first interview. Questions from Leah and Mark's second interviews, as well as from David's first interview, fell into our second category; Changes/Opportunities. These questions focused on asking the students what else the principal could do to improve their academic standing (Carter), the quality of teaching (Everton), or principal's approaches to leadership (Lodi). Notice if you will where the focus in each of these questions lies. At Carter, I see a principal who is interested in knowing how he can help his students do better in school, and improve their grades. At Everton, I see a principal who is concerned with improving the work of her teachers. Finally, at Lodi, I see a principal that would like to use student feedback to improve his work as school leader. While these may seem like subtle differences in improving the overall instructional program to some, these questions represent to me what these principals really care about.

At both Carter and Lodi, students said they would like a principal to come to their classrooms and work with them more. Students at Carter were able to elaborate on the nature of the contact, while students at Lodi also mentioned that they would like their principal to vary his approach to giving speeches during assemblies.

The final group of questions did not fall into either category and asked the students to think more critically about their role as learners. Two of Mark's questions and two of David's questions fell into this category of Others. Mark's very first question was to ask students what they would do if they could be principal for a day. This was an empowering question that I ended up using across research sites, and that the students had interesting responses for. Students mentioned that they would like to have the kids be the teachers and the teachers be the students. Students also talked about how they would encourage kids more and teach them more

about school. Mark's final question was a timely one where he asked his students if they had any concerns about their upcoming consolidation with a neighboring elementary school in the district. This question got the group very excited, and it was their first opportunity to talk about the transition, and raise questions to the moderator (who was more aware of the details than I was) about a number of issues that they had yet to be informed about including safety, friendship, and the layout of their new building.

David's next question asked the students what they value most about school. While this seems like a very simple question, notice that it necessitates a response that can be used to help the principal build on what he already has in place at his new site. Notice also that the emphasis is on what the students value, and not what the school or principal believes they should value, or what they value about their principal. Students responded by saying they valued their teachers and their peers the most, because they helped them learn and made them laugh. David's second question was developed in connection with his own doctoral research and focused on asking the students how they felt about the lack of teachers, role-models, and staff that look like them at Carter. Here I see a principal that is asking the students a question typically reserved for older students (or even adults) in order to raise their awareness around a problem that has plagued urban schools nationwide for many years now. The students, although a bit timid at first as they were being asked this question by a white researcher in an unfamiliar environment, warmed up to the topic after the moderator, an African-American female, asked some excellent probing questions to deepen their understanding of the topic as it related to experiences they had thus far with specific teachers in the building.

There is evidence that when principals are invested in asking students questions that force them to think, students will answer the call and provide responses that can be used to inform

their practice. Dialogue between principals and students can be used to develop a shared theory that principals can then use to refocus their work with students, and strengthen their approaches to school leadership and instruction. In the following section, I will take a look at how principals have attempted to engage students using some non-traditional approaches to leadership.

Empowering Learners

In the following section, I will present how principals have worked to empower students as learners by more actively involving them in the decisions they make as school leaders. These non-traditional approaches included making decisions with students, developing their sense of agency, and listening to what they say about learning in an effort to provide them with a real voice in their education.

Non-Traditional Role of Principals

Principals have typically been responsible for hiring and firing teachers, coordinating buses and master schedules, disciplining children, and speaking with angry parents (Hallinger, 1992). Principals that have found non-traditional ways of approaching their role as school leader, minimize the amount of time spent on non-instructional tasks. In the process, many develop new approaches to creating a more responsive instructional program. Some examples of more modern models of principalship I have observed in these schools include conducting routine and focused morning and afternoon classroom visits, providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement, working outside of the office, making themselves available to students and their families during after school programs and extracurricular activities, forging links between the home and school, providing incentives for students, extending content coverage, and monitoring student's academic, social, and emotional progress.

At our two urban elementary schools, I witnessed a range of evolved approaches to the principalship becoming the norm in schools where new or newer principals have replaced long standing veterans. Principals today are greeting kids in the hallways, taking the time to give students compliments and social/emotional support, and making sure they have a range of support services in place to support their specific learning needs. The principalship has evolved and can be characterized as more determined, focused, innovative, and scholarly than those that came before them. The principalship is a constantly evolving position of leadership, where building leaders have to wear a number of hats during a given day to help students and staff experience success in teaching and learning.

At Everton, students are literally lining up in the hallway to give their principal hugs, pieces of art, and to ask if they can spend time with her. At Lodi, I found a principal that once rode a horse around the school, and on another occasion a motorcycle. The FH principal has (in the past²⁷) selected a student to be ‘Principal of the Day.’ At Carter and Everton, principals are making a real difference in students’ experiences of learning by going into the classroom and teaching or actively monitoring and sometimes even co-teaching the curriculum. The same curriculum they are also responsible for coordinating, and the very same curriculum for which David is extending content coverage so students can become more motivated about a variety of topics that hold real meaning for their specific educational experiences. Schools in America are being faced with a new set of instructional issues. Principals that struggle to break the traditional mold will struggle in their efforts to lead schools of the 21st century to success.

Shared Decision Making

²⁷ (In the past) refers to a behavior this principal mentioned he did at another school or in years previous, but is not doing currently.

One way principals are breaking the mold is by making decisions in a collaborative manner with students. This non-traditional and decentralized approach occurs when principals actively involve students in making decisions that may impact students' experiences of school.

Principals like Leah are interested in creating a student advisory board where conversations with students about a range of issues, including student learning, can be shared with adults at the site. Initiatives like these could not only help inform the school's instructional program, but could empower learners as key players in the decision-making process in school.

In his short time at Carter, David has actively made decisions with students that have had a profound impact on the learning experiences of at least one student as you will see here. During our first meeting, David shared a story with me about a situation where a student presented him with an alternative to out of school suspension. The student and principal collectively negotiated a deal whereby the student would instead serve his suspension in school. Examples like these demonstrate how principals are willing and capable of making decisions with students based on factors that hold real meaning for empowering students and improving student learning outcomes.

Unfortunately, most schools and principals have only given students opportunities to make decisions in school related to maintaining the status quo. While students at these sites are sometimes allowed to make decisions around managing and organizing school activities and behavior, shared decision making has been largely subjected to limiting school established parameters (Warner, 2010). These parameters have rarely been designed to include students' perspectives of teaching and leadership (Gentilucci, 2004). At the completion of this field study, none of the principals had yet used students' perspectives of teaching and leadership as a way to structure their reform efforts.

While Mark and Joseph both believe in the concept of having a student government, FH and Lodi are two sites where shared decision making has been limited by the principals. Students at these schools are given opportunities to develop a set of classroom rules with their teacher, or to rearrange the way they sit in the class or lunchroom. While ideas like these are a step in the right direction, it is clear that students at these sites have not been given opportunities to provide principals with input that will effect their experiences as learners.

Student Agency

The eagerness of students to take on an academic identity, and commit their own time to taking an interest in their learning, behavior, experiences of school and achievement, rest largely on how principals choose to empower students. Students that are able to take charge of their own education, and play a more active role in their learning, will develop at a faster rate academically, socially and emotionally (Kirchner, 2005). Principals that take the time to develop student agency and responsibility in their own schools reap the rewards of students that have a strong sense of self and their dynamic role in their own education (Mitra, 2004). Furthermore, research demonstrates that students who are respectful of each other, their teachers, and principals are more likely to develop as learners capable of making their own decisions (Jackson, 2003).

Both Leah and David emphasized the importance of empowering kids to take responsibility over their own actions. Both principals said they felt most proud of their students when they were able to communicate the choices that should be made. David went on to stress that student responsibility will get students further in life than ELA, Math or Science. These perspectives align with research that says teaching students how to communicate the choices they should make is as valuable as reinforcing the curriculum (Oakes, 1990). At Lodi, the

principal has (in the past) taken opportunities to speak directly with his eldest students in an effort to empower them as student leaders. Mark has provided these students with opportunities to serve as role-models for the school by letting them do morning announcements, holding them responsible for raising and lowering the school flag, and allowing them to act as peer mentors for younger students. These tasks also teach them how to work with others, become more proactive learners, and take-charge of their own education. More confident and aware learners are also more likely to have something to contribute to their schools (Fielding, 2001).

While these tasks are no more consequential than setting classroom rules or re-arranging the desks, approaches like these give students an idea of what it would be like to become more actively involved on a larger scale. However, the potential of involving students in making decisions that effect the entire school has yet to be realized for most principals and students.

Student Voice

When adults listen to what students have to say about their learning, and meaningfully use student voice and participation to shape their experiences of school, they can empower students as learners, and transcend traditional school frameworks in the process (Cook-Sather, 2010). As students gain confidence and experience they will naturally create opinions, ideas, and beliefs about school. These include individual and group perspectives and actions within the contexts of learning and their experiences with education (Rogers & Lea, 2005). However, opportunities for students to express their opinions and make decisions about a range of school-wide factors that affect their learning have been few and far between.

While Mark at Lodi began to see the value student voice has for informing decisions he makes towards the end of the study, he admitted at its onset that he did not know how that would look in an elementary setting. FH has a principal who acknowledges the value of listening to

students, but there was no evidence that the principal has involved them in decisions that can have a real impact on their experiences of school. Students at FH were also quick to say they would misbehave if they wanted to get the principal's attention. Leah saw real potential in using student voice to develop a more responsive approach to school leadership. At least for the time being however, she seems overwhelmed by responsibilities and tasks that demand her immediate concern. Of all the principals, David seems the most poised to take the leap and begin actively using student voice as a complement to his already student-driven approach to leadership. He was unique in that he had concrete examples of how he has used student voice to inform his leadership, and talked about his work in a way that made communication which flows horizontally at Carter a reality.

Conclusions

After looking at the constructed themes across all four of the cases some key findings have emerged. First, each principal's perspectives on leadership, school, instruction and students varied from school to school. These perspectives or beliefs are sometimes based on assumptions principals have about what works for their schools and students. These beliefs led to certain behaviors that broadcast to the students what the principals valued about school.

While the principals' districts or even the state prescribed some of these behaviors, it is clear that each principal was able to choose how they spent some of their time in school. These choices represent what each of these principals value about their role as school leader. After speaking with the students it became clear that these choices, and even the principals' beliefs in some cases, do not always match what the students are looking for in their principal. Students were able to clearly identify ways the principals could help them address challenges they were

facing with school. Students were also able to identify which specific leadership behaviors had a high or low influence on their experiences of school.

Principals that had meaningful interactions with students, and who were effective communicators, were better at structuring students' experiences. They were also more willing to engage in dialogue with the students about what they value about school. While some principals claimed that they value student voice, student responsibility, and shared decision-making, it became clear that not all principals understood what that looked like, or if they did, were able to put their claims into practice. In addition, principals struggled to provide me with specific examples of student-centered approaches to leadership. While each of these principals demonstrated a range of approaches to the administrative function, it is clear that each principal has adapted their approach to suit the unique needs of each of their schools, their leadership backgrounds, and even their own expectations.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Discussion

In the following chapter I discuss the ways principals can teach students that they can, or cannot have voice in the future based on the work they do. The following discussion builds on findings from the cross-case analysis in chapter five. Five key themes from the previous chapter will be included in order to develop answers to the two key research questions. They are challenges faced by students, shared decision-making, principals' behaviors, personal inclination, and student voice. These themes bring elements of the literature review alongside findings from the case studies and cross-case analysis, in order to develop a set of conclusions and demonstrate contributions this study makes to the literature. This discussion will also help present broader implications of the field study as it relates to both practice and preparation programs.

Challenges Faced by Students

Although research has recognized the impact of effective principal leadership on individual students (Cotton, 1999; Nettles & Herrington, 2007), much of the research regarding the effects of leadership on student learning remains unclear (Walker, 2010). Researchers have frequently sought to explore the relationship between the instructional behaviors of principals and student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005), yet all but a few have neglected to include, or even consider, the relationships principals have with students as a significant variable. Despite this, there is evidence to suggest that principals know leadership behaviors that focus on student learning are important. Principals who communicate with students, provide students with suggestions and feedback on the learning process, and provide students with opportunities for

involvement can affect student achievement. Research suggests that principals often do not take the time to focus on leadership behaviors that involve the students because other managerial or instructional tasks at hand seem more readily achievable (Keller, 1998). I saw evidence of this at FH and Lodi where the ebb and flow of a litany of tasks throughout the day, including meetings, e-mail, phone calls, and bus issues (just to list a few), dictated to some degree how their time between the buses and bells was spent.

Collins (2009) makes the point that organizational decline is largely self-inflicted and that decline is often generated through neglecting the core business; which in our case is students and learning. There is also evidence that suggests principals can exert direct and powerful effects on student achievement by using instructional leadership time to engage in what students identify as high influence behaviors (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

As principals become more visible in schools, they must also be mindful that students like the ones in this study are also looking for principals who are both approachable and accessible. Students' perspectives of leadership have shown that whether the principal uses a hands-on or a more consultative approach, they want a leader who they can interact with (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001).

These findings from the literature were reinforced at Everton and Carter where students cited educational issues such as disruptions during class, drama between students, and things that happen outside of school that get them off track, as their biggest challenges. They wanted more direct instructional contact than these principals were already providing. They said they would like to plan with the principal, talk about what happened outside of school hours, and that they would like more instructional support in the classroom. Students liked it when principals came into class and sat down and helped them with challenging assignments and projects. The

students emphasized the value of this instructional support and wanted the principal to step in and fill that void in many of their overcrowded classrooms. In urban schools the challenges were social/emotional, physical (the state of the school), as well as instructional, and the kids were much more specific and better able to articulate what they needed from their principal and the adults in their school (e.g. tutoring assistance, teachers who can control big groups of kids, and who can keep kids on task, etc.). These students knew and talked about the specific things the principals did to help them learn.

The challenges in suburban and rural settings were tests, class work, and unfair teachers. A surprisingly high number of students in suburban and rural settings, where the principals were less of a direct force and had a more traditional approach to the principalship, reported that the best way to get the principal's attention would be to misbehave because that was the only time they felt the principal responded to students. Students in these settings also knew and talked about the specific things their principals did to help them learn, such as getting them a special parent-teacher organization sponsored breakfast on testing day, and even occasionally stepping into the classroom and providing them with strategies to solve problems on class projects.

It is also telling that the rural principal thought the most significant challenge faced by his students and their families was that many of them came "from a culture of poverty". Mark's position²⁸ reinforces the paternalistic posture which is apparent throughout the interview and observation data at Lodi. Despite his deep admiration for what he described as "high-poverty rural education," characterizing his community in this light carries with it a deficit view of the

²⁸ It is also worth mentioning that the assumptions Mark makes about his community relates, at least in part, to assumptions other educators are making when they say they know what their kids need. When school leaders are not respectful of and/or responsive to student input (and input from their parents), they often end up looking for solutions to problems in places where the possibility of a more direct effect may not exist.

students and families he serves. Research tells us that deficit thinking and belief systems may be found to result in lowered expectations for students and teachers (Gorski, 2008).

Gorski (2008) goes on to say that among these deficit belief systems, the idea that poor people share more or less predicatable beliefs, values, and behaviors, is one of the most common and dangerous myths about poverty. During the interview I missed opportunities to follow up on this idea and have the principal actively consider counter arguments to this deficit paradigm as they related to my student-centered study. For principals like Mark to be the best principals they can be for all students, they need to challenge this idea of a culture of poverty and reach a deeper understanding of where the deficit actually lies—whether that be among the disenfranchised youth, the education system itself, or within the hearts and minds of educators (Kozol, 1992). These examples of deficit thinking also have broader implications for this study: They reflect what may be a more basic assumption, on the part of nearly all school leaders (and teachers), that they already know what their students need, and hence, have no need to ask them.

Shared Decision Making

Principals have been developing collaborative, inquiry-oriented approaches to teacher development and instruction for years. Instructional leaders now commonly make decisions with these shared goals in mind. These goals have been designed to drive the teaching practices of adults. Principals are also using shared decision-making to develop sets of classroom and school-wide goals. While a more interactive, relationship-based approach to developing school climate is a must for principals who want to create an environment conducive to teaching, these approaches do not fully address student learning, or the role the students play in shaping, or being shaped by, the school climate.

There is evidence that more involvement in defining school goals results in a more

coherent and observable mission for students and principals (Pattal et al., 2008). This was evident at Carter, where the principal had closer relationships with the students. While students' comments at all sites aligned to some degree with the principal's actual behaviors, students at Carter and Everton were more aware of what their principal did because they had more interactions with their principal that were based on instructional, behavioral, and social/emotional support.

Principals who do not include stakeholders in the development of a shared vision may lose their support (Marks & Penty, 2003). Schools are interactive organizations, where students, teachers, and principals rely on each other to achieve academic goals. Students, however, are rarely given the ways and means to communicate their needs with adults. There is evidence that strong school leaders can use student voice to strategically manage transformational change (Warner, 2010), and yet practitioners and researchers are more often than not asking adults what can be done to create more reform-minded schools.

Fullan (2001) writes:

“The main problem is not the absence of innovation in schools, but rather the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, fragmented, superficially adorned projects.”²⁹

Example of such projects could be found in schools where principals believe in student councils, but fail to give students opportunities to make decisions that affect their experiences of school as members of these same groups. Some principals recognize the potential of student voice but they do not actually use it. Two of the principals openly admitted they have not thought about

²⁹ At Carter, where the principal took a streamlined approach to guiding the instructional program by going directly to where the instruction was actually taking place, David referred directly to the work of Fullan (2001) and Reeves (2004) when asked about how he approached leadership initiatives at his new site.

how kids could inform their practice, but also believed in having a student government. Using student voice to help them shape their approaches to school leadership in suburban and rural settings was a new concept.

Despite this, all the principals reported having used, considered using, or wanting to use something like a student council or a peer-mentoring program where students help, lead, and are responsible. If principals can get beyond traditional notions of what a student government actually is, a place where students make decisions about fund-raising, pep-rallies, community service, and how to line up in the lunchroom, more decisions can be made together that influence the work of adults and students in their sites. The problem with traditional views of student government is that principals and schools are establishing parameters for student decision-making that limit the capacity student voice has for having any real impact on solving problems faced by students.

Principals' Behaviors

The importance of a shared mission, and the concept of followership, has been a theme of the leadership literature for some time (Lee, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1992). Few studies however have investigated the role of shared mission in schools, and of these studies even fewer have focused on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2010). Schools are effective or ineffective based not only upon how their principals lead, but also on how well the principal fulfills the important role of follower (Smith, 1991).

This is due in no small part to the fact that few principals have been able to admit that a less autocratic, and more servant or guide-like approach could help to empower students and improve their experiences of school. Principals, like the ones at our urban sites, have taken

different approaches to the work they do in order to empower students that do not receive as much academic or social/emotional support at home.

Principals have typically been regarded as autonomous and authoritative figures. However, many of their goals have been perceived by both students and the public as being limited by their authority (Leithwood, 2003). For example, three of the principals included in this study mentioned that district and state initiatives (and meetings outside of the school) often interfere with their ability to become actively involved with their instructional programs. Some of these goals, while still integral to creating a school climate conducive to teaching and learning, are even included in Murphy's (see Table 2.1) theoretical framework. For example, generations of students have known that principals are responsible for creating a safe and orderly environment, promoting quality instruction, and communicating school goals.

Because principals have always been viewed as the director of the main office, this is what many continue to become or resort to when problems with student learning seem overwhelming. Students, teachers, and members of the community have allowed their impressions, and the broadcast impressions of the administrator, to dictate their interactions with the schools' most influential force. I see evidence of this at FH, where students are reluctant to approach the principal with problems they are having in school. When these problems exist in abundance, they appear to manifest themselves in two distinct ways. Either the students go to a peer, sibling, or in most cases a parent to share their frustration, or that frustration turns into an unfavorable behavior—behaviors for which the adults in the building are then responsible for providing a consequence. Here is evidence of how student voice can operate as an oppositional force in schools as well.

Principals have gradually transformed their practice into one that includes teachers, and sometimes even parents and members of the community. This coalition of adults is now better equipped to coordinate teaching and curriculum for students. However, many of these adult-determined goals still hold little meaning for students (like those in my study) that already understand the basic tenets of schooling (e.g., doing well on exams and not fighting is important). When goals can be more specific and student driven, schools will become both more cohesive and more easily operable (Robinson et al., 2008).

Principals regularly interact with teachers across grade levels to create continuity and provide support. These hands-on approaches to staff development include communicating with teachers to ensure that the content is being covered, addressing instructional concerns, encouraging teacher autonomy and innovation, developing reflective practice, and building time for teachers to collaborate (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). There is also evidence that principals who play a more active role in structuring their students' experiences of learning will produce more observable student achievement outcomes (Leithwood, 1982). Many principals formally and informally recognize student achievement. Some even provide students with tasks or responsibilities and promote student involvement outside the classroom. These activities are associated with better student behavior, attendance, higher achievement, and help develop shared goals between teachers and students (see Figure 3.1). However, few principals place much emphasis on these instructional leadership behaviors, and the connection between principals and students often neglects to focus on student learning outcomes. Principals, who regularly ask the students what is being covered, and provide them with additional instructional support, are not going the extra mile; they are merely fulfilling the other half of their instructional leadership responsibilities.

As schools nationwide become more diverse and more inclusive, a largely homogenous group of teachers and administrators are being forced to develop new approaches to instruction and leadership. Despite the overly negative stance that many educators have taken towards inclusion, many schools using this model are now reaping the benefits that have come as a result. These benefits include more collaborative approaches to instruction, greater opportunities for social interaction, higher expectations for all students, and greater access to an equal education (Corbett, 2001). While these benefits are most visible in classroom settings, my findings suggest that principals who more actively work to include students in school-wide models of leadership can create more coherent instructional programs. They can do this by involving all members of the school in an effort to recognize both internal and external sources of incoherence (Newmann, 2001). Since the sources of poor instructional delivery lie both inside the schools (Gentilucci, 2004), and outside (Fullan, 2000), strengthening instructional program coherence requires the participation of all members of the organization, from the bottom up, as well as from the top down.

Personal Inclination

Almost every choice made by principals in schools carries with it a restructuring of the student experience (Foster, 1986). While many principals say that they are focused on acting in the best interests of the student, standards of the profession, personal and professional codes of ethics, and even the ethics of the community, all in part influence how school leaders set their agendas (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). In each of our schools principals took different approaches to decision making and made judgments based on factors that appeared (to many of the principals) to be out of their control. Both the review of the literature and evidence from this study show that principals who are not using student-driven approaches to direct their

instructional leadership are left with little else but personal inclination in their quest to structure more responsive schools.

At Everton, the principal set up a system whereby she could spend half of her day working directly with students to support instruction. Despite this system, the principal spent most of her time handling issues of behavior management. That is not a huge surprise considering this site's want for resources (space, academic resources, experienced and highly trained teachers, etc.), but when I looked at the work of rural and suburban principals, where insubordination was at a minimum, principals were not necessarily using that extra time to focus on instruction or interacting with kids and teachers. Furthermore, their time outside the office was largely spent observing teachers, dealing with bussing, lunchroom duty, or conducting informal walk-throughs³⁰ after students arrived in classrooms.

The rural principal, when asked about his role at Lodi and his work with kids, shifted our conversation towards resources, funding, state and federal monies, and teacher performance. He also had metaphors for school leadership that completely excluded students and student voice from the equation. By comparison, the suburban principal had more time on his hands, but repeated having direct interactions with kids only when there was a disciplinary issue that needed attending to.

Principals across this study also commented that they thought only older kids were worth talking to about the work that is being done in schools. Many also assumed that certain leadership behaviors, such as being a professional presence in the classroom, were something the kids and adults perceived as being important. This assumption seems to contradict the value these elementary school principals said they placed on listening to kids, but highlights that

³⁰ Some of these informal walk throughs were not focused on instruction. For example, during one walk through we stopped to talk to the custodian about a door that needed fixing. During another, the principal took me to the courtyard and showed me where some ducks had settled that the district needed off of school property.

crucial next step of using student voice to actively re-shape the school culture, and how schools are run. The principals recognized that a study like mine could hold real value if students could see principals working to address the challenges they face in school. By helping principals to identify occasions where shared decision making may already be happening, and showing them the value of these initiatives from the perspectives of the students and staff, opportunities to build on or re-develop what is already in place may arise.

Student Voice

Not surprisingly, findings in the leadership literature do not always align with those found when students are asked to share their thoughts and feelings about school (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). This gap between the two literatures also manifested itself during the research study, and usually occurs because students are so rarely included in discussions about teaching, learning or leadership. Student perspective research conducted in grade schools here in the U.S. has only scratched the surface in its attempt to understand what students think about schools, and the impact their thoughts and feelings can have on the work of practitioners.

While students are now given a more active role in choosing how they learn (Brophy, 2010), and are afforded more opportunities to talk about how they perceive their environment, learning, and engagement (Wang & Holcombe, 2010), their voice is rarely used by school leaders to effect transformational change in schools (Warner, 2010). More rarely yet is it used by administrators to structure their experiences of school, or as a tool for empowerment. With the birth of the concept of instructional leadership came principals that were entering the classrooms to closely monitor teaching and learning for the first time. However, there is evidence to suggest that increasing pressures of accountability, efficiency, and productivity have forced principals into making decisions based more on test scores than on relationships (White,

2008). This reality has again begun to lower the veil that for years separated the school leader from his/her most important assets in the school; the students. While data has been proven to inform both teacher practice and principals decisions about student achievement, it often fails to demonstrate the root causes of why students are not engaged in their learning.

There is little evidence that these pressures will subside for principals and public schools here in the U.S. as new accountability measures brought about by policies such as Race to the Top (RTT) emerge. Many principals nationwide report having exhausted their limited resources, and budget cuts have placed teachers on the chopping block (Kober & Rentner, 2011). With so much stress being placed on the leadership capabilities of the school principal, finding unexplored and readily available resources to tap into has become critical. Instead of looking for a cure for curriculum and teaching on the distant horizon, beyond the control of schools and teachers, leaders can look within for answers to questions that have been missed by more traditional empirical studies that rely on information provided by adults.

Principals interested in shaping positive, reform-minded learning cultures, must match their support strategies with the needs of their students. If the most important administrative responsibility is to help all children learn well, certainly one approach to achieving this goal would be to ask students, ‘What do you need in order to learn?’ Students have reported that principals that do not ask about their learning are left to wonder whether or not the principal cared about their learning at all (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). As principals become more visible in schools, they also must be mindful that their visibility is not a substitute for accessibility. Student perspectives of leadership have shown that whether the principal uses a hands-on or a more consultative approach, they want a leader with whom they can interact (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

Numerous studies have been undertaken to create interventions and reforms designed to improve academic achievement in American schools (Block et al., 1999; Shapiro, 2010). While many of these efforts have been translated into a set of best practices that currently guide school leaders (Gentilucci, 2004), there is still evidence to suggest that American students learn less successfully than grade school children overseas (Hoff, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Despite all that is known about leadership, practitioners and the research community still understand very little about what students perceive principals do to affect their learning. Only Gentilucci and Muto's (2007) study has examined the influence principals have on academic achievement from the students' perspective, and no study to date has examined what elementary school students, many of whose attitudes towards school are less affected by peer and adult influence, popular culture (e.g. the way principals and leaders are portrayed in the media), and youth culture, think about school leaders. These young voices are the least adapted to these influences and may provide both administrators and the research community with some new strategies for understanding the link between leadership and learning.

The body of literature examining the indirect relationships between instructional leadership and student achievement must be supplemented by new lines of inquiry that examine the relationship between these two key players in greater detail. Perspectives of students in grades K-5 are critical to administrators that want to engage and empower students, while setting up systems that will allow their voice to play a role in their education beyond the elementary classroom, and in future models of leadership.

The students' role in determining what works in schools, and what they think about leadership, is a critical and yet unexplored resource that can open at least some of the doors that remain closed between instructional leadership and student achievement. A more nuanced

description of which instructional leadership behaviors elementary school students perceive to influence their academic achievement and experiences of school will provide both new and experienced principals with something they can use to develop their practice. While data and research has repeatedly suggested that strong instructional leaders are working in the trenches with the students, a clear portrayal of the relationships between these two groups, told from the often-overlooked perspective of the student, is critical if principals truly want to meet the needs of their schools' most important asset, the child. In an educational landscape that is becoming more inclusive, and at the same time more diverse, it is now more important than ever to examine models of distributive leadership in which student perspectives are used to reshape applied work for school leaders.

Conclusions

Toward a Theory of Engaging Students in School Leadership

In the following passage, I will present my new theory on how principals can create more responsive approaches to school leadership by including students' perspectives on school and school leadership in their own agendas, strategies, and goals. I will be using the adapted version of Allen's (1983) theoretical framework from my literature review to capture and explain how students can be more actively considered as partners in co-developing approaches to instructional leadership, and student achievement outcomes.

This adapted framework, and my theory, provides an alternative to more unidirectional approaches to understanding the connection that exists between principals' strategies for improving the instructional program, and students' strategies for succeeding academically in schools. The relationships between these two groups have been discussed at length from the

perspective of the adult. This model serves to demonstrate the importance of developing a line of inquiry that not only includes the students' perspectives, but also places it beside that of the principal. This model also highlights the important role student voice plays in empowering students as learners, and serves as a guide for how students' perspectives can be used to shape and guide new forms of leadership.

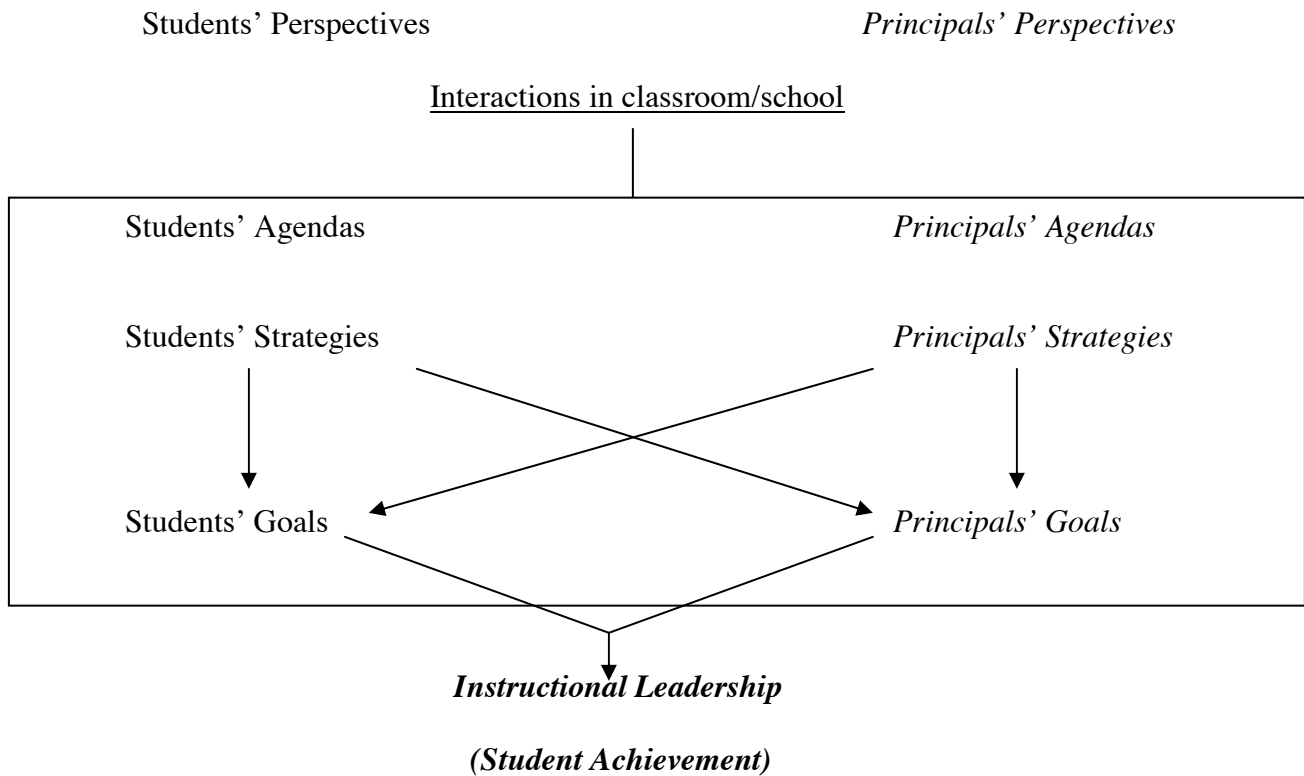


Figure 6.1: *Bidirectional Instructional Leadership Model*, adapted from Allen (1983).

In this qualitative study, I explore what elementary school students perceive to be the biggest challenges they face in school, and how principals help students with the challenges they face. I did this by going directly to principals to ask them a wide range of questions focused on their approaches to leadership and their work with kids. I then spoke with their students and asked about their impressions of their principal, and about their thoughts and feelings about school. After in-depth interviewing and observation at four very different schools, with four

different principals and groups of students, I have developed a new theory that I will present here in an effort to inform educators and researchers who seek to strengthen the opportunities of students, and the leadership practices of school principals. Central to this is a call for principals to use more student-driven approaches to guiding their principalship, so that students can be empowered as learners and school leaders in their own right.

By better understanding principals' perspectives of leadership (and their agendas, strategies, and goals), researchers and practitioners can see how they are connected or developed in response to those of the students. This concept of principals' responsiveness is a core value of this study. Our need to define principals as the ones who seek out the opinions and perspectives of those they serve, rather than making decisions for them, is a significant but necessary departure from more traditional approaches to leadership. Principals that only use adult perspectives to shape their leadership practices leave students to circumvent or adapt to goals that in many cases will not square with their own, and may impede their ability to develop socially and academically. Findings indicate that when principals look inside of their school for help with solving problems faced by their students, instead of looking outside of school, more authentic and transformational approaches can be developed to create schools that are more responsive to students' needs.

Business and industry leadership has long-recognized the value of involving line-workers in decisions about how their work is organized and conducted (Wilkinson, 1998). While effective leadership, strong teachers, and socioeconomic status have been cited as a few of the many determinants that make up a successful school, students are the ones that are actually doing the work of learning. Students are education's line-workers, and it is the quality of their work that inevitably determines the success of the entire organization. Despite this fact, students have

not been treated as vital to the success of schools by most practitioners and scholars. While university students have been actively involved in evaluating their instructors and postsecondary programs for over a half century (Becker, 1961), and secondary students have been given opportunities to reflect on their experiences of school (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001), younger students perspectives are rarely if ever used to inform the work of researchers of practitioners.

Schools teach kids about how to deal with problems based on how adults like these principals deal with their own challenges. Research demonstrates that when teachers develop strategies designed to meet students' academic and psychological needs, they can promote their students sense of responsibility and voice in the classroom (Schneider, 1996). When teachers set up systems to actively engage students in their own learning (such as cooperative learning, self-assessment, student-teacher contracts, class meetings to address problems, and lessons designed for student-constructed processing), students become more responsible and are able to self-direct more of their behavior over time (Gossen, 1992). Many teachers however are reluctant to give students opportunities like these and can get caught up in (and even contribute to) the same self-defeating mindset of their students (Schneider, 1996). Teachers and even principals have for years attributed causes for failure to any number of causes out of their direct control (e.g., lack of resources, poor parenting, etc.).

While principals have long been regarded as the school managers, they are also in a unique position to show a larger population of students that they can or cannot have a voice based on the work that they do. This has far-reaching effects on the students and their future role in society. It also has a direct impact on how teachers choose to run their classrooms and structure their interactions with kids. While most principals in this study agreed that a big part of their job was making sure they had the best teachers possible, and that teachers were the ones

capable of impacting change, principals invariably shape the work of the teachers, and enact policies and practice that affects the way teachers teach and students learn.

Even though principals today are supposed to spend more time focusing on teaching and learning than ever before, there is evidence that students and student learning often take a back seat to the work of adults in school. Conversations and observation at these schools also indicated that there is a discrepancy between what some principals say, and what they actually do. While some principals acknowledge the value student driven approaches to school leadership have for empowering kids, and are able to talk about some ways they promote quality instruction for kids based on the instructional leadership vernacular, I found limited evidence that principals actively use student voice or interact with students directly in an effort to address problems in their schools.

Findings from the field indicate that this is not because principals can not or do not have the time to use more student-driven approaches to guide their instructional program. Instead, this research has found that principals choose to use these approaches based on whether or not they value receiving direct input from kids. Principals choose to let students' perspectives affect their agenda, strategies, and goals based on whether or not they believe this is important. While some principals may be unaware that such a choice even exists, and instead take more traditional and managerial approaches to their work, there is evidence that some principals are aware that there is a choice, and still make an active decision to not give students opportunities to share how they think and feel about school.

These observations reinforce the conclusions I drew from my discussion: principals who are not using student-driven approaches to guide their principalship are left with personal inclination or externally-derived models in their quest to provide structure to the school's

instructional program. Many of these choices were based on assumptions principals have about what students are capable of contributing to a discussion on what does or does not work in schools. These assumptions were largely based on (1) whether or not it had occurred to principals that using student voice was a possibility, (2) perceived competence as it relates to a student's age, and (3) preconceived notions about whether or not students should have a say in their experiences of school. These assumptions existed when principals develop and demonstrate leadership behaviors that underestimate what students are capable of contributing to the school. While every principal in the study was willing to engage in an indirect conversation with students about the challenges they face, few principals actively look to see what students think about school, and even fewer use student voice to shape their approaches to leadership.

At FH, students shared stories about teachers that made them feel uncomfortable, and by the end of the study, began to realize that the principal was someone that could help them with their problems. At Lodi, students wanted their principal to develop some new approaches to his interactions with students, and also provided some ideas for restructuring school events like open house and assembly. At Everton, students' behavior during focus groups alone demonstrated that they were having trouble engaging with the instructional program. They also cited a range of physical factors around the school (such as the condition of the classrooms and hallways), and factors inside the classroom (such as disruptive students and overwhelmed teachers) as hindrances to their learning. At Carter, students spoke openly about how they wanted more of the direct instructional and social/emotional support the principal was already providing.

At the root of many of the assumptions made by principals was a reluctance to concede or modify their current position of authority and adopt a more shared approach to making decisions in schools. This autonomy, which gives principals their sense of professionalism and a feeling of

control over their school, can also get in the way of collaboration with staff and students, and communication structures which might allow for alternative forms of interaction. Opportunities to make adjustments to the instructional program and to impact student learning outcomes are lost when leaders take more autocratic approaches to making important decisions in schools.

All of the principals spoke to the quality of leadership and strength of the teachers that were in the building before their arrival as a key factor for determining how, where, when, and why they spent their time the way they did. As a result, early analysis led me to believe that principals' leadership styles were in part influenced by the work of their predecessors and that school leaders inherit their approaches to leadership, and play more of a maintenance role in schools that are not in a situation of crisis. After more in-depth analysis, observation, and interview I have concluded that age, training, and personal background have also played a significant role in shaping the choices these principals make regarding school leadership.

It is plausible that older principals idealized their 'better days' when they had more time to be in the classrooms, or more energy, or when there were more resources and fewer students. Our youngest principal, however, made no excuses and said that the principal is the one who is responsible for the success of the students. He also pointed to his more recent training and experiences working with strong (and not so strong) principals in the recent past as instrumental to his development as an urban school leader.

While there was some evidence that students felt like they could identify more with principals and teachers who shared a similar background, I do not believe that race or gender played a role in determining whether or not these principals choose to work closely with their students, or how students' perceived their principal's role as school leader. At our suburban and rural school, predominantly white students were able to identify with their white middle-class

male principals despite the lack of meaningful interactions they held with them on a regular basis. At Carter, a predominantly black high-poverty community, students did say they were better able to identify with adults (including their black male principal) that were of the same race. Despite these findings, there was ample evidence that students at Everton, a predominantly black school with a white female principal, had no problems going to their principal for support of any kind.

In schools where students did not perceive their principal to be someone that they could go to for help with their challenges, student voice occasionally manifested itself as an oppositional behavior. While these schools had less problems with insubordination based on a variety of factors including socioeconomic status, school resources, teaching experience, and school climate, findings indicate that students would react to conditions in ways that did not fit their principal's preferences in order to get the principal's attention. As a result, principals would then have to deal with student voice in the form of resistance or by way of parents, instead of using that voice to structure their approaches to leadership early on.

Both my review of the literature and research data from the field indicate that principals who increase student responsibility and use student voice to drive their instructional leadership have empowered students as learners. This empowerment has resulted in better behavior, increased engagement in the instructional program, and the development of a more shared set of goals between students and staff. Principals have done this by playing a more visible and accessible role school-wide and in classrooms, and by having more direct instructional contact with the students. Outside of the classrooms these principals have also been able to speak with students about problems that affect their learning inside and outside of school. The data suggest that instructional leaders can develop more specific goals using a vision which is shared by the

students, reflects student concerns, and in which students had a voice in creating, if they want to create a school climate that is more inclusive, conducive to learning, and better equipped to respond to change.

Research that seeks to understand principals' perceptions of how schools best operate, and then places adult perspectives alongside those students have about school, can develop a better understanding of how students and principals can work together to create more equitable and excellent schools. Principals' direct and indirect approaches to promoting the instruction that takes place in their schools has a significant impact on students' experiences of education. By better understanding how principals think about the approaches they take, students' learning outcomes and teacher efficacy can be enhanced. Principals and students play key roles in shaping school culture, and enter school with similar goals. These shared goals include an intention to succeed as participants in the academic program, as well as a strong desire to be supported socially and emotionally. Principals willing to explore their perceptions of students and student learning in depth are better able to understand their relationships with students, and the role they play in determining the success of both the school and the principalship.

Students' thoughts and feelings matter and can provide schools and the research community with new evidence that be used to inform the existing research on instructional leadership and administrative function in the field. This study has shown that principals are interested in what younger students have to say about their work. It has also helped principals realize the value these perspectives have for shaping their work as school leader.

Students have also been affected by this study. Students felt empowered when adults took the time to ask them about their challenges. When asked about what they would like to see done differently, some students were quick to ask for more instructional support from their

principals. Others remarked that they would like to see their principals develop new ways of approaching their administrative function. Still others spoke openly about their teachers and peers, or about how their principal could help support them socially and emotionally.

In each school, students had different sets of challenges and adults helping them with these challenges. In all of the schools, however, students were clear about what they could use to help them learn better, and in each of these cases, principals were in a position to adapt their agendas, goals, and strategies to those of their students. Principals that underestimate student agency, have trouble addressing diversity, and fail to make themselves accessible to their students limit their own opportunities for reform.

Implications

The findings of my study hold several important implications for leadership practice and preparation. In the following section, I present the value this research holds for principals interested in adapting their approaches to working with students. Finally, I will present a new framework that can be adopted by university leadership programs interested in becoming more student-centered.

Practice

Principals can use students' thoughts and feelings about a whole range of school-wide factors to inform their practice. They ought to do this because their assumptions about what works have largely been based on more traditional approaches to school leadership, which have in turn been informed by a body of adultcentric research and experience. There has also been evidence to suggest that leaders need their students' perspectives and cooperation to develop

their administrative function. Neither tradition nor the extant research on school leadership can, in every case, match what students are actually looking for in their school leader.

After sitting down and speaking with students, I found that they are asking for more of that direct academic and social/emotional support. Students value opportunities to receive the principal's assistance in schools where students have had more frequent interactions with principals, as well as in schools where they have had less frequent interactions. Students like when principals ask them questions and provide them with support because it shows them someone important cares about what they are learning. These observations align with and build on existing student perspective research that says students are confused when principals enter the room and only interact with the teacher, do not interact at all, or limit their feedback to teacher performance (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). When principals do not interact with students, or talk to them about what they are learning, students are left to wonder what the principal actually does, and whether the principal actually cares about their learning.

There is also evidence that principals are not setting up systems to help them focus their time on improving students' experiences of learning. For example, of the four principals included in this study, only one principal has a capable group of secretaries handling his more managerial responsibilities. As a result, he can routinely spend his time monitoring teaching and learning in his school's classrooms. This clear and consistent contact with students and teachers provides him with opportunities to provide students and teachers with more focused feedback and instructional support than colleagues who only observe for short periods of time during informal walk-throughs, or who limit their interactions with students to matters of discipline. Principals that are in the classrooms, hallways, and lunchroom throughout the day are better able

to solve little problems before they become big problems, and develop proactive strategies that anticipate or respond to challenges students face in school.

While time constraints, accountability demands, and new initiatives from above are limiting the amount of free time principals have to devote to instruction, it was clear that principals who are not managing crises are able to choose how they spend significant parts of their day. Furthermore, our principal at Carter illustrated that the management of what some people think of as crises can be delegated to others. However, these choices rarely included interacting with students or supporting classroom instruction directly, or even indirectly in some cases. Principals need to set up systems that allow them to have more routine, structured, and meaningful interactions with the students and the instructional program during the day. Students' voices can be heard (quite literally) by principals who put themselves in the position of interacting with students, without having to develop any formal procedures for involving students in decision-making. Data indicates that principals who are in the classrooms should be providing feedback to teachers *and* students, and coaching them both if they want to develop a more cohesive and coherent approach to instructional leadership.

There is also evidence to suggest that after being given opportunities to develop a dialogue with students, school leaders became more interested in using student voice to inform their decision-making and empower students as learners. Principals in this study were eager to see and hear about what the students thought of them. Students' comments and feedback challenged principals to think more deeply about their important role as learner, and prompted them to develop sets of questions for the students that held real value for how they approached a range of leadership decisions. Principals also thought that if students saw the changes they were

discussing in their focus groups happen in their site, that it could be an empowering experience for kids, and a valuable new leadership tool.

Preparation

While leadership development programs are aiming to provide young and veteran principals with the tools they need to succeed in today's schools, many principals still find preparation programs to be out of touch with today's realities (Butler, 2008). One possible reason why principals have been reporting frustration after entering the high-stakes world of school leadership may be that they have not been taught how they can help students deal with the unique challenges many of them are facing in school. Principal preparation programs have largely failed to convey the significance of using student voice, instead focusing on professional development, models of shared leadership that include only adults, and on the administrator's function as a data-driven decision-maker or instructional coordinator (Hess, 2007).

While each of these functions is essential to the principal's success, particularly in schools that have been struggling academically, students are largely excluded from their principal's formula for success, and more responsive approaches that involve working with kids, or taking the students' lead, are all but ignored here in the United States. Programs that address this issue of principal's choice, and that recognize the value of using students' perspectives of leadership to develop both the administrative function and students' experiences of school, could provide principal candidates, many of which enter these programs as experienced or talented instructors, with a more seamless transition into leadership. They could also help focus the principal's work around a key variable (students and student learning) that actually hold real value for the overall success of the school.

Preparation programs are responsible for helping preservice administrators develop strategies that include students in models of shared decision-making. These programs can help show principals how to make the time for regular instructional contact with students and student learning in the classrooms. Programs that can help principals develop ways of eliciting student voice as it relates to students' experiences of learning, and help principals find ways of applying what they have learned, will empower students as learners and leaders in their own right. Preparation programs could also instill in their principal candidates an awareness that students are the ones actually doing the work of learning, and help principals model this understanding for other adults in the school so that all students may become more responsible learners.

Suggestions for Future Research

In the following section, I will present ideas for further research and indicate where this work met with limitations. I will first identify several key limitations to this research study. The first and most concerning limitation is that while I was able to raise the students' awareness about what their principals do, and raise the principal's awareness of what the students think, I was not able to use my shared theory to make the changes students would have liked to have seen made in their schools. The qualitative research method, which involved multiple focus groups, one-on-one interviews with principals, and observations of the interactions taking place, was designed to be action relevant. At the time of this analysis, the principals have not reported that they are using the findings, or the method, to impact change in their schools. While principals may one day use these findings, and a few expressed a genuine understanding and excitement for the value these findings could have for informing their leadership function and the experiences of the students in the future, my final focus group with students was the last

interaction I was able to have with students or principals in these schools. Four case studies limit my ability to generalize and follow through with suspicions I have about how principals approach their role as administrator. This lack of longitudinal data also prevents me from demonstrating how principals might use student voice to structure their approaches to leadership over time.

If I were able to orchestrate a more longitudinal process and keep the dialogue between principals and kids going over time, I would ask students to do a series of drawings and compose illustrative journals. These journals would allow me to analyze in greater depth any changes that occurred to their thinking about their principal as a result of having been able to talk and think about the principal's work. I would also ask the principals to more actively develop questions for the students relating to various events taking place inside and outside of the school. By doing so principals might be better able to see how the perceptions students have on a wide range of factors that influence their learning can be used to help them develop programming or supports to suit the needs of their students. This approach might also allow principals to sustain a dialogue with students independent of my participation. Research demonstrates that when adults develop student forums, or empowerment groups, that promote problem-solving skills, social action, and civic participation for elementary school and early adolescent youth, students can be empowered as learners and decision makers (Bemak, F. et al., 2005; Wilson, et al., 2007). While these adults are typically school counselors, there is evidence from this study that school principals are also capable of developing empowerment groups for their students.

However, for the purposes of this study, principals, parents, teachers and I all wanted to minimize the amount of time students would be out of the classroom, while still giving me an opportunity to meet with students twice during the semester to develop a shared theory. As a

result, I was only able to meet with each group of students twice, and for only 45 minutes each time.³¹ There were also some unanticipated occurrences in schools that further diminished the amount and quality of time I was able to spend with students. At sites where students within the focus groups were dealing with behavioral infractions on one of the days focus groups were scheduled, and either showed up late, left early, or were absent from the focus group on this day, students became distracted, and their responses were often vague, not fully articulated, or completely off topic.

Another unforeseen factor that had an impact on the amount of quality time I was able to spend with students was the quality of the school official or moderator present during the focus group interviews. At sites where students were excited to be a part of the focus groups, or where moderators had a strong presence, the group was able to stay on topic for the entire 45 minutes, thus maximizing the potential these conversations had for empowering students and informing the work of principals. At sites where moderators came and went during the interview, or where moderators and students were distracted, students struggled to stay on topic, and less useful data was gathered as a result. Another limitation brought on by the time constraints was that students were not able to completely understand the value of their participation.³² While many students looked forward to focus groups, and all understood what it was I was hoping to achieve by speaking with them, I am not confident they completely understood the value their voice had within the context of the study, or within the context of their schools.

Time constraints also got in the way of my ability to investigate how parents and teachers have and will continue to serve as a key channel for student input. While several parents across

³¹ This was an improvement considering the original arrangement with the principals was that I meet with students for 30 minutes each time.

³² This was not strictly a time-related factor. Neither students nor their principals (in most cases) had even thought of what their voice might add before this study.

each of the four schools wanted to learn more about the study, and I was introduced to some of these same parents during my visits to the schools, I was unable to ask them directly about how they serve as a conduit for student voice. Some of the parents whose students were included in this study also spoke of their admiration for the value this work held and were curious to see what I would learn from the students.

While the extensive literature on school-family relationships (Epstein, 2001; Lareau, 1999) emphasizes educators' resistance to parent interference, it's clear that parents are also able to identify kids' needs and bring them to the school system's attention. I believe that a parallel study that was able to examine parents as an alternative source of authority on what kids need, or as a vehicle for communicating concerns that kids bring to their attention, might provide a missing link for principals interested in reshaping their approaches to leadership for students and parents. Listening to parents may be an important way of listening to kids, and it seems entirely plausible that exploring students' voices alongside those of the parents would be an important extension of this work.

For the purposes of this study I have started with the most obvious and necessary place for examining student voice, but this is only the most obvious and direct way. It is also possible that teachers, counselors and other community members might be alternative sources and vehicles for transmitting knowledge about what the kids have to say. The need for future research to examine and understand the wide variety of ways in which principals can be more responsive to students, and the challenges they face, is critical if school leaders want to become better leaders of youth.

While I began to develop a discussion on how student resistance is itself a form of student voice and input for principals during the first two sections of this chapter, there is a need to explore this topic further as it relates to how students and principals interact.

During the discussion and conclusions sections of this chapter, I mentioned how student voice manifested itself as an oppositional behavior in schools where principals had few interactions with students. The research community has explored this alternative understanding of how student voice can be used in schools in some depth. Giroux & McLaren (1986) claim that urban students respond with resistance because their racial/ethnic identities prompt them to reject the hegemony of the white adults who control their learning. However, the urban students surveyed in this study (one urban school had a black principal and the other did not) said they would have no problem going straight to their principals with a range of academic or social/emotional concerns. Our lone African-American principal even took the time to ask how the students felt about the fact that they did not have as many African-American role models in school as part of my research model.

At our suburban and rural sites, where principals, teachers, and students were predominantly Caucasian, students did not perceive their principal as someone they would approach to talk about their problems. As a result, when I asked students how they would express themselves if they were having a problem in school, they responded by saying they would misbehave, or find alternative ways to get their attention. This unexpected finding, which contradicts the extant research on resistant behavior, highlights the importance of developing a deeper understanding of how principals' approaches to leadership, and not the color of their skin, might serve to help us explore whether or not this oppositional behavior is more a case of principals not engaging with kids.

Another limitation was that none of the students interviewed has ever had an opportunity to talk about the work of their principals before. I am capturing and using these unrehearsed perspectives on a topic that they have had few opportunities to think about, and even fewer opportunities to share out loud with members of the school community and peers. While this meant that a few of these young students were a little unsure of how they should answer the questions, or how they chose to participate in focus group conversations, there were many more students who were unafraid to share their perspectives on a whole range of school wide factors. These factors included problems students were having with teachers, accessibility of the principal, quantity and quality of interactions with the principal, distractions inside and outside of school, and the physical condition of the school and its classrooms.

In addition to talking about principals, and responding to both my questions and those posed by the principal, students also wanted to talk about teachers and teaching, bullying, consolidation, and factors affecting their learning outside the classroom. These students challenged the principals and me to analyze their brilliant and imaginative illustrations, honest feedback, and timely concerns in a way that allowed both of us an opportunity to see how research like this could hold real value for practitioners, and inspire future research.

Another limitation involved the recruitment of both principals and students. During the principal recruitment process it was my intention to find principals who were exemplary at using student voice to drive their approaches to leadership. However, during the initial screening process only five principals responded to my e-mail introducing the study. While I conducted screening interviews with all five of these principals, and each was enthusiastic about the value a study like this one could hold for their work and their students, I ended up selecting principals (and their schools) based on their expressions of interest in student voice, and willingness to

participate in the study, rather than on documentation that they were excellent at using student-driven approaches to leadership. While finding principals who use student voice to structure their approaches to leadership proved more difficult than I had thought, it's important to note that these principals used a range of approaches to leading their schools, and that the study helped some principals, and many more students, realize the potential of using student voice in their schools. Still, the limited the range of experiences I was able to document, was due in no small part to the fact that many of these principals had never actively used student voice to help them make important decisions.

Future research with student-centered principals who have proven over time and have concrete evidence of having created opportunities for students to use them as an instructional resource, a social/emotional support, and include them in models of shared decision-making might reveal a much different set of findings. Such findings could better serve a research community looking to provide hard evidence of the possibility of direct effects of leadership for principals that do not use student-centered strategies. Some of the principals included in this study functioned more as school managers than as leaders, and their approaches to the principalship were less evolved and could be characterized as adultcentric, or paternalistic in nature. Not selecting principals who prove unable to develop specific goals using a shared vision that include the students in developing a school climate, would allow a study like this one to be even more non-traditional, and would hold potential for using the principals and students even more responsible for analyzing the data. More specific criteria for not including principals in a future study might include: focusing primarily on improving the work of adults in school, limiting classroom and hallway contact to conversations with teachers, and failing to confront barriers in cultures and subcultures of the school.

Another limitation regarding recruitment had to do with the number and grade levels of focus groups. Initially this study sought to conduct one pair of focus group interviews with students at each grade level in each school. If sites were smaller or had different grade-levels, my plan was to conduct additional focus groups to make sure that each site had the same number of students participating in the data production. Because members of my dissertation committee, school principals and I thought that conducting more than two focus groups at each site would be an overwhelming amount of data collection and analysis, I decided to revise my approach to include students at two grade levels in each site. This worked fairly well as both rural and suburban principals granted me access to students in grades three and four, and urban principals granted me access to students in grades four and five.

However, the response rate for parents in urban schools was far below that of the other sites, and as a result one school (Carter Elementary) only received enough responses to have one focus group with a group of fifth graders. While the quality of the data from Carter's students made up for the lack of a second focus group, this school's student population was underrepresented by the study, and as a result, there was less data to include in the principal's and my analysis of student data. A study that met with students across all grade-levels, and over an extended period of time, might reveal findings different from the ones we see here. It might also further empower these students as learners, and as active participants in models of school leadership.

A second suggestion speaks directly to this study's inability to use the action-relevant dialogue to impact real change in the research sites. A parallel or ancillary study which integrated principals who want to use the shared theory developed from this cogenerative method of learning, and test the impact of the findings, would reveal a great deal more. A study such as

this would require a great deal more trust on the part of principals, who would be using students' comments and feedback from conversations with a researcher to impact changes they make in their own work. A longitudinal study of principals and students, developed over an extended period of time, might help build this trust. If such a trust could be developed, I believe a study that analyzed the impact of using student's perspectives to inform any number of different factors from leadership to learning, could excite the work of principals and students, and empower students as learners.

Another study, that would help eliminate the limitation of student awareness expressed in the passage above, might revisit the schools to speak with the students in the future to ask them about how being a part of a study like this, changed or impacted the way they felt about their school, their principal, or the power their voice held for impacting real change in their schools. Such a study might provide the researcher with additional evidence that could be used to revise the research method. It might also remind the students of the value their voice holds throughout their careers as learners.

My study also highlights the importance of raising principals' awareness around the choices that they make. While Joseph spent most of his time managing the ebb and flow of the day, it was clear that David was able to manage these tasks and still take the time to have structured interactions with kids on a regular basis. Future research that highlighted this concept of principals' choice, or personal inclination, by examining how principals like David engage with students, might help principals recognize there are alternative and potentially more effective ways of spending their time in school.

Another example of how this research method could be used in the future would be to capture perspectives on topics the kids already have experience discussing or are more familiar

based on exposure in the classroom. For example, a research study that focused solely on students' perceptions of disciplinary measures taken in the classroom, situated beside teacher's perspectives, might reveal more focused and concentrated data that would translate more easily into actual practice. While younger students may still not have had opportunities to share perspectives on more familiar topics like this with peers, they have undoubtedly spent some time thinking about how the adults' approaches impact their experiences as they relate to safety and comfort in the classroom.

Another strand of research that began to develop was inspired by one principal's own dissertation research, and a question he asked the students regarding how they felt about the lack of African-American role models in their school. Students in this urban school mentioned that they did think about race, and wished they had more adults they could connect with at their site. These students also expressed that they wish they had more in common with their teachers.

At our suburban site, students were able to identify with their teachers and principal, both of which actively participated in extracurricular activities in the same suburban community. These students felt like their school, its values, and each of its members was a reflection of what they saw at home and throughout the community on the weekends. At Carter and Everton, however, many adults in the building flee the area for more affluent urban and suburban neighborhoods outside of the city center. One study that would help students in urban schools like these cope with the lack of role-models that look like them, might be to explore this topic of race as it relates to their experiences of education, and their impressions of how it might impact their future roles in society, using the same research method.

During the emerging themes section of this same chapter, I began to explore the differences between behaviors students perceive as having a high or low influence on their

learning, and the differences between direct and indirect leadership behaviors of the principals. This study, and other student perspective research, has found that students perceive some behaviors to have a high influence on their learning (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007), and there are some behaviors they do not perceive to have any influence on their learning at all. These high and low influence behaviors can also be direct or indirect. Direct behaviors describe when principals actively engage with students. Indirect behaviors, which occur when principals are not actively engaged with students, can be studied by speaking with the principal, his or her office staff, teachers, parents, community stakeholders, and of course the kids who may also be aware of changes that have occurred over time.

A quantitative or mixed methods study that focused more specifically on the nature of each behavior, and the impact each has on student learning outcomes, would help develop an understanding of which behaviors are more effective than others. This research would be a valuable tool for helping principals prioritize their responsibilities. It might also help principals better manage their time, and lead them towards more instructional contact with students in the future.

Finally, due to the amount of methodological diversity of research on topics such as leadership, there are other weaknesses in the research method. While the literature review was able to uniquely synthesize elements of three strands of research using a theoretical framework, there may still be gaps in the knowledge that exists between the three. For example, the effects of effective leadership on student learning has been examined at some depth and yet there is little research that has included students' perspectives on what principals actually do to influence their learning (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Because of this, no one has taken the time to analyze the

methods researchers have taken to understand the relationships that take place between students and school leaders.

While this provides my qualitative study with its significance, it also presents some challenges. An exhaustive review of youth methods studies, and student perspective research could develop different results from the method being developed here. As a result, the findings and conclusions reached in the development of this new method cannot claim to be entirely representative of the three extensive bodies of literature (Randolph, 2009). This review also neglected to include studies presented at conferences, or non-empirical literature. As student perspective research continues to develop, so does the quality of the information present in these excluded bodies of research. In developing my line of inquiry into student perspectives and educational leadership I was able to speak directly with James Gentilucci, Jane Taylor Wilson, and learn from George Theoharis, current experts in both of these fields. Despite the presence of research methods experts in my very own University and School of Education (Biklen, 2004), I was not able to solicit ideas about my topic from this group apart from what was gained in two discontinuous qualitative research classes; in between which the bulk of the research approaches were developed. By not taking advantage of this opportunity, and by not distributing sets of my findings to experts in research methods during my planning phase and subsequent literature review, I may have impacted the direction this research has taken.

Methodological Observations

In the following section, I will address some methodological observations that I made based on my conversations with principals and students. I also address my role as researcher. These observations are presented to develop a deeper understanding of how the research method

can be improved, how students and principals benefited from this work, and address logistical concerns that arose at different points in the study.

Students

Many students genuinely enjoyed and even looked forward to coming to these focus groups. The most exciting part of conducting this research was when I would pose a question, and the students would completely take the reigns and use that question as an opportunity to voice their concerns about any number of school wide factors affecting their learning. Many of these same conversations went right up until the moment where they had to go back to class, and could have continued on for well over the 45 minutes allotted for these interviews. As I would walk students back to class, they were often visibly excited by having had an opportunity to share their impressions of the work being done by adults in their school. These experiences left them feeling like their voice mattered, and that they might have a say in how their classes were taught, and their school was run.

In addition to the exciting moments of focus group dialogue, which typically emerged during the second focus group across sites, there were moments in the focus groups when students felt restricted, particularly during the first interviews, and particularly at the first site where interviews were conducted. Despite my efforts to open the conversation with some fun, relevant, and age appropriate warm-up activities (some of which revealed surprising data in their own right), I found myself wanting answers to so many questions during my first interview that I neglected to give each group member equal opportunities to express themselves in a more open and comfortable conversation-like setting. My reluctance to hand the conversation over to the students was something that became very obvious after my early analysis of the first focus groups and modifications to my approach were made during subsequent visits.

There were also some challenges regarding student behavior as I mentioned above in the limitations section. As a long time urban elementary practitioner, I anticipated that students might become distracted during a 30-45-minute session where they were being asked to talk, draw, write, and listen to conversations about a topic that they probably saw little relevance in initially. This was in fact the case at one site, and with only one focus group. Still, with only a total of seven focus groups in the whole study, and fourteen opportunities for interviews, these two opportunities to interact were nearly squandered. One student repeatedly tore up their illustrations, or made fun of others. Other students wanted to draw but did not feel comfortable drawing because they felt they could not draw as well as their peers. All of these factors, along with the altercation between students in the focus group and the lack of a consistent moderator, made data collection a challenge with this particular group.

Despite these challenges, I still found that some of the richest data I was able to gather across research sites was in this very school, with another focus group, and at a neighboring urban school in this urban district. These students' perspectives on a wide range of topics including safety, race, and teacher practice were eye opening and uninhibited compared to those of the students in rural and suburban settings. While it was much harder to recruit students in both of the urban sites, the students that finally sat down with me on interview day had so much to offer not only on the research topic, but also wanted to know about my background as a student in the same urban district, my experiences of learning, as well as my impressions of their school, neighborhood, and even their illustrations. These students asked me, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and then they shared their own hopes and dreams because someone who they felt cared was there to listen and even document their responses.

The power this work has for making principals aware of a new tool to improve their practice and schools is very real, but perhaps its greatest power lies in its ability to impact the lives of kids that have not had opportunities to be heard in this way before. These opportunities were genuinely empowering for young students from all backgrounds, and have inspired me to continue to develop this method in order to give students' voice on a wider range of factors effecting their learning in the future.

Principals

It is important to note that the principals selected for the purpose of this study were not chosen because they were recognized as being exemplary at using student-driven approaches to guide their work. While all principals included in this study were enthusiastic about their participation, it became clear that each of these principals has a very unique skill set which they apply in their schools. After conducting my screening interview, I determined that most principals thought the study was interesting and saw it as something that could possibly be used to inform their work. I then thought that these principals would naturally be very strong leaders of students. Why else would they allow themselves to be subjected to such research?

It turned out that each of these principals was quite different from one another. Each had their own set of strengths, weaknesses, experiences, agendas, strategies, and goals. These differences, although surprising and even a bit disconcerting at first, proved key to my analysis and it was interesting to see how each of these principals was an expert at different aspects of their jobs.

Students at rural and suburban sites had a harder time relating to their principals and providing specific feedback around what they would like to see their principals change or do more of in schools where the principal did not interact with the instructional program as directly

as did the principals in our urban schools. In schools where the principal was more of a presence, it is clear that students knew more about what the principal's role was, how it could be improved, and were better able to articulate their opinions, share their experiences of school, and actively participate in conversations around leadership.

Researcher

I understand that my decision to refer to my participants as co-authors, and to purposefully weave my own and their interpretations of the data produced by and with participants in order to create the unconventional narrative that appears in chapter four, may be perceived by some as biased. The decision to play an active role in the data production process and to treat our mutually-developed interpretations as data was one I did not take lightly, and came after careful deliberation and review of a wide range of educational research studies. The narrative that emerges in chapter four does more than hold a mirror up to what is happening in these schools. The narrative is designed to reflect what is happening in these schools, but it is also designed to improve the work being done by principals for students and is connected directly to this concept of cogenerative dialogue.

I never wanted to be separate from the data or the story I presented in this study. I wanted to connect with principals and students and have them speak openly about the challenges they face and their experiences of learning. Most importantly, I was curious to see what both classes of participants would say when given an opportunity to talk about topics that few of the participants had ever explored before I entered their lives. During this process, I wanted the students to see the potential their voice has for improving their schools. I also wanted students to feel like their thoughts and feelings about leadership matter and for principals to acknowledge their importance. I have made every effort not to criticize these principals, and to represent the

participants in a way that is fair throughout my analysis. However, in my effort to come to terms with the following strong and compelling finding, that principals are better at talking about student-centered approaches than actually representing those approaches, I found it critical that I intercede in order to connect my literature review and our data to our new shared theory.

Concluding Reflections

I felt the need to check in with my four school principals one month into the fall semester to see if any changes had taken place over the summer. The local newspaper reported that Leah's site, Everton Elementary, was closed at the end of last school year so I was curious to see where she would end up. Mark's site was being consolidated with another school so I also felt compelled to see whether or not he would engage with his new batch of students in ways he said he might during our final interview. Based on this knowledge, I decided to ask just a few brief questions to see how things were going: (1) Do you find yourself in the same position you were last year? (2) How has the start of this new school year unfolded for you? And (3) have you made any changes to how you structure your interactions with kids?

As was typically the case during the previous school year, Joseph at FH replied within minutes of receiving my e-mail. Joseph's answers were succinct and to the point. He remarked that he was still the principal, that the school was off to an excellent beginning, and that his interactions with kids are similar to what he has done in the past. A few days later I heard from Mark who now finds himself using a co-principal model at a new PK-6 site that has nearly 500 more students than were at Lodi. This consolidation took place over the summer when two separate K-4 buildings merged with grades five and six from what was a middle school. Mark says that while the consolidation has gone wonderfully, he has not changed how he structures his

interactions with kids and that it is now more difficult to get around to all the classrooms. He also said that one of the reasons why they adopted the co-principal model was so that administrators would be able to spend more time with kids in classrooms, but that “old habits die hard.”

Leah now finds herself as the Director of Professional Development for the urban school district in which she has been employed. No longer the principal at Everton, she is now working on the Race To the Top reform agenda of common core instruction, supporting the district with their Annual Professional Performance Review, and working with teachers to develop their approaches to data driven instruction. Sadly, Leah, who was one of the principals most connected to students in this study, placed “N/A” as the response to the third question as she now has very few opportunities to interact with children in her current position.

Of the four principals, David was the only principal who requested we have an actual conversation around these three questions. After setting an appointment with his secretary, we spoke at length over the phone about many of the changes he decided to make at Carter over the summer, and about his experiences as principal so far this year. While much of David’s abbreviated first year was spent focusing on issues that needed to and could be resolved quickly, he has continued to tighten up his instructional program throughout the school in a few different ways.

Carter now has a school dress code, and students from all backgrounds are now attired in more formal khakis and shirts. One of the concerns expressed by students at Carter in the spring was that clothes were a source of contention, particularly among the older boys and girls who would often criticize their peers for wearing outdated apparel. The high number of refugee students were also being ostracized and ridiculed for dressing differently and this new regulation,

coordinated with the cooperation of parents from the community, has reportedly alleviated a great deal of the conflict that took place, while giving students an increased sense of community and responsibility.

The school's academic and behavioral incentive plan has also taken shape this fall as parents and special education students are being involved in distributing a range of new and exciting awards to deserving students. The school has also partnered with community stakeholders to cultivate a green space just a block away from Carter where fruits and vegetables have been planted and are being attended to by students on a regular basis.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, David has revamped the after school program to include enrichment activities that will be very unlike the ones done at Carter in the past once the program kicks off in October.³³ David said he intends to develop a student council made up of class representatives involved in the after-school program. This student council will meet with David on a weekly basis to raise concerns they have about how they are treated and how the school is run. He refers to this as a "leadership development opportunity," that is designed to infuse the conversations class representatives are having with David, with the day-to-day operations of the school. I am excited to say that I have been invited to participate in these weekly meetings between class representatives and the principal starting in just a few weeks.

Before entering the field I really did not know how students and principals would react to questions that many of them had never been asked. It is never easy, especially as a professional, to answer questions for which you have very little prior knowledge or experience. All four of the principals did their best to respond in ways that helped me understand how they thought about the research topic. During this brief study, some of the principals even began to develop a better

³³ For example, instead of playing basketball students at Carter are now designing a green room, learning to golf, and becoming involved in a student government.

understanding and appreciation for the possibilities of this work themselves. Some highlights of this study include being able to witness Mark's paradigm shift first-hand. Another was finding out after the study that David would soon be meeting with students on a regular basis to talk about issues they are having in school. It was also hard to see Leah, who was so great at connecting with kids, be relocated to a position where she will have so little contact with the students, which clearly drove her practice. Even harder was the knowledge that all of her students lost their school, their beloved principal, and are now having to re-adjust to new sites and all the challenges that come with being uprooted.

The most rewarding part of this work was being able to sit down with students and have conversations uninterrupted by adults. As a long time elementary school teacher I always cherished the few moments when I was able to speak with kids about problems they face in school, or even just listen to them talk about their lives.³⁴ Still, before entering the schools I was not sure how students would react to an outsider asking them about their principal. As a result, I was hesitant to let the conversation flow during our first focus group. During our second interview, however, conversations about leadership and challenges students were facing in school naturally opened up and students felt comfortable sharing their opinions about their principals, teachers, and school. It was in these spirited moments of focus group conversation that I saw the students, and the students saw themselves, as being capable of providing an honest and sometimes critical account of the work being done by their school leaders.

It was in these moments that I also saw students reflect on challenges that got in the way of their learning. Bullying, exclusion and unhealthy competition were just a few of the problems students cited—problems that continue to plague each of our schools to varying degrees.

³⁴ These fleeting moments only took place before or after instruction—at recess, lunch, or on trips. As a teacher I used these moments to help me develop an understanding of each student's experiences, and this input helped me become a more responsible teacher.

Students also commented that they are still being confronted with problems outside of school, and that these problems “get them off-track,” and in the way of their opportunities for growth.

After spending a significant amount of time reflecting on these challenges myself, and on how they relate to decisions principals make (or do not make), and about how talking about these challenges made the students feel empowered, I have realized the real significance of this work. While my work as an outside researcher gave students and principals opportunities to reflect and develop their thinking, the best way to conduct student perspective research may be as an insider of the school. K-12 practitioners that can actively elicit student voice and use it to shape the way they structure their students’ unique experiences of learning are in an excellent position to impact change within their classrooms, schools, and districts. If principals can structure regular interactions with their students, and focus conversation on the students’ experiences of school and learning, they will be better able to respond to student issues before they manifest as an oppositional behavior, another student failure, or reach the main office via an outsider like myself.

APPENDIX A:

Letter to Parents

**SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

Dear Parents,

This spring your principal has decided to become involved in what I believe is going to be a valuable exercise for both the students and principal at *(school name)*. This research study, entitled *Unlocking Students' Perspectives of Leadership*, is designed to answer the following question:

How do principals take their lead from students, and use student voice to create more responsive schools, and a more responsible principalship?

My name is Jonathan Damiani and I am a long-time elementary school teacher from the area, and now instructor at Syracuse University's Department of Teaching & Leadership. I have met with your principal to discuss this project at length and I am confident that it will help *(principal's name)* become a better leader of *(school's name)* students. More importantly however it is designed to empower the students as learners by asking them to comment on your principal's work and the school's instructional program.

I am studying a small group of elementary school principals who have expressed an interest in how they might take students perspectives and opinions into account when making decisions. As part of this study I will be talking with students from the schools who choose to participate about what they think about school. Students would be grouped into friendly focus groups of between four and six students each. Focus groups will be conducted outside of instructional time and last approximately thirty minutes. I will meet with each group only twice during the study, with a *(School name)* representative present. During my scheduled visits to the school, I will also be joining the principal on walk-throughs so that I can observe the natural interactions that take place between the students and the principal. Only those students who return a signed consent form will be allowed to participate in this valuable study.

If you are interested in giving your child an opportunity to become involved in this valuable project or in learning more about the study simply return a signed copy of the bottom of this form to your child's classroom teacher indicating your interest or contact me directly at (315) 744-4802 or by e-mail at jonathandamiani@hotmail.com

Sincerely,
Jonathan Damiani

I am interested in having my child participate in this project. Please send more specific information about the study.

I am interested in learning more about this study first

Parent's name _____

Phone Number _____

Student's name _____

Follow-up Letter Introducing Study

(Date)

Unlocking Students' Perspectives of Leadership

Additional Information

Your child will be asked to participate in two friendly focus groups with their classmates. Each focus group will take approximately 30 minutes of their time. All information will be kept anonymous. This means that their name will not appear anywhere and their specific answers will not be linked to their name in any way.

The benefit of this research is that you will be helping us to understand how the relationships between students and principals may lead to more efficient instructional programs, increased communication, student empowerment, and a more responsive principalship. This information should help me to prove that students' thoughts and feelings matter, and can provide schools and the research community with new evidence that can be used to inform the existing research on instructional leadership and administrative function in the field.

By taking part in the research students may benefit from having an opportunity to share their experiences of school. Principals can later use this information to better structure students' experiences, and provide students with a meaningful voice that can be used to develop the schools' instructional programs.

Sincerely,
(Principal's name)

-
- I am interested in having my child participate in this project. (*Ideas: Please send more specific information about the study –or- Please send a consent form so that I can give my child permission –or- nothing...*)
 - (*Ideas: I am interested in having the researcher contact me directly about my child's participation –or- I do not want my child to participate, etc.*).

Parent's name _____ Phone Number _____

Student's name _____

APPENDIX B:
Principal Consent Form



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP
170 Huntington Hall Syracuse, NY 13244 (315) 443-1467

Unlocking Student Perspectives of Leadership

My name is Jonathan Damiani, and I am a graduate student at Syracuse University. I would like to invite your child to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to allow them to participate or not. This sheet will explain the study to you and please feel free to ask questions about the research if you have any. I will be happy to explain anything in detail if you wish.

I am interested in learning more about how principals take their lead from students, and use student voice, to create more responsive schools, and a more responsible principalship. Your child will be asked to participate in two friendly focus groups with 4-6 of their classmates. Each focus group will take approximately 30 minutes of their time. During the focus groups students will be asked to discuss what they think and feel about their school. Focus groups will be held during lunch, or after school programs and will no way interfere with the student's instruction, grades, or relationships with their teachers or principal. Provisions will be made so that students participating in focus groups during lunch will be given ample time to eat before or during the focus group interview. All information will be kept confidential. This means that their name will not appear anywhere and their specific answers will not be linked to their name in any way.

I would also like to observe the principal's interactions with the students during the school day. At the principal's discretion these interactions might involve classroom visits, interactions in the hallway, at lunch, or during an after school program. I will use these observations as a tool for understanding and interpreting the data collected in interviews with students and principals.

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group situations. Other participants in the group will know how students answer questions. While we will discourage anyone from sharing this information outside of the group, we cannot guarantee confidentiality by other group members. We will do our best to keep all of your child's personal information private and confidential but absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

I would like to audio record and transcribe focus group interviews for analysis. I would also like to take digital photographs of any illustrations your child does during the focus groups. Audio files of the interviews and photographs will be placed in a password-protected folder on the School of Education server that only I will have access to. Once all interviews have been completed and stored on the server, the spreadsheet will be permanently deleted. Only I will have access to the records as described above. Audio files will be destroyed once they've been

transcribed (no later than August 2013). Photos of illustrations may be kept for future use (in educational presentations, workshops, etc.).

The benefit of this research is that you will be helping us to understand how the relationships between students and principals may lead to better instruction, increased communication, and student empowerment. This information should help me to prove that students' thoughts and feelings matter, and can provide schools with new evidence that can be used to inform the existing research on school leadership. By taking part in the research students may benefit from having an opportunity to share their experiences of school. Principals can later use this information to better structure students' experiences, and provide students with a say in their education.

The risks to your child of participating in this study are minimal. For example, your child might feel uncomfortable while sharing stories with the focus group. In addition, a person closely linked to the school site maybe able to recognize details in a student's story that might be shared in an excerpt for a research publication or presentation which might be uncomfortable. These risks will be minimized before each interview and before the audiotape is turned on, when we reassure participants that they may decline to answer any question they find uncomfortable. We will remove or change any easily identifiable details from any excerpt shared in a research presentation or publication to reduce the chances that anyone will recognize a student's story or description.

If you do not want your child to take part, you have the right to refuse their right to take part, without penalty. If you decide to allow them to take part and later no longer wish to have them continue, you have the right to withdraw them from the study at any time, without penalty. Furthermore students who decide they don't want to take part after arriving at the interview may ask to leave. Your child does not have to answer any questions that they do not want to answer.

If you have any questions, concerns, complaints about the research, contact Jonathan Damiani at 315-744-4802, or Dr. Joseph Shedd at 315-443-1468. If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, or if you cannot reach the investigator, contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish for my child to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree for my child to participate in focus group interviews and to be audio taped.

I do not agree for my child to participate.

I give you permission to take photographs of my child's illustrations

I do not give you permission to take photographs of my child's illustrations

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of participant

Printed name of child

Signature of researcher

Date

Printed name of researcher

Parent Consent Form



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP
170 Huntington Hall Syracuse, NY 13244 (315) 443-1467

Unlocking Student Perspectives of Leadership

My name is Jonathan Damiani, and I am a graduate student at Syracuse University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This sheet will explain the study to you and please feel free to ask questions about the research if you have any. I will be happy to explain anything in detail if you wish.

I am interested in learning more about how principals take their lead from students, and use student voice, to create more responsive schools. You will be asked to participate in two one-on-one interviews. Each interview will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. All information will be kept confidential. This means that your name and your school will not appear anywhere and your specific answers will not be linked to your name in any way.

I would like to audio record and transcribe interviews for analysis. An audio file of the interviews will be placed in a password-protected folder on the School of Education server. An electronic spreadsheet with interview numbers, written transcripts, and a study ID number will also be kept on the server. No paper copies of this spreadsheet will be produced. When the interviews are placed on the survey they will be identified as Interview #1, #2, etc. without a written record of which principal participated. Once all interviews have been completed and stored on the server, the spreadsheet will be permanently deleted. Only I will have access to the records as described above. Audio files will be kept no later than August 2013. After that date, the audio files will be permanently deleted from the server.

The benefit of this research is that you will be helping us to understand how the relationships between students and principals may lead to more efficient instructional programs, increased communication, student empowerment, and a more responsive principalship. This information should help me illustrate the various ways in which students' thoughts and feelings matter, and can provide schools and the research community with new evidence that can be used to inform the existing research on instructional leadership and administrative function in the field. By taking part in the research principals may benefit from having an opportunity to reflect on the ways they use student voice to empower students as learners. Principals can later use this information to better structure students' experiences, and provide students with a meaningful voice that can be used to develop the schools' instructional programs.

The risks to you of participating in this study are minimal, outside of the risks associated with being a principal. In addition, principals might encounter some psychological risks while

sharing stories during interviews. As a result of the focus group interviews with students, stories about your practice may be shared with parents. In addition, a person closely linked to the school site may be able to recognize details in a principal's story that might be shared in an excerpt for a research publication or presentation that might be uncomfortable. These risks will be minimized before each interview and before the audiotape is turned on, when I reassure participants that they may not answer any question they find uncomfortable. I will remove or change any easily identifiable details from any excerpt shared in a research presentation or publication to reduce the chances that anyone will recognize a principal's story or description.

If you do not want to take part, you have the right to refuse to take part, without penalty. If you decide to take part and later no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty.

If you have any questions, concerns, complaints about the research, contact Jonathan Damiani at 315-744-4802, or Dr. Joseph Shedd at 315-443-1468. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, or if you cannot reach the investigator, contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree to be audio-recorded

I do not agree to be audio-recorded

I agree to help the researcher arrange focus groups interviews with students in my school

I do not agree to participate

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of participant

Signature of researcher

Date

Printed name of researcher

Student Assent Form

Informed Assent Form for Unlocking Student Perspectives of Leadership

My name is Jonathan Damiani, and I am from the School of Education, at Syracuse University (SU). I am asking you to participate in this research study because you are an elementary school student.

PURPOSE: A research study is a way to learn more about people. In this study, I (we) am (are) trying to learn more about finding ways you can help the principal make your experience of school better, and help you learn more while you're here.

PARTICIPATION: If you decide you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to have some fun friendly conversations with your classmates about parts of school that you like, don't like, and how you would like to make them better. All of this should take about 30-45 minutes. These conversations will take place either during lunch, or during after school programs, and will in no way affect your grades, or your relationships with your teachers or principal. If focus groups are to be held during your lunch period, you will be given an opportunity to eat either before joining the focus group, or during the interview itself. I would also like to observe you and your principals during the school day. When your principal visits your classroom to check in on you, I may be there as well. I want to see how your principal helps you learn, and helps you experience school. You may also see me with your principal in the hallways, at lunch, or during recess.

RISKS & BENEFITS: There are some things about this study you should know. You may feel nervous sharing stories about your experiences of school with your classmates. We cannot guarantee that only the people in this room will know what is said. Your classmates in this room will know how you answer questions. I will discourage any of your classmates from trying to make you feel bad about anything you say during our conversation. I will do this by asking them to focus on the topic of this study and being polite and friendly at all times. This is not going to be a private conversation. I also understand that you may want to share what you have heard here with your friends and families. I will do my best to keep all of your personal information private but I cannot promise that I will be able to do so.

Not everyone who takes part in this study will benefit. A benefit means that something good happens to you. We think these benefits might be that school principals will be able to make schools better places for you to learn and share what you have to say.

ALTERNATIVES: If you do not want to be in this research study, you do not have to. You also don't have to answer any questions you don't want to.

REPORTS: When I am finished with this study I will write a report about what was learned. This report will not include your name or that you were in the study. I would also like to audio-record this study so that I can remember what you have said after I leave. I will use the recording to help me write my report about what I learned from you. I will not share this audio-recording with anyone and after I'm finished with this study I will erase it. You do not have to

be audio-recorded to be a part of this activity. I would also like to take pictures of your illustrations at the end of our meeting today. I want to take pictures so I can remember what you drew, and use those pictures to help me write my report.

VOLUNTARY: Voluntary means that you do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. I have already asked your parents if it is ok for me to ask you to take part in this study. Even though your parents said I could ask you, you still get to decide if you want to be in this research study. You can also talk with your parents, grandparents, family members, teachers, and principals before deciding whether or not to take part. No one will be mad at you or upset if you decide not to do this study. If you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too. You can also skip any of the questions you do not want to answer. If you don't want to answer a particular question you don't have to.

QUESTIONS: You can ask questions now or whenever you wish. If you want to, you may call me at 315-744-4802, or you may call Dr. Joe Shedd at 443-315-1468. If you are not happy about this study and would like to speak to someone other than me, you or your parents may call the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 315-443-3013.

Please tell me if you agree to be part of my study. You will get a copy of this form to keep for yourself.

Do you agree to be audio-recorded?

Do you agree to have your illustrations photographed?

Name of Participant _____

Signature of Investigator or Designee _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Investigator _____

APPENDIX C:
Interview Protocol- Principals

Interview 1

1. Present consent form.
2. First, there are no right or wrong answers. I am just interested in understanding the work you do with children.
3. Second, I want you to feel comfortable answering questions. We're not here to promote a particular way of thinking about leadership. I just want to understand how principals like yourself think and feel about the work you do with kids.

Opening Script

Thanks so much for taking the time to speak with me. I'm interested in details that might seem unimportant to you and I'd really like to hear your stories. I've developed a series of preliminary questions that all of us will start out following, but we'll also let the nature of the conversation determine where they questions will go. Historically principals have gone to teachers and parents to communicate with the students.

- 1- Can you identify some ways in which you interact directly with the students?
When do you see the students?
How do you make yourself accessible to the students?
- 2- How do you go about getting information from kids?
Do you go directly to the students?
Do you get this information indirectly from teachers, other staff members, parents?
- 3- What are the most significant challenges faced by students in your school?
How do you know?
- 4- How do you help children cope with the challenges they face?
How would you like to?
- 5- In what ways do students opinions and attitudes influence your agenda?
How you go about implementing your agenda?
- 6- How do you actively participate in student learning and/or work to improve student learning outcomes?
How do you help students learn?
In what ways would you like to?
- 7- Is there anything you would like to see changed in the school?
- 8- In what ways do you use student voice?
- 9- How have you increased student responsibility?
- 10- Have you provided students with opportunities to become involved in shared decision making?
- 11- What is the best part of your job?

APPENDIX D:
Interview Protocol- Students

Interview 1

4. Present Assent Form. Willing students can sign assent form.
5. First, there are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in understanding perspectives about leadership.
6. Second, you shouldn't feel that you have to agree with everyone else in the room if that's not how you really feel. There are _____ people in this room, so we expect that people will have different views. And it's important that we learn about all the views represented here. If you find yourself feeling upset about the talk, you can leave at any time.
7. Third, we want you to feel comfortable answering questions. We're not here to promote a particular way of thinking about schools or principals. We just want to understand how students think and feel about their schools.
8. Fourth, we ask that you talk one at a time so that we can be sure to hear everyone's views, and get them on tape. Warm-up activity: taking turns ball toss.

Opening Script

Hi everyone. Thanks so much for coming. I am trying to learn more about finding ways you can help the principal make your experience of school better, and help you learn more while you're here.

Free association activity

Illustration

-So silently, what I want you to do is close your eyes and picture your principal in your mind. Think, what does your principal do? Now open your eyes, and I want you to draw or write what you saw your principal doing. If you choose to write and there's time left you can add a drawing, or vice-versa. We're going to be doing a lot of talking later on but for now we're going to start working on this. Any questions?
(If you're not finished you'll have more time later to complete this when we meet next time.)

Questions

- 1- What do you like about school (or not like)?
Is there something you would like to see changed?
- 2- What are the biggest changes that you've seen in schools?
Do you ever talk to adults about what you like or don't like?
Does anybody ever listen to you and your friends when you want to change something?
If adults in the school are making changes do you ever get to have a say in that?
- 3- Apart from your teacher, is there anybody in the school that you can go to to share how you feel?
- 4- What is a principal?
Who is your principal?
How do you know this person is the principal?

- When do you see your principal?
- 5- How is a principal different from a teacher?
How are they the same?
Can you go talk to the principal?
- 6- Do principals help you learn?
What do they do to help you learn?
What do they say?
How does it make you feel?
- 7- How do you know what you know about the principal?
Did you hear it from parents, teachers, popular culture, other principals?

Closing Script

Your comments today will be presented to your principal who is going to try find some new ways to help you with any challenges you might be facing. After I speak with your principal, I will then meet with you again to talk with you about what he/she had to say.

APPENDIX E:
Codebook (Elaboration of Code)

Codebook:

Beliefs- Research Question 1

SP- Student Perspectives

SPL- Leadership

SPS- School

SPI- Instruction

PP- Principal Perspectives

PPL- Leadership

PPS- School

PPI- Instruction

PPSt-Students

Beliefs-Research Question 1

Chall- Challenges faced by students

Beliefs-Research Question 2

Assum-Assumptions

Behaviors-Research Question 2

Inc- Personal Inclination

Behaviors

HILB- High influence leadership behaviors

LILB- Low influence leadership behaviors

DLB- Direct leadership behaviors

ILB- Indirect leadership behaviors

Interactions/Communication

PSI- Principal Student Interactions

SSE- Structuring Student Experiences

Comm- Communication

Dial-Dialogue

Empowering learners

NT- Non-traditional role of principal

SV- Student Voice

StudAg-Student Agency/Responsibility

SDM-Shared decision making

SA-Student achievement

(SPL) Student Perspectives of Leadership

Definition: Students thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about the principal and his/her approaches to school leadership.

Characteristics: Forthright, undervalued, overlooked, direct, candid, plainspoken, spontaneous, ingenuous, innocent, natural, open, simple, sincere, essential, aware, outsider.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: These perspectives exist when researchers and/or practitioners take the time to ask or listen to what students have to say about the school principal(s).

Proposition: Principals that use students' perspectives to meaningfully structure their experiences of schools and learning can create more responsive schools and a more responsible principalship.

Illustration: "I see my principal as a role-model to other children and he helps students get a scholarship."

"I know he likes school because when he's working he likes talking to the kids."

"I see Mrs. Wilson being happy to see the children listening to the teacher and handling problems in a nice way. Some people say they are calm when they hear her voice."

"I know he's the principal because he sits in the office and he's dressed up nice."

"I think he gets paid a little bit but the teachers get paid a lot more because they teach all day and he doesn't, he just walks around."

"He feels controlling. He can control everybody in the school and the teachers only control the students."

"He has lots of duties, he has to get forms and stuff and set up stuff for the PTO. He teaches teachers too."

"He helps us learn about no-bullying. He goes around and helps people to see if they're being good to other people, or to see how people are being mean to each other."

"He keeps you on task. He doesn't teach the subjects like science and math and spelling, he's more focused on keeping you safe and not hurting other people, not saying mean things and just making sure he's helpful."

Free association activity: Students identified their principal as an office worker, than an office man, before they said principal.

See student illustrations

(SPS) Student Perspectives of School

Definition: Students thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about their school.

Characteristics: Forthright, undervalued, overlooked, direct, candid, plainspoken, spontaneous, ingenuous, innocent, natural, open, simple, sincere, essential, intellectual, aware.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: These perspectives exist when researchers and/or practitioners take the time to ask or listen to what students have to say about the school's systems, climate and culture.

Proposition: Schools that use students' perspectives to develop systems and techniques for structuring and enhancing students' experiences of school can become more equitable and excellent.

Illustration: "I like having a safe community at school and just being proud of what you can do and what you can't do and trying something new that you never did before."

"It's about work. Gotta get your job, education, and your scholarship."

"She wants it to be safe so we won't hurt ourselves."

"They (adults) want us to do our best in the classrooms everyday and they work hard everyday to try to get kids to graduate so they could get a good idea and not drop out of high school."

"I like all the encores and the activities we do with Say Yes and also when we work together and we figure out problems and clues in class."

"She wants us to be good and she doesn't want us to get in trouble or anything because we have a lot of proactive incident reports (PIR) in our school."

"Principals and teachers make sure we're safe. A teacher, their job is to make sure they keep us safe during the day, and the principal does that, but has to do it for the whole school, not just one particular class."

"I would change the design of the school. I wish the rooms could be bigger, like some desks could be bigger."

"My classroom is mad hot and stank, and it smells like pee by the smart board, and by the door it smells like manure."

"I wish they could fix the broken stuff, like the ceiling ear the gym. I wish we could get air conditioners."

(SPI) Student Perspectives of Instruction

Definition: Students thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about the instruction they receive.

Characteristics: Forthright, undervalued, overlooked, direct, candid, plainspoken, spontaneous, ingenuous, innocent, natural, open, simple, sincere, essential, aware, intellectual.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: These perspectives exist when researchers and/or practitioners take the time to ask or listen to what students have to say about the school's instructional program, and include students' thoughts about the teaching and learning that take place.

Proposition: Teachers that actively use student feedback to develop their approaches to instruction can empower students as learners and increase student-learning outcomes in their classrooms.

Illustration: "Sometimes in math our student teacher, if you didn't understand something she would say you can come back to the table and tell me and she'll teach you how to do what you don't get. I like that, and I miss her. I liked that extra support."

"When we get home and do our homework they (teachers) do a good job to teach us about the lesson and we remember it and that helps."

"If you learn too much, like our teacher said this morning, than most of the smart kids will get confused because they have too much stuff in their brain because there's a lot of stuff going on. You'll also be very boring and start speaking with words like, 'technically speaking...'"

"Students like listening to the rules, science, ELA, recess, and math."

"The teacher is so rude, he always yells at people."

"One kid got hit in the face with a ball and almost got a black eye and the teacher just made him come over. I got in trouble for burping. We get yelled at when we burp. We can't control that."

"I wish there was a teacher that would take all the bad kids. If there was a different teacher in a different school that could handle difficult children and take control of them even when they (teachers) are not looking at—every time they walk out of the room the children should still be good."

"I wish I could tell them (teachers) to stop talking and shut up and do they work. My teacher talk too much. All she do is blah blah blah, I can hear her in my sleep."

(PPL) Principal Perspectives of Leadership

Definition: Principals' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about their approaches to school leadership and the approaches of other administrators.

Characteristics: Reflective, speculative, studious, intellectual, experiential, meditative, adultcentric, contrived, manufactured, improvised, conservative, progressive, insider.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: These perspectives exist when principals disclose their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about their leadership practices and the work of other school administrators.

Proposition: By better understanding principals' perceptions of leadership, and agendas, we can see how they are connected or developed in response to those of the students in an effort to create a more coherent instructional program for schools. Principals that only use adult perspectives to shape their leadership practices leave students to circumvent or adapt to an appointed set of goals that in many cases will not coalesce with their own, and may impede their ability to develop socially and academically.

Illustration: "I feel like I'm a kid mechanic in so many ways, or a tool. I don't see myself as a principal. I see myself as an instructional leader and I have to be a coach and model for teachers, but at the end of the day I see myself as a servant. The principalship is a position of service. That's where the work is."

"How can we continue to perpetuate a lie for kids? We (principals) sit here and tell kids they should be lifelong learners and value education. But kids are not being exposed to things that I think they need to widen their view of the world and the community and it's my job and responsibility to get them that."

"Everybody needs to be led. Everybody needs to be able to look to somebody for guidance. But we also have to have expectations. As we work with kids and adults the expectation of where we're going needs to be out there because if the kids understand the adults understand. If the adults understand they can help lead the students."

"There's some people (principals) that don't get the pedagogical understanding of what their job is. I find that there's a lot of leaders go into these positions with the realization that 'holy cow, I don't know what I've gotten myself into.' And they don't work to make it better, but because they're the person in charge they have to show that they're in charge, and they end up leading out of fear."

"I don't think we have enough folks that know their job and that have the interpersonal relationship skills to meet the demands of the clientele. If you go visit a lot of urban schools that meet the mark, all you have to do is look at the principal and it's going to tell you a whole lot."

"I get up for this. I live for this. When I wake up in the morning I get another day. Not I have to, I *get to* go in here and impact the lives of kids."

“We have to change the way we think. We have been going by tradition. Principals that are taking this cookie cutter approach have an egotistic self-centered mentality.”

“Just as it’s important for teachers to give students feedback about their learning it’s important for me to give teachers that kind of feedback as well. That’s how I think I can impact the student as well, through that channel. I believe strongly the most important thing I do is to make sure that every classroom in this building has the best possible teacher in it. If someone were to ask me what would I want my legacy to be, it would be to make sure that there’s a Socrates in every classroom.”

“I feel like I’m making a positive impact on kids in this community. That impact may be academically, socially, emotionally, but I have fallen in love with high poverty rural education. Obviously there are principals and administrators in the FM and JD’s but I can’t imagine that those principals go home every night feeling that they made a difference.”

“My role is to make sure that resources are available for students to achieve.”

“I think that’s my role as principal, to be there for kids and using their voices and looking at what is it they need.”

“It’s supporting the initiatives that are coming down from the district, from the state, the federal government, and have them be able to efficiently, smoothly, flawlessly go into the classroom with the teacher. It’s trying to figure that out.”

“The success of this building and student achievement does not rest with me, it rests with the teachers in the classroom. They’re the ones that are where the rubber meets the road.”

“It’s easier to know what to do when you know where you know where you need to be and then you just backpedal and think of how to get there.”

(PPS) Principal Perspectives of School

Definition: Principals' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a range of school wide factors, including the function of schools, and their experiences with schools.

Characteristics: Reflective, speculative, studious, intellectual, experiential, meditative, adultcentric, contrived, manufactured, improvised, conservative, progressive, insider.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: These perspectives exist when principals disclose their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about their school, settings like their school, or the function of schools today.

Proposition: Research that seeks to understand principals' perceptions of how schools best operate, and then places adult perspectives alongside those students have about school, can develop a better understanding of how students and principals can work together to create more equitable and excellent schools.

Illustration: "Like most kids, they love school. It's a place of refuge, it's a place of calmness from all the stressors that many of our kids deal with."

"No matter what you say about clientele if they were to all go away what would happen to you? We merely exist by the fact we have kids to serve."

"One way (to help kids cope with challenges) is to make sure that they understand that this is always a good place to be, and that the more you're here the better. There are going to be things that you can count on here. You can always count on being safe, on being loved and cared for, on someone who cares for you and is going to give you the best thing for you even though it may not seem it at the time, to give kids some consistency, some structure. To give them a feeling that they're accepted and important because they get a lot of people saying they're not important."

"The stability at home determines their (students) success in the building."

"This building is like a car or a vehicle. There are people that are the engine of that car, and they're the ones that really make the bldg go, are the doers, and they step up to the plate, they're here early, stay late, involved in everything and are all about kids and when I say we need to do something about instruction they say what do I need to do. And then we have the wheels, they're the people that make the bldg move, they may not be the heart of the bldg but w/o them we don't go anywhere. And then there's the chrome and the trim, the ones that are along for the ride that kind of make us look good but don't really do anything. And as a principal I'm sitting in the drivers seat and stepping on the gas, breaking, steering, signaling which direction to go, and together all of us somehow get the organization down the road and moving forward."

(PPI) Principal Perspectives of Instruction

Definition: Principals' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about teachers, teaching, instructional delivery, and curriculum.

Characteristics: Reflective, speculative, studious, intellectual, experiential, meditative, adultcentric, contrived, manufactured, improvised, conservative, progressive, insider.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: These perspectives exist when principals disclose their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about their instructional program, teaching, and/or instructional delivery taking place at their site, or in other schools.

Proposition: Principals direct and indirect approaches to promoting the instruction that takes place in their schools has a significant impact on students' experiences of education. By better understanding how principals think about the approaches they take, students learning outcomes and teacher efficacy can be enhanced.

Illustration: "I tell my teachers. If I'm here in 5 years and we've not made solid gains and you don't understand academic rigor, giving focused teacher commentary, or don't have a good grasp on the common core, or use formative assessments, and take that data to drive and adjust and tweak your instruction that's on me. The first thing I told my teachers when I got in here I said 'you guys have been failed (by previous principal).' I'm a player's coach."

"Elementary school teachers, even as early as first grade, should be content specialists."

"Creativity in the classroom is a challenge because of the mandates that are coming down everything is becoming cookie cutter. We have to do this for this hour, and this for this hour, and all of a sudden what happens is the teacher becomes programmatic and robotic and that's not healthy. Because you get into education to really help the kids learn, that's a big challenge right now. We're becoming checklist people."

"In a lot of cases before we can even begin to attack the cognitive or academic piece we need to make sure the social and emotional are OK."

"(We're) trying to lessen the impact of the realities that students have to deal with on a day-to-day basis in their home and their community. And making sure there's still an academic focus and they're feeling supported in their learning."

"Teachers were not even planning together (within their grade levels) before I came. The professional learning conference room is where we meet now and have our PD. I get the floor waxed, a projector set up, we've got laptops in there, and that's where we meet in the mornings. There's also a sign in book for accountability purposes. That's where we teach teachers in house and that's where we plan."

(PPSt) Principal Perspectives of Students

Definition: Principals' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about students, student learning, student behavior, and student achievement.

Characteristics: Reflective, thoughtful, speculative, studious, intellectual, experiential, meditative, adultcentric, contrived, manufactured, improvised, conservative, progressive, outsider, insufficient.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: These perspectives exist when principals disclose their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about students, student learning, student behavior and student achievement.

Proposition: Principals and students play key roles in shaping school culture, and enter school with similar goals. Principals willing to explore their perceptions of students and student learning in depth are better able to understand their relationship to students, and the role they play in determining the success of both the school and the principalship.

Illustration: "Those kids you could tell they were thirsty for somebody they could reach out and touch. Kids truly have a sixth sense, they can smell it on you. You can stand behind a wall and you can talk and they can pick up on that."

"Kids are bright anyway. The new type of baby is totally pre-wired. They're packaged in a different way. These kids in all schools across the board, even the ones that come from the most impoverished damaging environments are some of your most brightest students you'll find. Because they have a level of resilience about them. If your life has been tough, and if it gets even a little bit better, you watch those kids just take off."

"When the kids know you care, they'll line up. They'll shape up for you."

"You start to see that they're down really young in urban education. In kindergarten you see kids that are really eager beavers, there's nothing they can't do. By the end of first-grade some kids are already seeing themselves as not-readers, or not-learners so I have to fight that battle all the time."

"I have a pretty good idea of how I'm perceived by the teachers, a pretty good idea about how the parents perceive, but I have no idea how the kids perceive me. I'm very interested in learning what they think of me and also about using feedback from kids more about making changes and engaging them."

"I see a lot more parents stepping in when they feel that their child was treated wrongly by somebody, and it's sad to watch because they're not letting their child grow on their own and be independent. What I find in my other (more urban school) situation is that my other kids were more independent and more savvy and streetwise because they didn't have that parental involvement. So which do you take? Do you want the absentee parent or the enabling parent? You've gotta find the balance and hopefully it's the parent who gets it."

(Assum) Assumptions made by principals

Definition: Principals often draw conclusions or make assumptions about their approaches to school leadership that don't correspond with what students are looking for in an instructional leader.

Characteristics: Naive, instinctual, spontaneous, impulsive, hypothetical, taking something for granted, theoretical.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: These conditions exist when principals develop and demonstrate leadership behaviors that underestimate what students understand about school and/or are capable of contributing to the school.

Proposition: Some principals assume that (a) only older kids are worth talking to about the work that's being done in school, (b) kids aren't able to answer specific questions about teaching and learning, (c) student voice should be limited to school established parameters, and (d) certain leadership behaviors are valuable for kids. These assumptions often don't match what the students are looking for in a principal and highlight the value of using student perspectives to inform principals' approaches to school leadership.

Illustration: "I guess initially I thought I could see that (using student voice) at the secondary level but what does that look like at the elementary level? How do kids know what's good for them? Isn't that our job?"

"You want to listen to the children but you need to lead the children. You can't let them control what we do."

"I can walk in and in many cases they don't even know I'm there."

"I'll still approach that (talking about college) with young kids at the elementary level because for them to think too far beyond that is really difficult."

"From the structure of the day to the buses coming to school and going home, to the lunchroom, and recess. And to recognize that sometimes kids are going to say they need a lot more recess and to keep that in an 8-year-old context (referring to how the principal would like to use student voice)."

"So if I were in an elementary school it (student council) would probably be 3-5th graders working in an advisory capacity."

"I'm asking questions like 'I see you're doing that, what are you doing?' because I'm checking to see if they understand, checking on the quality of what they're being assigned in classrooms. It gets to the point with the older kids, in grades 3-5 and even 2nd graders 2 but a little bit less with the K-1 because they may not really understand what I'm asking—"

(Inc) Personal inclination

Definition: Principals choose whether or not to provide students with a voice in their education and/or focused instructional support, based on personal preference or instinct.

Characteristics: Instinctive, fearful, traditional, simplistic, diffident, suspicious, reserved, reluctant, timid, overwhelmed, influenced, unstructured.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: Examples of these behaviors exist when principals have opportunities to make leadership decisions on their own and choose ancillary leadership behaviors (many of which could be distributed to support staff) over student-driven behaviors that they say they would prefer to engage in if they had the time.

Proposition: Principals that are not using student-driven approaches to guiding their principalship are left with little else but personal inclination or externally derived and ill-fitted models in their quest to provide structure to the school's instructional program.

Illustration: "I may go into a classroom I may not, I may just do a simple walk around and observe that things are settled and the day is going in the right direction. It's a variety of things that take place, and that's usually by lunchtime. The afternoon continues on like that, I might get a phone call right now and I'll have an issue here, it might be a bus issue, or a situation where the parents are upset because something happened within the building. It's just a variety of things like that, it ebb and flows. I'll meet with the nurse, touch base with the school psychologist. It's way beyond the little things of taking care of the kids—"

"Everything I do is predicated by what's in the best needs of the children, not what's in the best need of teachers, not to what's good for me, because it's not about any of the adults. We've had our chance."

"To be honest I hope that a lot of the decisions I make are done so with the student voice in mind, but if it is it would have to be done subconsciously."

"Sometimes I try not to be that autocratic principal but there are other times when I'll say this is what we need to do and we're going to do it."

"If a student was really struggling with doing their work there were many times I ended up having lunch with those kids, and we did study halls, and academic support for those kids where I was very involved and helped supervise that work with kids. I don't do it as much here because the teachers have a handle on it. But I used to be very involved in my old school."

Based on observation/conversation: On the principals to do list is our meeting, something about baby ducks, and an after school commitment. He says, "sometimes the whole page is filled, sometimes only a few items like today. Which I like because it gives me a lot of freedom and flexibility to work with kids if necessary (*meaning only if there's an issue of discipline*)."

(HILB) High Influence Leadership Behaviors

Definition: Leadership behaviors that the principal engages in that the students and I perceive to have a high influence on student learning, student experiences of school, student behavior and school climate/culture.

Characteristics: Supportive, visible, accessible, experienced, consistent, honest, clear expectations, caring, direct, good communicator, team player, teacher, resilient, change agent.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category Works of Operates: Effecting change in student outcomes, developing strategies for streamlining instruction at both the classroom and building level, developing relationships with students, working with students individually and in groups to support their academic and behavior needs.

Proposition: When principals exhibit these behaviors they are able to have the greatest impact on student performance. Research demonstrates that principals can exert direct and powerful effects on student achievement by using their leadership time to engage in what students identify as high influence behaviors (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

Illustration: "I ask if they understand and they might say 'yes sir' and if they don't understand I'll say 'look, let's work the problem.' I feel like I'm a mechanic in so many ways, a kid mechanic, or a tool. I don't see myself as a principal, I see myself as an instructional leader and I have to be a coach and model for teachers, but at the end of the day I see myself as a servant. The principalship is a position of service. That's where the work is."

"Kids know that they can approach me at anytime, anywhere, in the lunchroom, in the hallway, in a classroom, off the bus, on the bus, it doesn't matter. I'm very approachable and they will approach me."

"I also occasionally have lunch with the kids. Small groups may come to me, sit with me, eat with me. But I'm pretty involved because there's also those kids who are the higher needs, and when a counselor or a psychologist or a nurse is working with those kids I'll pop in and help and support those kids."

"In science, we were making robots and outside of the cluster me and a bunch of other kids that were having trouble with the robots and were working out there and we were very confused and The principal came and helped us out and we got it done in class."

F: During one principal's walk throughs she did an excellent job at providing individual students and small groups with extra instructional support. In these overcrowded classrooms she was almost like a second teacher.

Based on observation: At another site students all said they would go to principal first if they wanted to change something in school or if they had a problem.

See illustrations

(LILB) Low Influence Leadership Behaviors

Definition: Leadership behaviors that the principal engages in that the students and I perceive to have a low influence on student learning, student experiences of school, student behavior and school climate/culture.

Characteristics: Unsupportive, un-approachable, non-personable, unavailable, inexperienced, inconsistent, dishonest, passive, observer, lacking clear and reasonable expectations.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category Works or Operates: Examples include managerial tasks, meetings with staff both inside and outside of the school, an office worker. Feedback is limited to teacher performance, interactions with students are limited to discipline, and principals that are unfamiliar with what students are learning.

Proposition: When principals exhibit these behaviors they have a minimal impact on student performance. Principals that do not interact with students cause students to wonder what the principal sees and thinks about their work. This communicates to the students that the principals don't really care about the quality of learning in the classroom (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Principals that are able to minimize, share, or eliminate these behaviors can spend more time focusing on the needs of the consumer (student).

Illustration: "When you're a heavily state aid dependent school district, you say we'll do this kind of stuff (educational programs the staff and principal don't agree with) even though we might not agree with a all of it because they're going to send us 3 million dollars. Which is a lot of money."

"There's an awful lot of training and meetings that get me away from this building and that really bothers me, I don't like it."

"I didn't want to be a teacher, I wanted to be a principal."

"I haven't observed anybody doing anything today instructionally and I probably won't (because of discipline issues) and I think that that's where we get in trouble in low performing schools, which we are."

"The kids start arriving around 835 while I'm still in those meetings, so teaching assistants are meeting those kids in the cafeteria to help them with breakfast."

"First I had a phone call from one of the administrators at the district office who wanted to talk about some of the common core standards. Then I placed another call to a former teacher that used to work here to congratulate her because she's retiring. I took another call from our superintendent asking me about how the budget cuts went. I may have a colleague call and ask for advice. That's how the day goes, it ebb and flows."

(DLB) Direct Leadership Behaviors

Definition: These behaviors describe when principals actively engage with students (as perceived by both the student and researcher).³⁵ Often, but not always, these behaviors can be defined by the principal and his/her students having direct individual or group contact in a classroom or other school or community setting.

Characteristics: Soothing, informative, comforting, individual small and large group interactions with students, educational, corrective, proactive, empowering.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category Works or Operates: Classroom visits, monitoring student work, meeting with students, discussing academic progress and problems, publicly and privately praising individual academic achievement, and providing group or individual tutoring assistance.

Proposition: Large and small school principals can have a direct effect on student achievement when they engage in direct leadership behaviors. These behaviors help principals view their responsibilities differently, and use the relationships they have built with their student's to drive their principalship.

Illustration: "He'll encourage us during tests."

"He always has a smile on his face. Why would he be principal if he didn't love school?"

"I'm at the door meeting and greeting all the kids, saying hello to everybody (in the morning). At the end of the day I'm in charge of dismissal so the kids leave in front of me everyday. I don't have a lot of student behavior issues. If I do I take care of that immediately."

"When I'm having those office hours where I'm the one dealing with triage it might be office discipline referrals, 9 times out of 10 it's more of a mini-counseling session with a kid."

"I talk to the principal when I need help calming down or when people are messing with me. Sometimes when we talk to her is when we have bad problems and we don't want to get into a fight, we just ask for help. She helps us solve problems and also if we're made she brings us down to our office and calms us down."

"I saw him (David) in my class today and we was doing a project and he came to see what type of project and then come in and says questions about our projects."

See student illustrations

³⁵ E.g., 'I saw the principal talking to a custodian' is not a DLB, but a principal doing a walk-through of a classroom is.

(ILB) Indirect Leadership Behaviors

Definition: These behaviors describe when principals do not actively engage with students (as perceived by the students and researcher). Often, but not always, these behaviors can be defined by principals that operate more as school managers than as instructional leaders.

Characteristics: Detached, invisible, preoccupied, teacher-driven, adultcentric, disciplinary, managerial, big-picture.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category Works or Operates: Manipulate school-level factors such as resources, climate, master schedule, instructional guidance, communication, and administrator-teacher relationships. Principals focused on professional development of teachers, providing opportunities for staff collaboration, evaluating instruction.

Proposition: Principals that attempt to influence student achievement through the efforts of teachers, district personnel, and other adults rather than through direct interactions with students may have a less significant impact on student learning.³⁶

Illustration: “I studied the school when I applied. Studied, studied. Looked at the data, got a feel for the community, not just the school community but also the city itself and the other schools in the district to compare why schools were different. I looked for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.”

“Looking at my master schedule for next year, we’re going to be doing our intervention services across the board from 9-930. I would also like to take Monday mornings, and have those class meetings surround the topic of bullying, mutual respect, understanding, respecting and embracing differences (HILB because students are asking for this).”

“I’m always reading. I’m always trying different things. I go to conferences.”

“All of our kids get breakfast for free whether they’re on free and reduced list or not.”

Based on Observation- One principal delegates all, or most non-instructional work to his office staff, and all (or most) of his disciplinary issues to his AP (also a HILB).

Based on observation- all students in the 4th grade play an instrument (principal’s initiative). They really enjoy this and one can often hear music playing when visiting the school (also a HILB-speaks directly to the challenges of a “culture of poverty”).

See student illustrations

³⁶ Indirect leadership behaviors can also be identified (by students and the researcher) as high-influence behaviors, just as direct leadership behaviors can be identified as low-influence behaviors.

(Chall) Challenges faced by students

Definition: Students describe situations and experiences where they struggle with their experiences of school and learning.

Characteristics: Disconcerting, disappointing, confusion, frustration, worry, limiting, lack of interest, fatigue, apathy.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: Students report these challenges when they have feelings of frustration with various school-wide and out of school factors including (but not limited to), teaching, learning, physical appearance of the school, relationships, school climate, school culture, trouble at home, experiences on the bus, etc.

Proposition: When adults develop mechanisms for ensuring that student voice and participation are central to decision making practices in school, and build their educational contexts around the premise of listening to students, local theories can emerge to transform the unique challenges faced in schools today.

Illustration: “Stability at home.”

“Professionally I wish I had more time to just dive into classrooms and literally work with the teacher and the kids. It’s almost an impossible task for me.”

“Recess, I don’t know why but there’s a lot of drama (this principal is not at recess).”

“Being in one big classroom with all the kids. Bullying, homework, getting yelled at. I think we should have more field trips too.”

“Tests. The hardest thing is when people talk about, or talk directly to the teacher, and when people are trying to talk and people are disrupting you... you be getting distracted.”

“My biggest challenge is when people try to help you out and you feel like you don’t need or want them to give you answers.”

“My biggest challenge is when people get in trouble and they get mad for what they did, because it’s kind of annoying.”

“I don’t want kids worried about their safety all day long. They’re not using their full brain capacity to become the best readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, history musicians they can be when they’re worried about their basic needs.”

“We’re dealing with that out there in society but with a very cloistered community that doesn’t care about that (going to college) because ‘I dropped out when I was 16 and if that’s good enough for me, it’s good enough for my kid.’ And that’s really pervasive. A lot of our kids see that as their frame of reference, that’s all they know.”

(PSI) Principal-Student Interaction

Definition: Any situation whereby the principal and student interact physically or verbally.³⁷

Characteristics: Coincidental, warm, kind, persuasive, patient, individual and group interactions, dedicated, humorous without being sarcastic, nurturing.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category Works or Operates: Classroom visits by the principal, student visits to the main office, the principals' private office, interactions that might take place in the hallway, cafeteria, during bussing, in the health clinic, or doing extracurricular activities conducted by or with the principal, where the principal is talking, or meeting with students directly. These extracurricular activities can include (but are not limited to) FTO/PTO meetings, field trips, barbecues, random encounters in public, etc.

Proposition: Research suggests principals are better able to meet accountability demands by focusing their leadership time on the interactions (both during the school day and beyond) they have with their students. While it is often difficult to study these interactions in schools because most principals don't consistently take the time to fit them into their schedule, and some of them may be unplanned, principals that meaningfully structure their approaches to these interactions can have a positive impact on students' experiences of school.

Illustration: "When we go down to the cafeteria the kids ask me if they can have lunch with me. They want to escape because it gets loud."

"Conversations (with kids) are just like a conversation I would have with anybody. I would say 'how's things going in life?' but then I also would break the ice and ask 'what's your favorite thing?' or 'How's school going?' We have some good in-depth conversations."

When I first came to the school he gave me a tour, he gives kids a tour. He told about his office and the people who work here.

"I go around to tables and talk to kids and ask how their day is going and just being there so if they want to say something to me they can, anything good or bad. Sometimes they're sharing personal stories, sometimes I'll ask something specific."

"Kids will see me there (FTO/PTO events) and I'm there to help with parent involvement."
See student illustrations

³⁷ Principal-student interactions differ from direct leadership behaviors in that they may not be planned encounters. They also often take place outside of the classroom or office, and can occur in settings where principals have not traditionally made themselves available to students for support.

(SSE) Structuring Student Experiences

Definition: Situations shared or observed where principals directly or indirectly impact students' experiences of school and learning.

Characteristics: Manufactured, high-influence, unidirectional, influential, prominent, forward, presumptuous, measured, significant.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: This structuring occurs when principals make decisions or acts in a way that has a significant impact on individual students, groups of students, classrooms, or the entire student body.

Proposition: Principals play a significant role in structuring students' experiences of school and can empower (or disempower) learners, through both their approaches to and interpretations of problems in schools.

Illustration: "We do eagle dollars where kids get rewarded for getting caught being good and the eagle dollars are used to have our spring fling. Kids need 15 eagle dollars, less than 3 PIRs, and no bus referrals or discipline referrals and you get to go to the spring fling."

"We used to do assemblies every week but now we're too busy because of the state tests."

"I don't spend a lot of time in my office. The first part of my day is spent setting the tempo for my building. I understand that as a bldg level leader, I set the pulse every morning. If I'm in a bad mood, the school is going to be in a bad mood that day. So I'm holding the door for students and telling my students to run in and things like that."

"We set up a system where this is just a place (the main office) they can come for a time out. A teacher can say to a kid 'I need you to take this proactive incident report down to the reflection room (w/teaching assistant to the office) and they know they're going to be there for 10-20 minutes and the teacher checks off why.'"

"It's a reward that they can have lunch with me as part of a behavioral plan. And the kids really like that, and I connect with a lot of kids like that."

"I want to see kids going to college. I believe in SYTE, so I'm trying to figure out how do you build structures in place so that needs are being met for students."

Based on observation: The lunchroom at one site was very loud and chaotic (*also see illustrations*). The principal allows it to be like this and the teachers are dropping off their kids and fleeing the scene. At another site the principal plays a more active role in the lunchroom and the students have a much better experience.

(Comm) Communication

Definition: Characteristics or experiences that describe the communication between members of the school community including principals, students, staff, and families.

Characteristics: Unidirectional, regular, routine, natural, prevalent, ongoing, advice, transmission, telling, distribution.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: This exists between all members of the school community and can be characterized as one-way, e.g. from principals to staff, from principals to students, from principals to parents, (or vice versa), through morning announcements, phone calls, e-mail, etc.

Proposition: Opening up lines of communication between members of the school community around meaningful student driven initiatives can help practitioners and researchers develop new approaches to solving real problems taking place in school. This type of communication is also more likely to lead to more focused conversations (dialogue) between members of the school community that may not have existed before.³⁸

Illustration: “I heard that from kids and parents and other people in the community. It (strong leadership) was really not there. When I started on the job at dismissal they would say this is amazing. The principal never came out for dismissal and hung out there and talked with adults.”

“I typically share some encouraging words via e-mail with my staff once a month. I’ve been doing it since I started as a principal 9 years ago.”

“Many times I get info (about kids) from parents, teachers, staff members. There might be a situation where a child is struggling and that information comes to me. My people are very good at making sure I’m in the loop on everything. But I may not be part of the direct process.”

“A lot of my work those 3 months was reassuring parents, explaining the letters parents were getting about their choices, etc.”

“She (mom) said what did you do today in school. What did you learn? How did you learn it? How good was it? Was it fun? They also ask how the principal’s day went.”

“If a student was struggling I’d speak with the teacher, the student themselves, depending on the situation I’d speak with the parent. If it’s a literacy issue I’d speak with our reading teacher, instructional coach. Those kinds of things.”

“When I came in and asked ‘what are we going to do about student achievement?’ the teachers were eager. They turned to me and asked what they could to make that happen.”

³⁸ E.g., when the communication is direct and focused on student achievement (instead of on the pep-rally, bake-sale, school dance, etc.) it’s more likely to lead to student learning.

(Dial) Dialogue

Definition: Facilitated or unfacilitated discourse that takes place between principals and students, or between students during focus groups.

Characteristics: Explicit, action relevant, open, absolute, unadulterated, collaborative, joining, juxtaposed, uncharted, functional, practical, efficient.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: This dialogue exists when principals and students engage each other in face-to-face dialogue in school, when the researcher helps facilitate dialogue between the principals and students during one-on-one interviews and focus groups, or during intergroup dialogue between students in focus groups.

Proposition: Dialogue between principals and students can be used to develop a shared theory that principals can use to refocus their work with students, and strengthen their approaches to school leadership and instruction.

Illustration: (Just a few examples from one site are listed).

P: What else can we do from an academic standpoint to improve your standing as a student? (SA, SV, SPL, SPI, SPS)

S: Come visit our class more and help us with our work? (SPL, SV, SPI, Chall, HILB, DLB, NT, SV, SA)

S: I'd like the principal to work with us in grade levels, like assemblies for just grade levels. Like early in the morning we could sit down and plan our day and start thinking about something that happened between days. Because usually something that happened at home can effect our day in school and we can get off track.

P: What part of school do you value most?

S: The teachers. When you really like the teacher it will make it easier for you to learn and it'll make your job easier and you'll get through school quickly. They teach us good stuff and help us learn. They give us good advice. The students make the day go by faster because they have humor and they laugh a lot. If there was just on e person in the class it would go by slow I think. You also might not learn as much because you learn from your peers as well right?

P: I would like to know how they (students) feel about the lack of teachers, role models, staff that look like them (African-American). Do they notice it? Are they accustomed to it? Do they want to see more adults in the classrooms that look like their uncles, their brothers, does that make them want to perform better?

S: I think about it sometimes. I'm OK with it, I just talk about it (with peers) sometimes. It doesn't bother me that much. Everybody is different so it doesn't really matter. Who looks like her, she has the same shoes as him. It would be nice to have more people we could relate to, like us. Like it would be cool if our teachers were more the same because we could talk about like my mom works here, or my mom works here. Not with our education but the way some students act because they think about race. Some teachers just don't really act right. I like my teachers to be females, I feel uncomfortable having a male teacher.

(NT) Non-traditional role of principal

Definition: Principals have typically been responsible for hiring and firing teachers, coordinating buses and master schedules, disciplining children, and speaking with angry parents. Principals that have found non-traditional ways of approaching their role as the school leader find ways of minimizing the amount of time spent on these tasks so that they can develop their function as instructional leader in new ways.

Characteristics: Determined, focused, confident, progressive-minded, scholarly, innovative, constantly evolving, staff *and* student leader, teacher, follower, servant, visible and accessible.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category Works or Operates: Conducts routine and focused morning and afternoon classroom visits, provides opportunities for meaningful student involvement, is rarely in the office, is available during after school programs or extracurricular activities, forges links between home and the school, provides incentives for students, is actively involved in coordinating the curriculum and monitoring students academic, social, and emotional progress.

Proposition: Schools in America are being faced with a new set of instructional issues. Principals that struggle to break the traditional mold will struggle in their efforts to lead schools of the 21st century to success.

Illustration: "I see my principal all over the place. Once he rode a horse around the school. Once he rode a motorcycle around the school."

"Once we get kids into class and make sure everybody is fed I tell my secretaries, 'I'm in classrooms, unless there's an emergency you need to get it done.'"

"I took 100 plus kids to the SU (basketball) game when they played Providence. Never been done. That many kids, had about 30 staff members, evening game, snow and all."

"The kids recited, retold, re-enacted the 'I have a dream' speech with excitement at assembly. So they were judged by a rubric and a three judge panel which included myself, the AP, two instructional coaches and a parent (principal designed this black history month oratorical contest with teachers because programming around this had been weak in the past)."

"I've had two parents banned already in 4 months. They can't come back, and they have kids here. I called the cops on one guy. He got ticked off because he wanted to check his kid out at 230. I said 'sir I dismiss kids at 240.' The guy got in my face so I cussed him and called the police."

Based on observation: Students lining up in the hallway came to one principal for hugs, gave her pieces of student art, asked if they could come spend time with her. She is as one parent said during a conversation with me, "the big mama of the school."

(SV) Student Voice

Definition: The opportunity for students to express their opinions and make decisions about a range of school-wide factors that affect their experiences of learning.

Characteristics: Unbiased, undervalued, overlooked, insider perspective, oppositional, critical, empowering, activist, dialogical, belief-oriented, opinions, leadership, participation, knowledge.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: As students gain experience they will create opinions, ideas, and beliefs about school. These include individual and group perspectives and actions within the contexts of learning and their experiences with education.

Proposition: When adults really listen to what students have to say about their learning, and meaningfully use student voice and participation to shape their experiences of school, they can empower students as learners, and transcend traditional school frameworks in the process. Principals teach students that they can or cannot have voice based on the work they do.

Illustration: “To be honest with you until you’re study I never even really gave any thought to student voice or about how it would impact what I do. I gotta admit I wondered what that look like. But I can see where there’s a place for it at this level.”

“So he (student) says ‘David, I want to make a deal with you.’ So I said hey, start talking. The kid says, ‘how about, because I don’t need to be at home, I need to be at school and learning, how about instead of being suspended I spend 5 days in ISS.’ So I ask him if he understands and he says ‘yes I understand, I don’t want to be at home I want to be in school.’ So I told him to go ask our AP that same question like an adult, without telling him I sent you, and see what he says. And so we ended up being able to follow the kids lead and keep him here in school. Sometimes we do take the lead from kids.”

P: We have a student council, which is school wide. They meet monthly to do a lot of different things. Most of it is our school spirit days, our charitable events, so we do those kinds of things.

Q: Do they ever get together to talk about anything regarding learning, school, teaching?

P: The student senate is more teaching about community, how it’s important thing, how to give back to others. They don’t get involve—(*principal cuts himself off*)...like many times I used to have a student council at my old school and the cafeteria always came up.”

“You should act bad so that you can get the principal’s attention. I would start meeting with kids and have a strike. (in response to how would you deal with a problem you’re having in school).”

“We’ve been counting the days until we got to talk to you (me) next!”

(StudAg) Student Agency

Definition: The eagerness of students to take on an academic identity and commit their own time to taking an interest in their learning, behavior, experiences of school and achievement.

Characteristics: Aware, involved, active participant in learning, collaborative, proactive, dedicated, eager, take-charge, confident, responsible.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category Works or Operates: Agency exists when students are engaged in the curriculum and feel connected to school life.

Proposition: Students that are able to take charge of their own education, and play a more active role in their learning, will develop at a faster rate academically, socially and emotionally. Principals that take the time to develop student agency in their schools reap the rewards of students that have a strong sense of self and their role in their own education. Students that are respectful of each other, their teachers, and principals are more likely to develop as learners capable of making their own decisions.

Illustration: “One of the things I did with them was meet with all the fifth grade classes at the beginning of each year and share with them that you are the seniors of this school. You are my student leaders. I need to be able to count on you to be role models for the kindergartners and first graders when I’m not around. In the lunchroom, on the playground, and bus. They would do announcements, be responsible for raising and lowering the flag, they would act as book buddies for first graders where they would take the younger kids under their wing and read to them.”

“The push towards more constructivist learning and cognitive thinking and 21st century learning skills is kids becoming more responsible for their own learning and I think this (research) might help to lead to that.”

“Our principal helps us learn from our mistakes.”

“I’m big on responsibility. If kids make a mistake, whether it’s minor or major, I’m so elated if I can get that kid to take responsibility and communicate the choices that should have not been made or talk about what should have been done. That’s the real work. That’s priceless and is going to get you further in life than math, ELA, & science.”

“Everything is driven off taking the kids lead. We want parents to communicate with teachers and teachers to communicate with the parents, but why don’t the kids have agendas and planners like the adults have (so they can take responsibility for their own learning)?”

(SDM) Shared Decision Making

Definition: A process through which principals and students make decisions in a collaborative manner at the school level.

Characteristics: Decentralized, integrated, organized, cooperative, interdependent, uniting, mutual.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category operates: SDM occurs when principals actively involve students in making decisions that may impact their learning and experiences of school (e.g. student council).

Proposition: While schools and principals have given students opportunities to make decisions in school related to maintaining the status quo, or in managing and organizing student activities and behavior, shared decision making has been largely subjected to limiting school established parameters. These parameters have rarely been designed to include students' perspectives of teaching and leadership, and rarer still have principals used these perspectives to structure their reform efforts.

Illustration: "It was a matter of having the kids, the teacher aides, and myself saying can we give this (a shared decision in the lunchroom) a try. That was one way I used student voice to make a change. And they were collaborating with me and those aides, and also they took ownership for that and had to come up with the rules."

"What classrooms do and it's usually more on an intermediate level is they would set up some kind of democracy and have a level of government and therefore sometimes elect their own presidents in the classroom. Many times we (teachers and students) would try to pas a bill to a law. We would also do other things like setting the rules to the classroom. It wouldn't take the place of a discipline the teacher does, but maybe it was a decision about the movement of the desks."

"I'd like to create an advisory board and maybe have a tape recorder and have the school leadership teams be my teacher governance body listening to student voices talking about these issues (and then use what students have to say to structure our approaches to leadership and instruction). That's what I'd do if I could have my dream time."

"The rule creation process begins with the kids and adults identifying what our hopes and dreams for this year are. We start there and kind of boil those down into what does that look like or sound like in terms of classroom rules that kids develop with adults so that then you can have a living-breathing document."

"Our principal is the same as a teacher because he teaches us what we need to know about school and how we should think about making it better."

(SA) Student Achievement

Definition: Excellence across academic disciplines, in class as well as extracurricular activities. It includes day-to-day class participation, grades, performance on the statewide exams, excellence in sports, behavior, confidence, and ability to communicate with peers and adults.

Characteristics: Hard-working, responsible, productive, leader, focused, determined, excited, concerned, collaborator, self-reflective, dedicated.

Specific Conditions under which Code/Category Works or Operates: Can be demonstrated in classrooms, at home, through both informal and formal assessment including, but not limited to, statewide exams, report cards, conversations, communication with peers, teachers, and the principal.

Proposition: Students academic achievement is impacted by a myriad of factors that take place both inside and outside of the school. Principals that act as strong instructional leaders in primary settings can set students up for success that will continue years after they have entered secondary settings, post-secondary settings, the workforce, and society.

Illustration: “We had kids in an oratorical contest upstairs last week and this morning we announced the winners. All last week kids were running up and asking me when we were going to announce the winners. The kids were asking who won the oratorical contest, and when kids start to ask, that’s when you know they’re excited about learning.”

“I got this little confidence I’m going to ace this (NYS) test.”

“This is our second year we’ve been able to reduce our office discipline referrals by over 50% (reduced or just re-named?). We’ve been able to reduce our OSS by 75%. That’s really important because the graduation rate for kids in this city is under 50%.”

“Dibels data look like I have 86% of my kids really doing well with reading but Dibels is a low measure of fluency. When I take the treasures series it’s really high, it’s actually harder than the NYS standards. We only had 8% passing. So I’m trying to figure out how do I help mediate that and get the right resources. In grades 2-5 85% of my kids did not pass state assessments last year. That’s huge. How do you turn that around, and that’s my biggest challenge looking at all the dynamics that go into the school community.”

“One of the things we’ve started to look at is how many graduate, how many go on to college, of those how many are dropping out of college after they go. A lot of kids are going, not a lot are completing college. 90% graduated and went on, but maybe only half finished college. So we’re looking at are we preparing kids to be successful in college.”

“The principal likes to make sure we’re reading a lot and using big words.”

APPENDIX F:
STUDENTS' ILLUSTRATIONS
FOREST HILLS: GRADE THREE
(FH3)

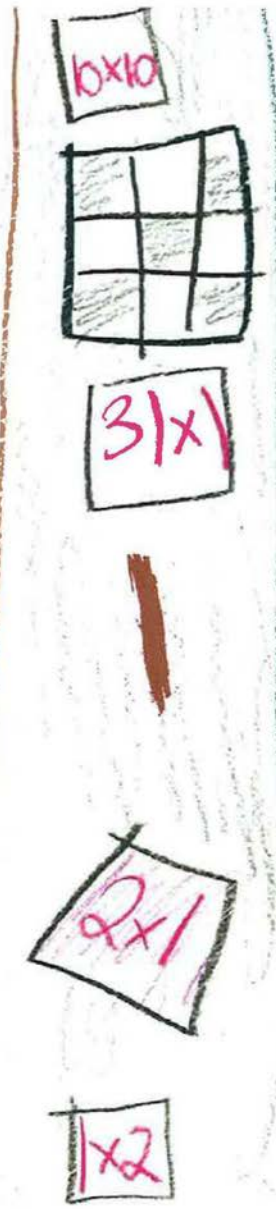
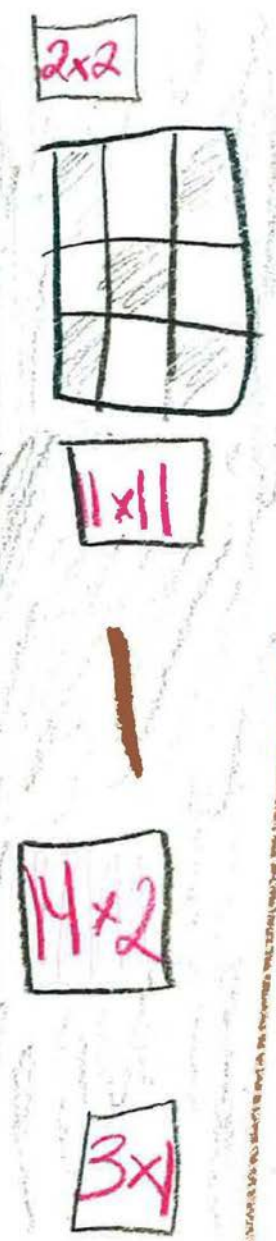
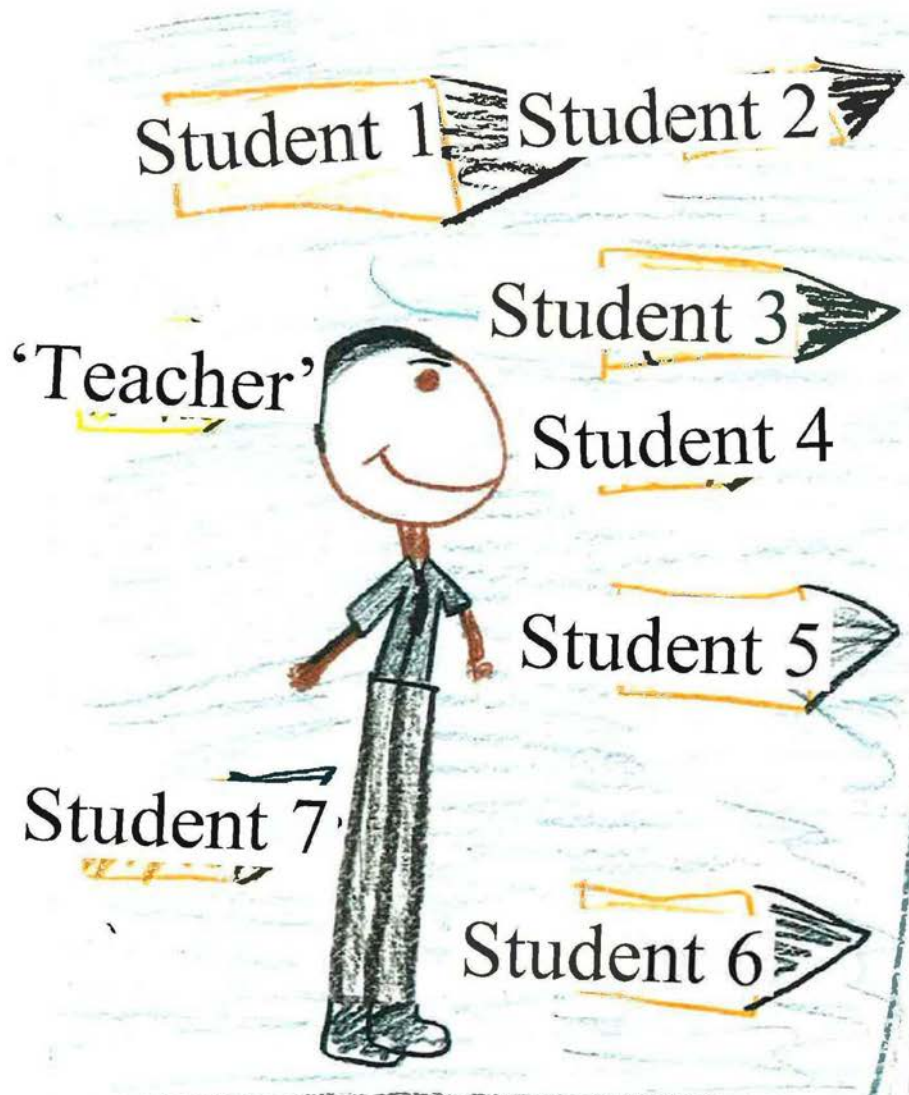


FH3-1

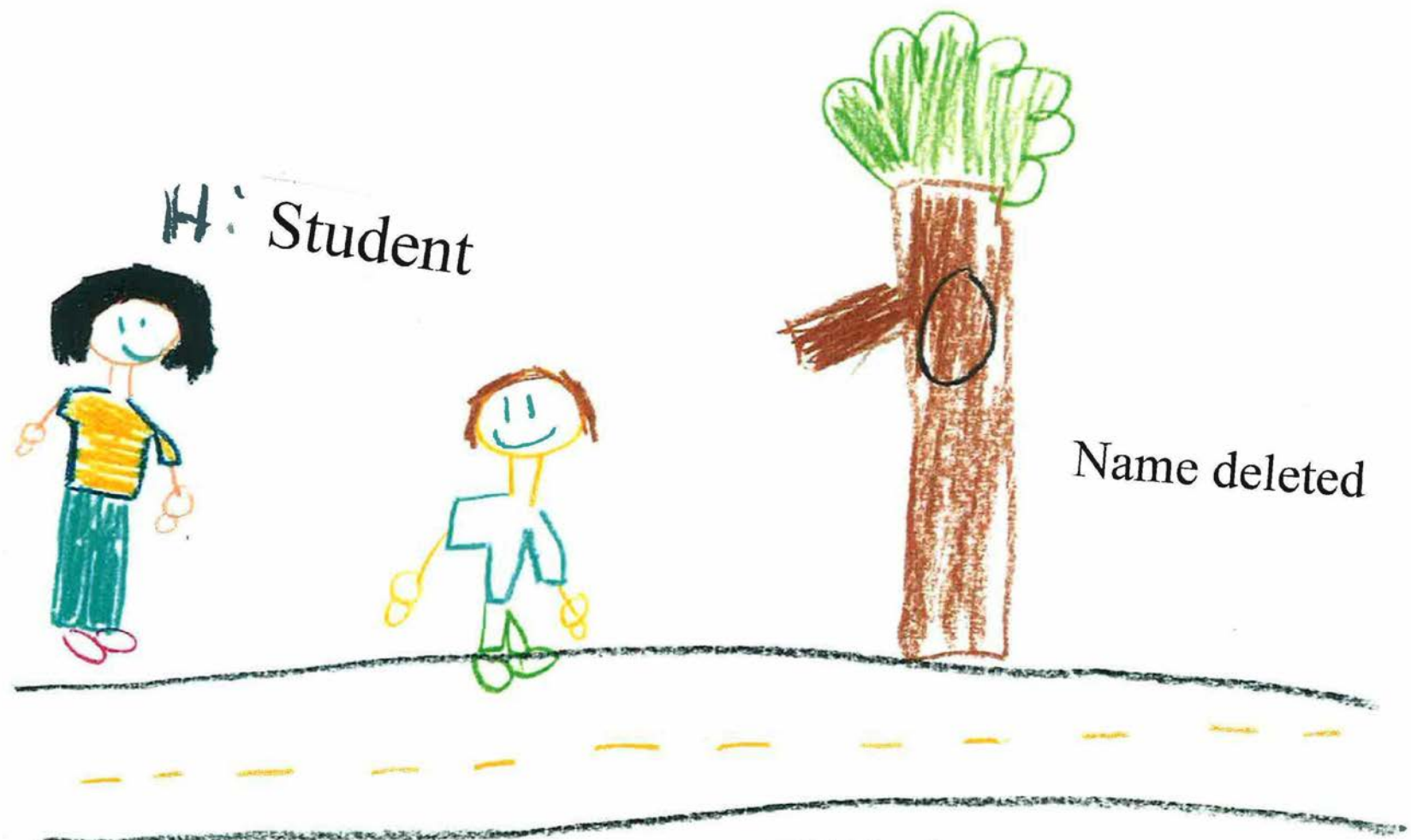
I saw 'Joseph' making sure this school
is running smuthly in the of f'ist.



FH3-2



FH3-3



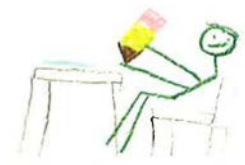
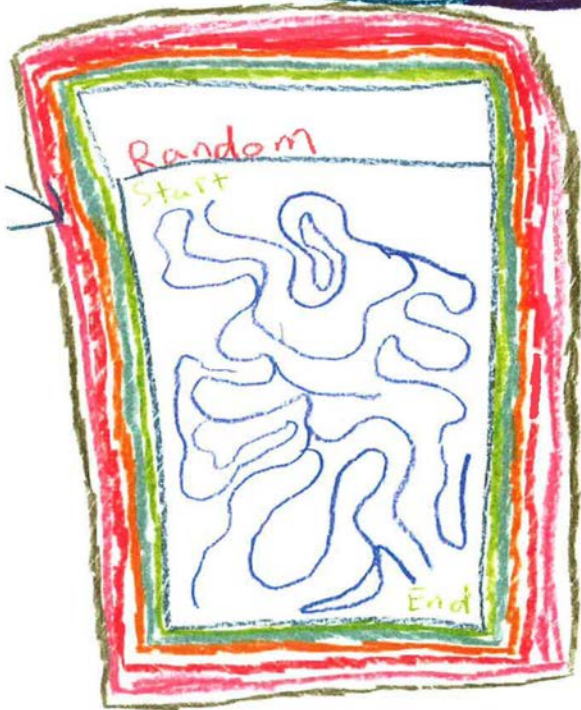
H: Student

Name deleted

FH3-4

He is always working to help are School.

His Paper

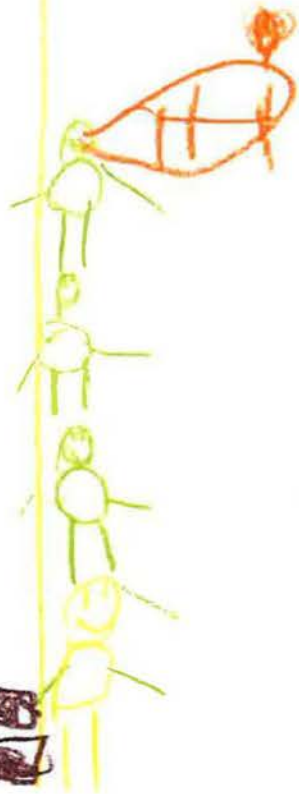


FH3-5



He is always
walking around
to check on
people

FH3-6

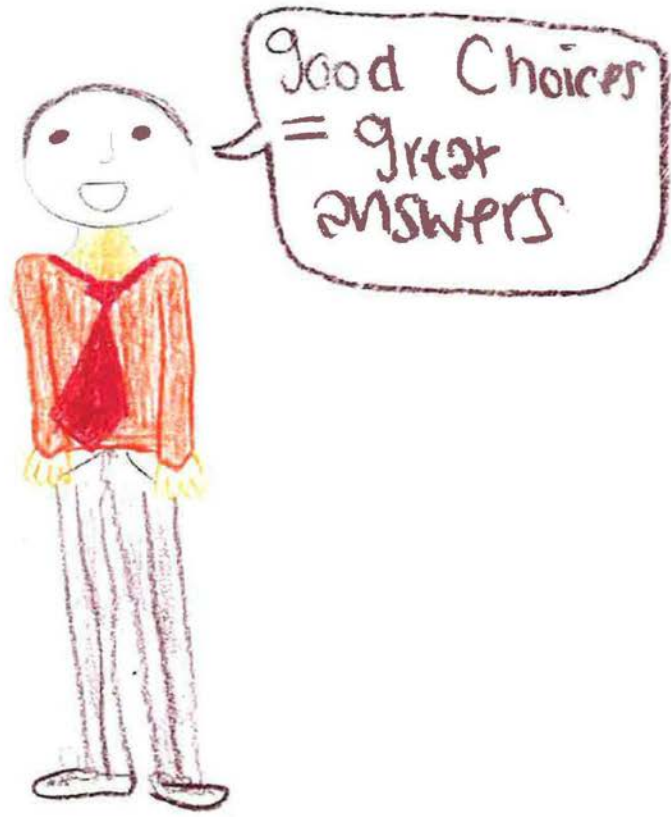


APPENDIX G:
STUDENTS' ILLUSTRATIONS
FOREST HILLS: GRADE FOUR
(FH4)

FH4-1



FH4-2

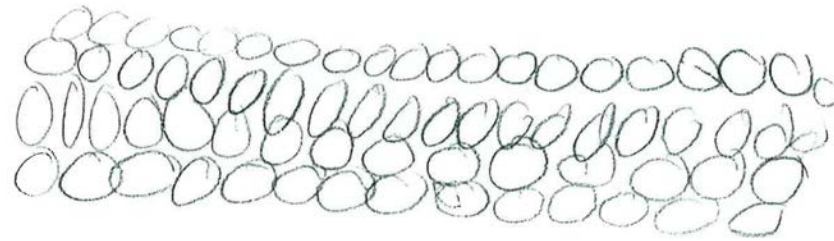


FH4-3

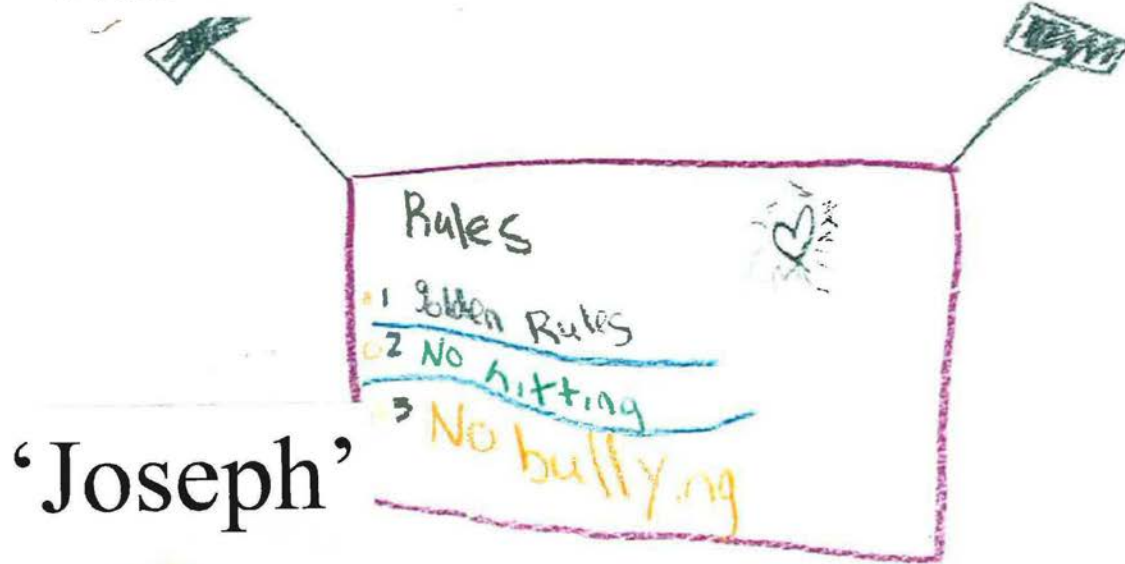




FH4-5



Name deleted

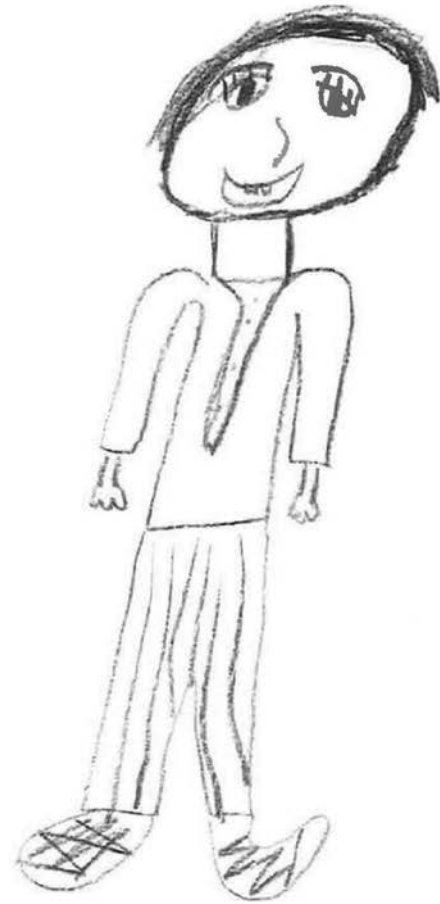
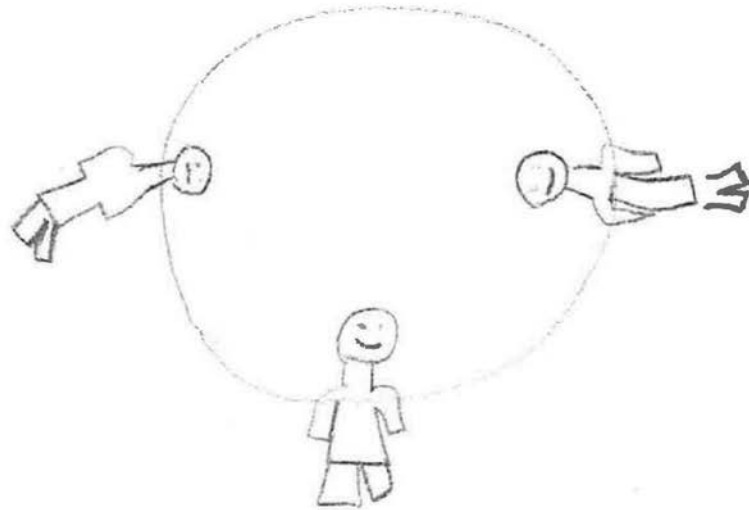


Name deleted



FH4-6

FH4-7



'Joseph'
tells kids
to follow
the golden
rule!

FH4-8

'Joseph'

Follow
the golden
rule!



Good choices =
Great results

'Joseph'
tells kids
to "follow
the Golden
Rule!"

FH4-9

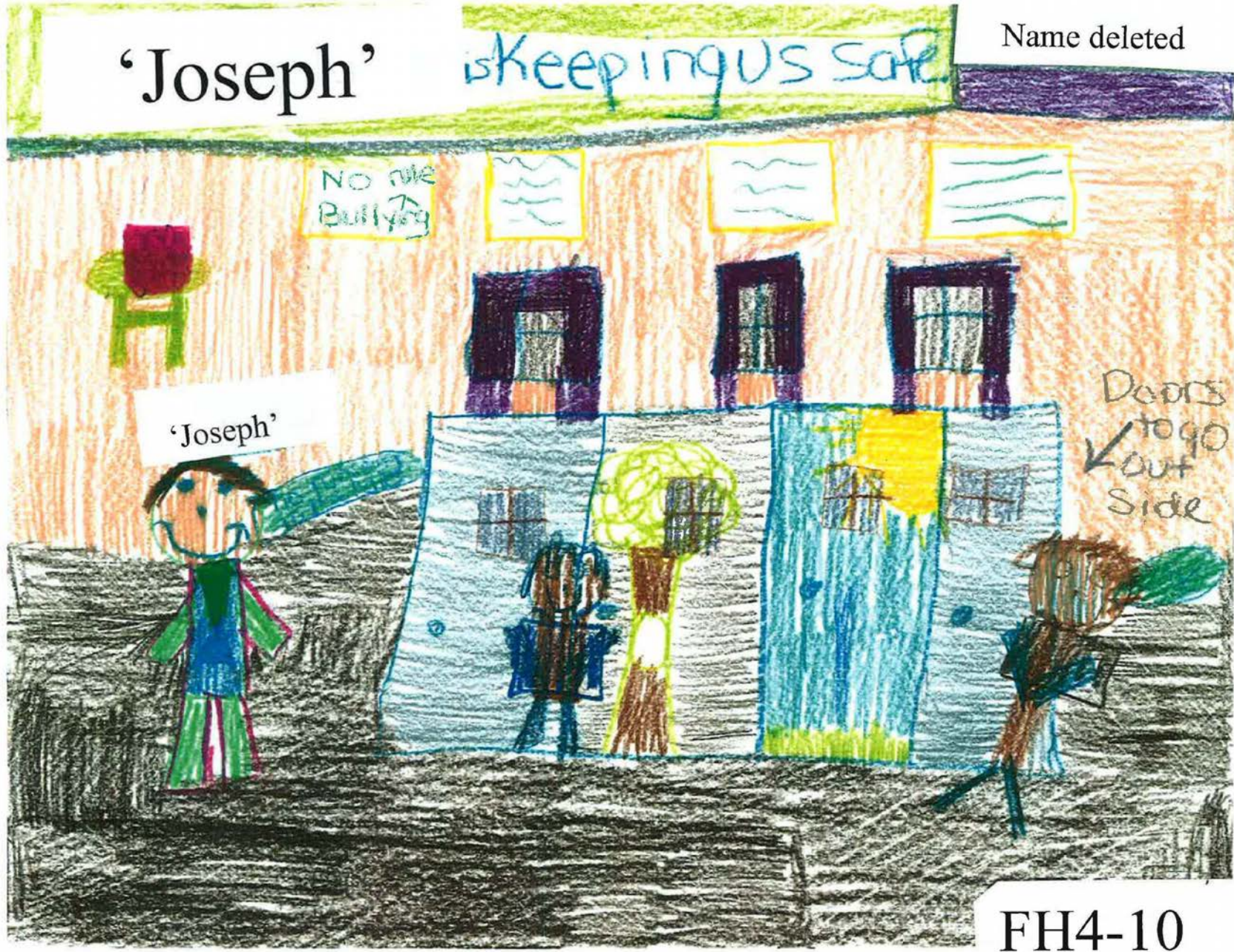
Good Choices Great Results!

Golden Rule;
Treat others how you
want to be treated.

'Joseph' Follow The
Golden Rule!



COOL!

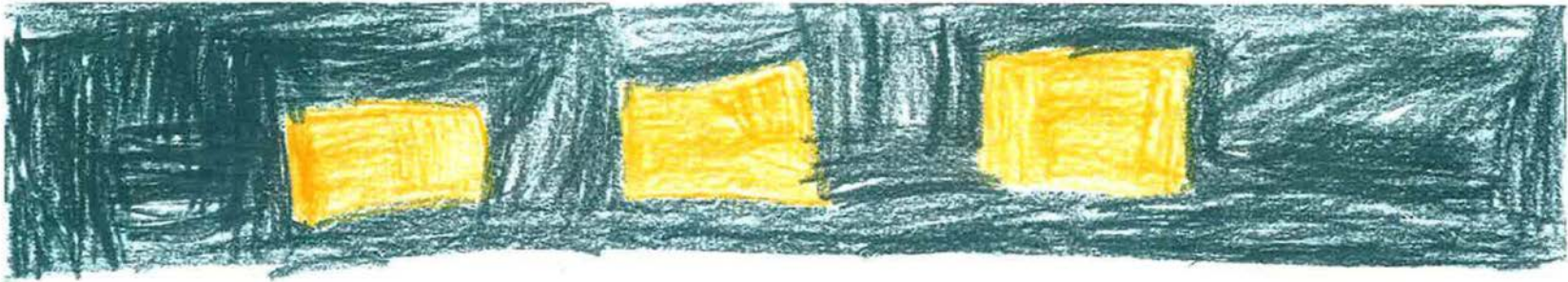


FH4-11



APPENDIX H:
STUDENTS' ILLUSTRATIONS
LODI: GRADE THREE
(L3)





L3-2



L3-3

APPENDIX I:
STUDENTS' ILLUSTRATIONS
LODI: GRADE FOUR
(L4)



L4-1

'Mark'

is

FANTASTIC

How are you doing



L4-2

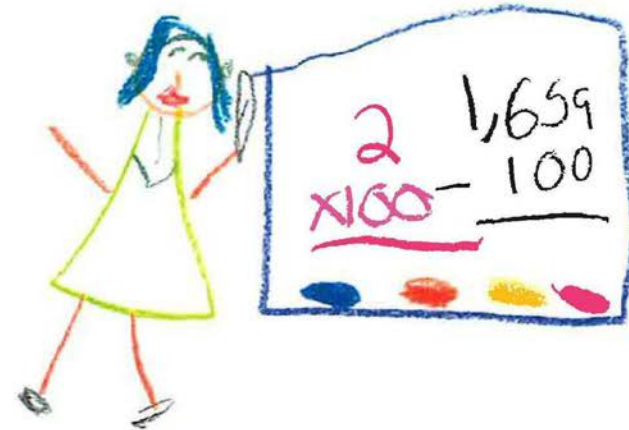


L4-3

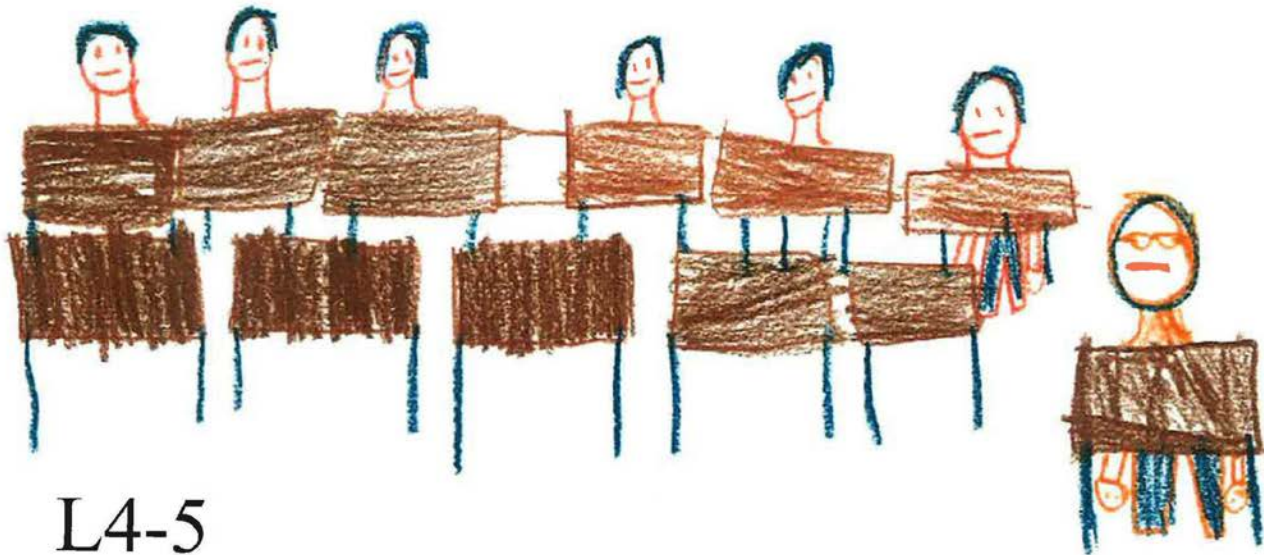
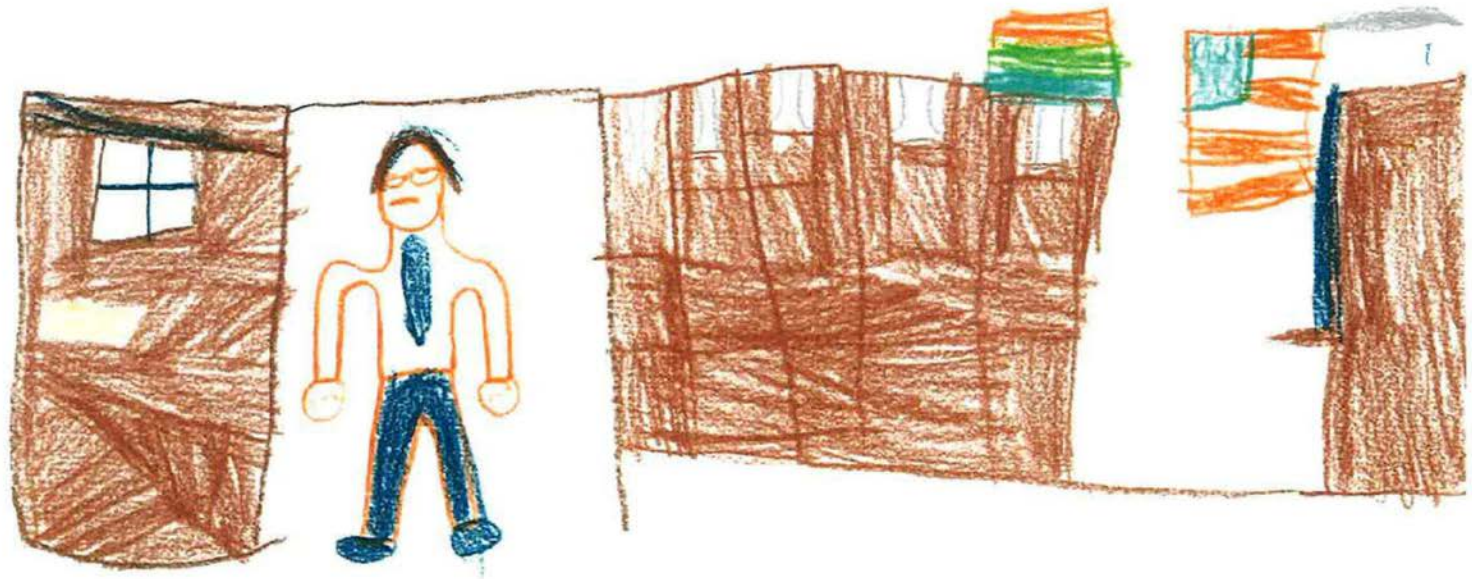
'Mark' Does a lot of speeches,
He sees use do work,



'Mark'



L4-4



L4-5



L4-6

APPENDIX J:
STUDENTS' ILLUSTRATIONS
EVERTON: GRADE FOUR
(E4)

I Love the Principale



I am
the
SCORERS

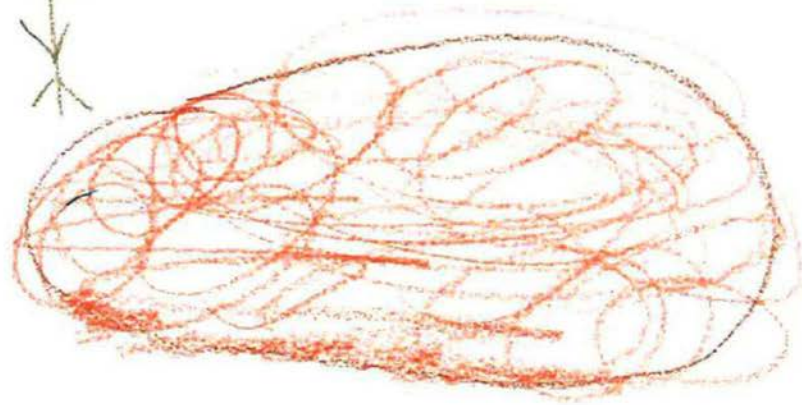


E4-1

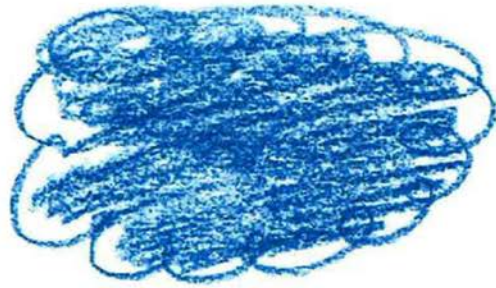
I saw 'Leah' looking
in the room, watching us
doing work. She came
again and we was going to
be doing a test,

E4-2

I saw 'Leah' down stairs in the cafeteria
breaking-up a fight.



E4-3



E4-4

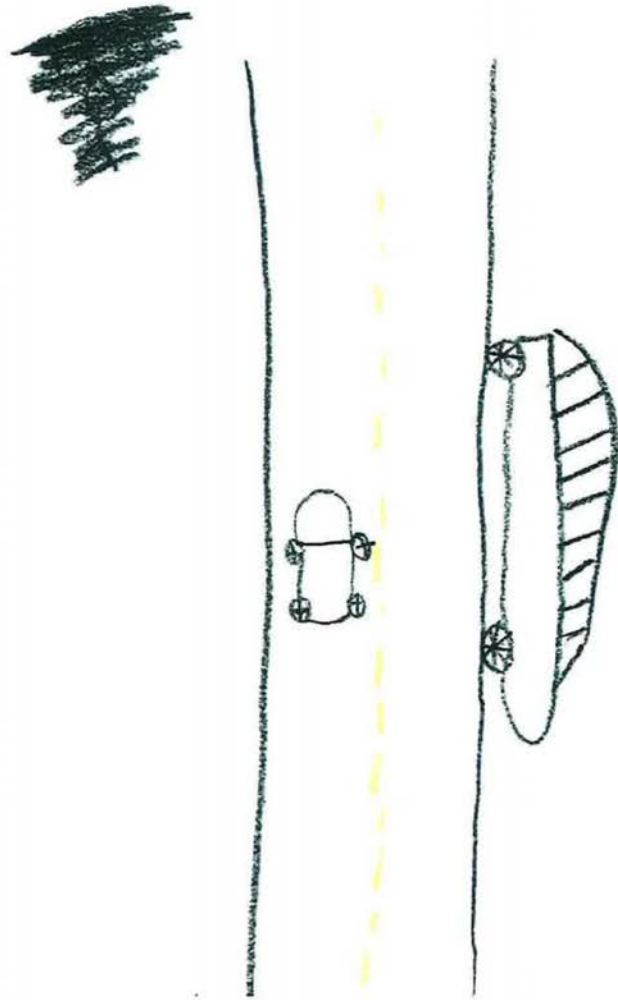


Our Favorite Principle

What I See 'Leah'

being happy to see the children
 having a good time and learning and
 listening to the teacher and
 handling problems in a very
 nice way and some people say
 they are ~~calm~~ calm when they hear voice.

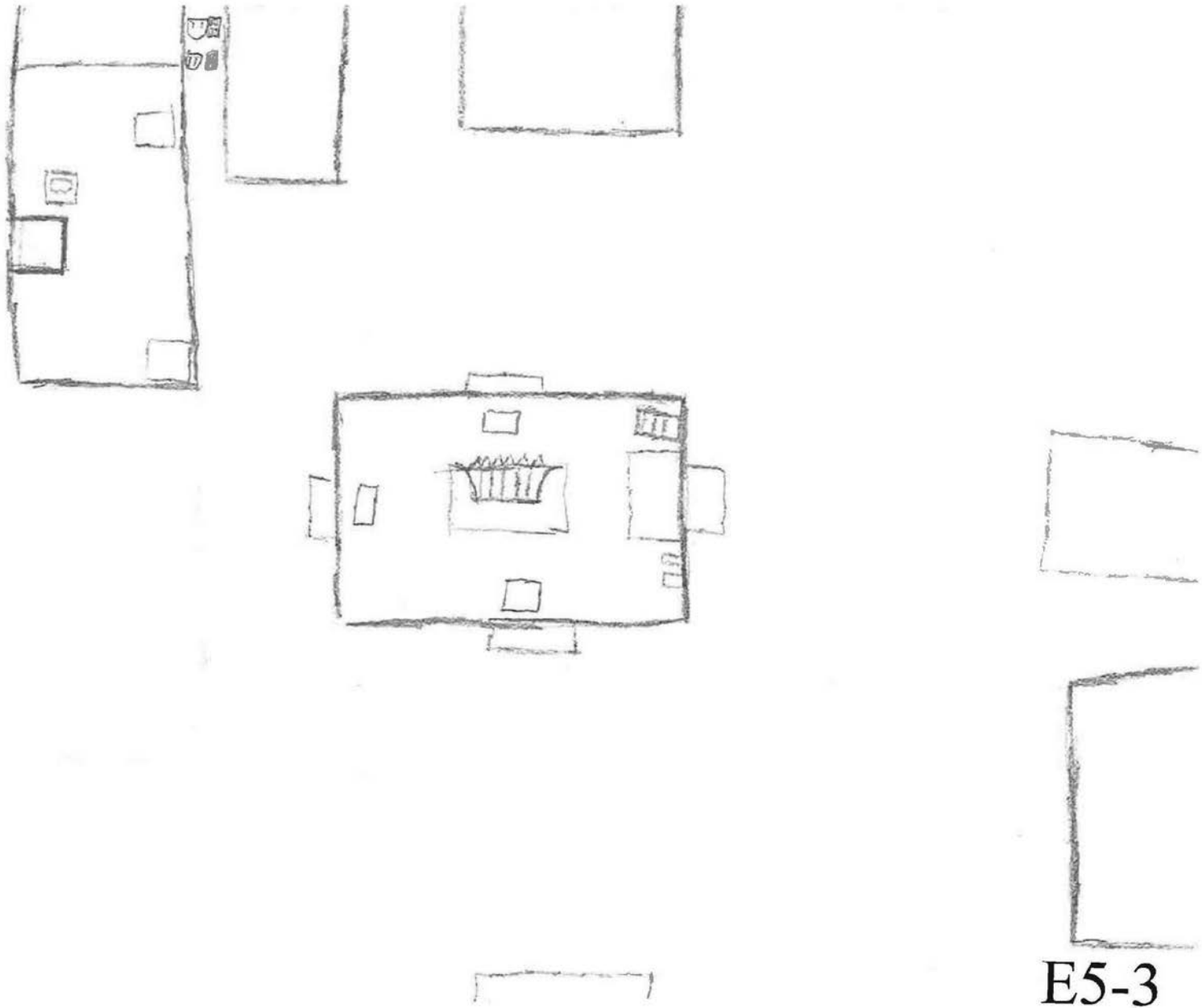
APPENDIX K:
STUDENTS' ILLUSTRATIONS
EVERTON: GRADE FIVE (E5)



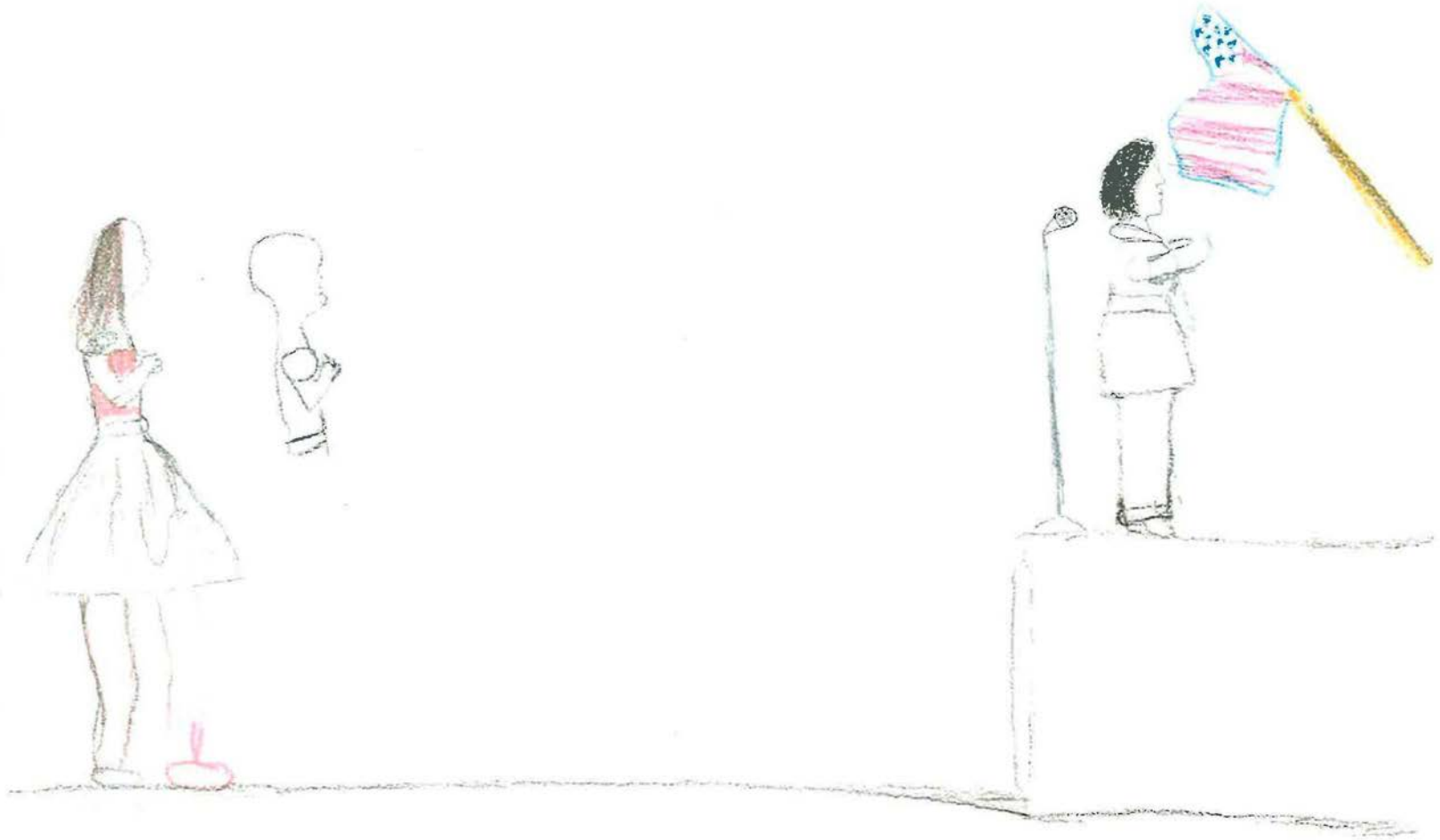
E5-1

I see my Principle as a role model to younger children. And help students get a scholarship.

E5-2



E5-3



E5-4

APPENDIX L:
STUDENTS' ILLUSTRATIONS
CARTER: GRADE FIVE
(C5)



C5-1

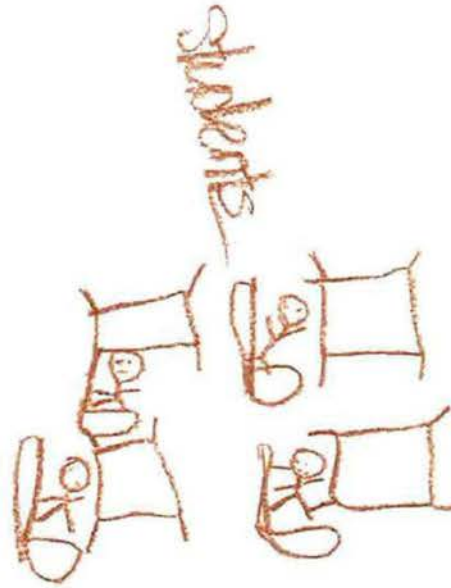
He walks around giving orders mostly. I don't communicate
 with him. He's a good person really. When I see
 him he's usually walking around talking to
 others. ~~He's~~ ~~usually~~ ~~walking~~ ~~around~~ ~~talking~~ ~~to~~
 How to keep the school in check. | 'David'
 IS trying to make school fun for everyone.
 while still learning. He always
 Does his job, like a wonderful
 Principal.

C5-2

'David' walk to classes and sits in their. I think he tries to see what we are learning. He talks with students. He sometimes talk to the students about what they are learning.

A 'David' is a good principal.

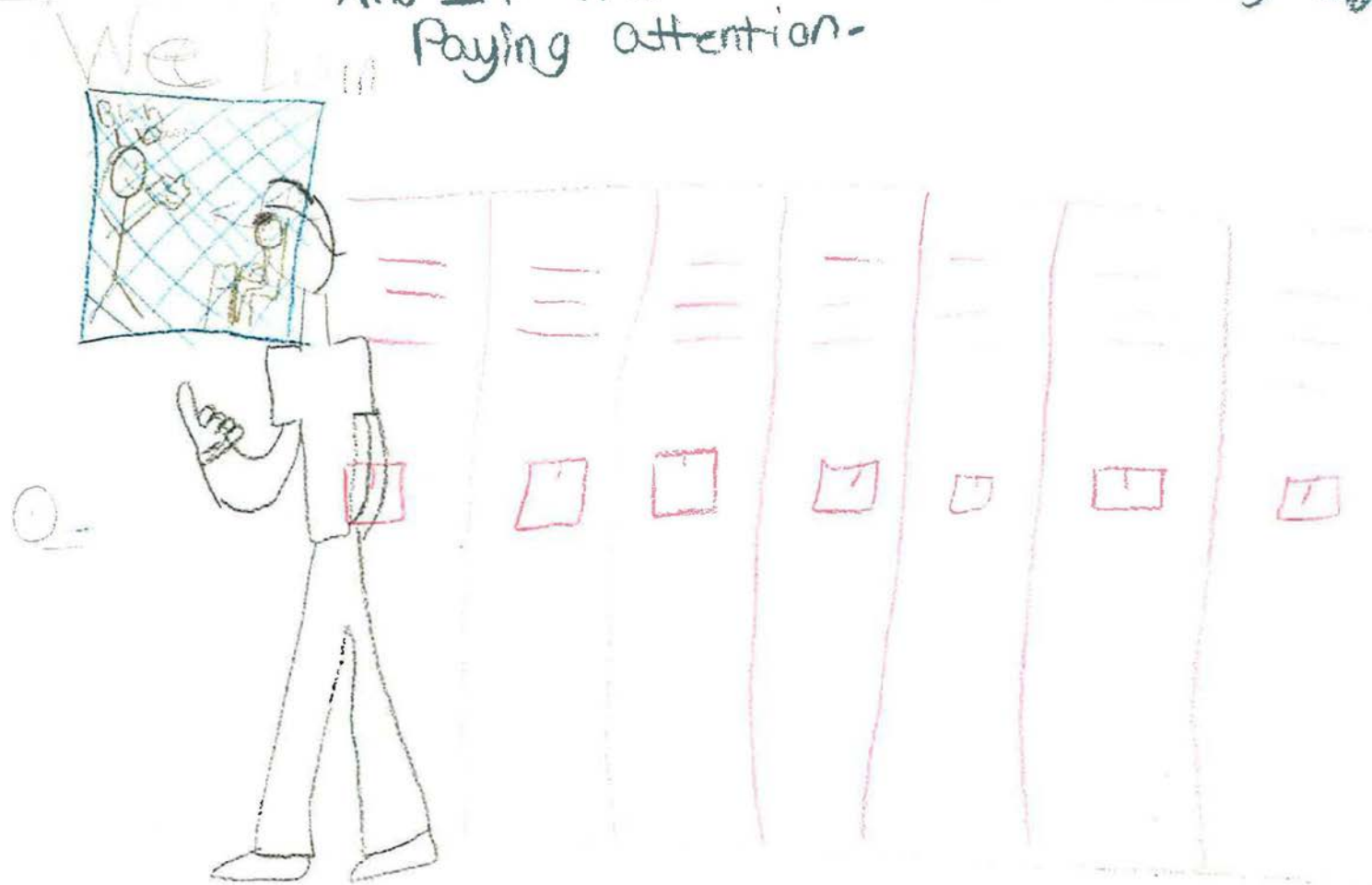
'David'



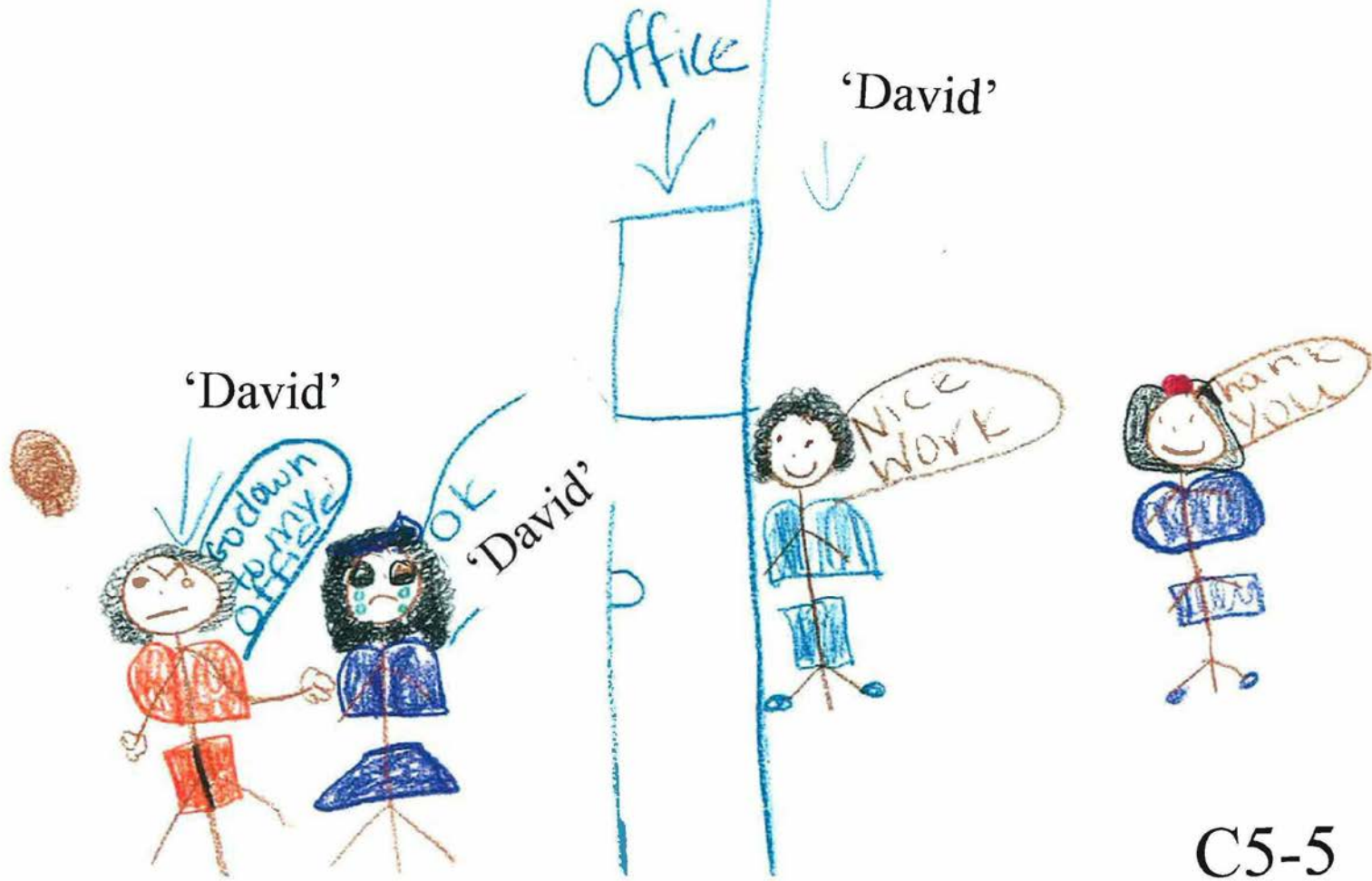
C5-3

C5-4

'David' goes through the halls and looks in classrooms to see if the Teachers are doing their job. And IF the Students are learning and Paying attention.



Go ~~to~~ down to my office Compliments



C5-5

Appendix M:
IRB approval



SYRACUSE
UNIVERSITY Institutional
Review Board

MEMORANDUM

TO: Joseph
Shedd
DATE: February 27, 2012
SUBJECT: **Expedited Protocol Review - Approval of Human Participants**
IRB #: 12-026
TITLE: *Unlocking Student Perspectives of Leadership*

The above referenced protocol, submitted for expedited review, has been evaluated by the Institutional

Review Board (IRB) for the following:

1. the rights and welfare of the individual(s) under investigation;
2. appropriate methods to secure informed consent; and
3. risks and potential benefits of the investigation.

Through the University's expedited review process, your protocol was determined to be of no more than minimal risk and has been given **expedited approval**. It is my judgment that your proposal conforms to the University's human participants research policy and its assurance to the Department of Health and Human Services, available at: <http://orip.syr.edu/human-research/human-research-irb.html>.

Your protocol is approved for implementation and operation from **February 27, 2012** until **February 26,**

2013. If appropriate, attached is the protocol's approved informed consent document, date-stamped with the expiration date. This document is to be used in your informed consent process. If you are using written consent, Federal regulations require that each participant indicate their willingness to participate by signing the informed consent document and be provided with a copy of the signed consent form. Regulations also require that you keep a copy of this document for a minimum of three years.

CHANGES TO APPROVED PROTOCOL: Proposed changes to this protocol during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, cannot be initiated without IRB review and approval, except when such changes are essential to eliminate apparent immediate harm to the participants. Changes in approved research initiated without IRB review and approval to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the participant must be reported to the IRB within five

days. Protocol changes are requested on an amendment application available on the IRB web site; please reference your IRB number and attach any documents that are being amended.

CONTINUATION BEYOND APPROVAL PERIOD: To continue this research project beyond **February 26, 2013**, you must submit a renewal application for review and approval. A renewal reminder will be sent to you approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date. *(If the researcher will be traveling out of the country when the protocol is due to be renewed, please renew the protocol before leaving the country.)*

UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS INVOLVING RISKS: You must report any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others within 10 working days of occurrence to the IRB at 315.443.3013 or orip@syr.edu.

STUDY COMPLETION: The completion of a study must be reported to the IRB within 14 days.

**Office of Research Integrity and
Protections**

121 Bowne Hall, Syracuse, New York 13244-
1200 (Phone) 315.443.3013 ♦ (Fax)
315.443.9889 orip@syr.edu ♦ www.orip.syr.edu



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board

Thank you for your cooperation in our shared efforts to assure that the rights and welfare of people participating in research are protected.

Kathleen King, Ph.D.
IRB Chair

Note to Faculty Advisor: This notice is only mailed to faculty. If a student is conducting this study, please forward this information to the student researcher.

DEPT: Teaching & Leadership, 150 Huntington Hall

STUDENT: Jonathan Damiani

Office of Research Integrity and Protections

121 Bowne Hall, Syracuse, New York 13244-1200

(Phone) 315.443.3013 ♦ (Fax) 315.443.9889

orip@syr.edu ♦ www.orip.syr.edu

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Teaching & Curriculum (Minor in Educational Leadership)

Syracuse University, School of Education- Syracuse, New York

Expected Graduation December 2012

- Specializations: Teacher Education, Special Education, Urban Education, Inclusive Education, Educational Leadership, Educational Inquiry, Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages
- Dissertation Topic: Using Student Voice to Create More Responsive Schools and a More Responsible Principalship

M.S.E. in Special Education

City College of New York- New York, New York

June 2004

- Completed while working full-time as a New York City Teaching Fellow

B.A. Communications-Public Relations Track, (Minor in Asian Studies)

Oswego State University- Oswego, New York

Seinan Gakuin University- Fukuoka, Japan

May 1999

- Studied Japanese language, culture, and history abroad at Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka, Japan for entire senior year
- Worked part-time as a Teacher of English to Japanese students ages 5-25

COLLEGE TEACHING & LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Instructor, School Liaison, Supervisor, Field Coordinator

Syracuse University, School of Education- Syracuse, New York

August 2009—Present

- Taught students in the inclusive elementary education program
- Instructor of Record: *Theories of Learning in Inclusive Classrooms*
- Instructor of Record: *Practicum in Pre-K Inclusive Education*
- Teaching Assistant: *Theories of Learning in Inclusive Classrooms*
- Teaching Assistant: *Inclusive Elementary Social Studies Methods* (co-taught/merged with *Differentiation of Instruction in Inclusive Classrooms*)
- Supervised and coordinated field placements for inclusive elementary education students in regional schools

Instructor, Teaching Assistant Mentor

Syracuse University, Graduate School Organization- Syracuse, New York

2011-Present

- Prepared teaching assistants to be successful teachers, advisors, and role models across disciplines
- Provided instruction, orientation, and on-going professional development activities to enhance teaching assistants' teaching skills
- Provided opportunities for rich, multidisciplinary conversations about teaching and graduate study

Instructor, Program Coordinator

Syracuse University, Gen-One Scholars Learning Community- Syracuse, New York

2011-Present

- Developed instruction, programming, and excursions to support first generation undergraduate students
- Helped young scholars across disciplines navigate the university and understand the keys to succeeding both in and out of the classroom

Instructor, Program Coordinator

Partnership with: Say Yes to Education (SYTE); Syracuse City School District (SCSD); Syracuse University School of Education- Syracuse, New York

2010-2011

- Screened, hired, trained and supervised college undergraduates to be tutors in diverse urban high schools locally
- Provided all tutors with on-campus orientation and tutoring training
- Worked to develop a program committed to increasing high school and college graduation rates for inner-city youth
- Collaborated with multiple partners including SYTE Foundation administration, regional school district's administration and staff, and Syracuse University faculty to implement program across high schools the district.

Adjunct Professor

Le Moyne College, Department of Education- Syracuse, NY

May 2009—August 2009

- Professor of graduate students seeking New York State teaching certification
- Instructor of record: *Introduction to the Special Education Perspective*

PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHING FELLOWSHIP

Teaching Fellow and Elementary Special Education Teacher

New York City Teaching Fellows- Brooklyn, New York

2002—2005

- Worked with children ages 4-13 who were diagnosed with severe emotional/behavioral disturbances and learning disabilities
- Taught a K-2 class my first year for a teacher on sabbatical; Worked as a science cluster teacher 2003-2005
- Coordinated school trips and excursions citywide for special education district

INTERNATIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Primary School Teacher

Soong Ching Ling International School, Shanghai, China

December 2006—March 2009

- Co-taught students ages 4-6 from all over the world using the United Kingdom's National Curriculum in an inclusive setting

Instructor

Universal Culture School of Hunan (Women's Prep Academy)- Yueyang City, China

July 2005—June 2006

- Worked to create a total language and culture education system for Chinese students ages 16-20
- Trained faculty in their spoken English, grammar and understanding of foreign culture
- Developed methods to improve the overall quality of instruction in China by emphasizing critical thinking, self-expression through language and the arts, cultural understanding and practical experience as alternatives to traditional learning methods.

Junior High School Teacher

Jet Program Nagoya City, Japan

August 2000— August 2001

- As a promising first-year classroom teacher was selected to teach at seven different junior high schools in the Nagoya City area

AWARDS

- Syracuse University Berj Harootunian Award for Meritorious Dissertation Research 2012
- Syracuse University School of Education Research & Creative Grant Award for 2012
- 'From Story-to-Screen' Video Contest for Publicly Engaged Students Award for 2012
- Certificate in University Teaching Awarded by the Future Professoriate Program 2012
- Permanent New York State Special/Elementary Education Teaching Certificate 2004

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Doctoral Research

Syracuse University-Department of Teaching & Leadership (Syracuse, New York)
2009-2012

DISSERTATION: *Unlocking Students' Perspectives of Leadership*

- Research Advisor: Dr. Joe Shedd
- Dissertation Committee: Dr. Mara Sapon-Shevin, Dr. George Theoharis, Dr. Dalia Rodriguez, Dr. Joseph Shedd
- Field study of the impact student's perspectives of leadership can have on school principals
- Cogenerative model of participatory action research developed with students and principals at rural, suburban, and urban elementary schools throughout the region

Research Apprenticeship

Syracuse University- Department of Teaching & Leadership (Syracuse, New York)
2010-2012

TOPIC: *Changes in Beliefs and Identities of Urban High School Tutors*

- Research Advisor: Dr. Jeffrey Rozzelle
- Focus group study of pre-service teachers beliefs about urban schools

Master's Research

City College of New York- Department of Education (New York, New York)
2002-2004

THESIS: *Science Software and its Impact on Behavior and Academic Achievement in a Special Education Classroom*

- Research Advisor: Dr. Betty Holmes-Anthony
- Mixed method study of the impacts of interactive media on tangential learning

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Publicly Engaged Scholarship as a Catalyst for Change in Campus Practices
- Addressing Roadblocks to Persistence and Attainment for First Generation Students
- Arts Based Research and Engagement—Disrupting Conventional Currents of Academic Wisdom
- Using Urban Voices and Hip-Hop to Explore and Problematize Race and Urban Education
- Narrative Inquiry and the Emergence of Improvisational and Postmodern Epistemologies

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Unlocking Students' Perspectives of Leadership

American Educational Research Association Annual Conference
Education and Poverty: Theory, Research, Policy and Praxis
San Francisco, CA
April 27-May 1, 2013

Urban Voices as Alternatives to 'Critical Theory'

SUNY Cortland Center for Gender and Intercultural Studies Conference
Race, Resistance, and Reason: Rethinking the Boundaries
State University of New York at Cortland

October 20, 2012

Negotiating Effective and Sustainable Community-University Partnerships

Imagining America National Conference

Linking Fates & Futures: Communities and Campuses as Equitable Partners

New York University—New York, NY

October 5-7, 2012 (Upcoming)

Developing Overlooked and Undervalued Voices in Research

American Ecological Engineering Society National Conference

Coupling Natural & Human Systems

State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry—Syracuse, NY

June 7-9, 2012

Hip-Hop as Reason

Critical Race Studies in Education Association National Conference

Race, Citizenship, Activism, and the Meaning of Social Justice for the 21st Century

Columbia University Teachers' College—New York, NY

May 30-June 2, 2012

The First-Generation Student: Addressing Roadblocks to Persistence and Attainment

Future Professoriate Program Annual Conference

White Eagle Conference Center—Hamilton, NY

May 17-18, 2012

Creative Research Relationships: Professional Development and Arts-Based Research

(Co-Presenter Laura Reeder)

Future Professoriate Program Annual Conference

White Eagle Conference Center—Hamilton, NY

May 17-18, 2012

Qualitative Approaches to Understanding and Using Student Voice

Central New York Publicly Active Graduate Education Conference

Engaged Scholarship Across the Disciplines

Syracuse University—Syracuse, NY

April 20, 2012

PUBLICATIONS/PROJECTS

- 1) Damiani, Jonathan. *Unlocking Students' Perspectives of Leadership*. Journal of Urban Education. Theme: Doctoral Student and Mentor Issue on Topics in Urban Education. Special Issue (Under review).
- 2) Damiani, Jonathan. *A More Responsible Principalship*. Journal of Staff Development. Theme: The Emerging Leader. June, 2013 (Under review).
- 3) Damiani, Jonathan. *The Teaching Principals: A Research Synthesis*. Journal of Staff Development. Theme: International Trends and Lessons. December, 2013 (Under review).
- 4) Damiani, Jonathan. 'From Story-to-Screen' Video Project for Publicly Engaged Students. *Unlocking Students' Perspectives of Leadership*. In partnership with Orange Television Network and Syracuse University (In progress).
- 5) Damiani, Jonathan and Wright, Glenn. Graduate Mentoring Initiative Book Project. Sponsored by the Graduate Student Organization at Syracuse University (In progress).
- 6) Daley, Jaimeson and Damiani, Jonathan. *We Are Underused*. Graphic Novel on Young Students' Perspectives of School (In progress).