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Securing the Blessings – Cultivating Active Citizens: Public School Principals’ Perceptions of How They Nurture a Democratic Way of Life

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DePaul University
College of Education

**SECURING THE BLESSINGS - CULTIVATING ACTIVE CITIZENS: PUBLIC
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THEY NURTURE A
DEMOCRATIC WAY OF LIFE.**

A Dissertation in Education
With a Concentration in Educational Leadership

by

Judith McCann Floeter

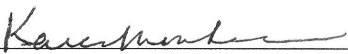
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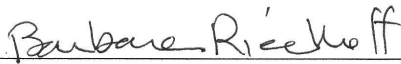
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Abstract

School leaders have the formidable responsibility to promote an educational environment that supports the growth of both the individual and the nation. School principals are uniquely pressured to comply with politically motivated demands to educate for a globally competitive labor force while they simultaneously promote and strengthen lifelong learning and a democratic ethos in their particular students. The thoughtful educator recognizes the complexities of this negotiation.

In this dissertation I examined the recent literature about schooling for democracy and conclude that public schools are vital to sustaining a democracy; current reform strategies impinge upon school efforts to teach children to become knowledgeable, active, and engaged citizens; and principals have a significant influence on the school community's learning priorities. I argue that to gain a better understanding of our nation's efforts to educate citizens who will sustain democracy, it is vitally important to study the democratic ethos of school principals. I then investigated public school principal's perceptions of schooling for democracy. This dissertation reports on the practices of public school principals, through a conceptual lens of democratic education that is informed by theories of participatory democracy, a concept of a good citizen, care theory and transformative leadership theory. It is supported by the democracy signified by the U.S. Constitution. This study concluded that leadership choices made by public school principals offer a counter to the narrative that public schools are broken. However, this study also concluded that public school principals seem scarcely aware of the public school's responsibility to prepare budding citizens which is necessary to "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity."

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. My husband has been unwavering with his faith in me. He has been patient and kind through thick and thin. He acted as a sounding board, a proofreader, and a coach. He pushed me to clearer thinking and more wording. He worked side-by-side with me throughout the years of my doctoral program and deserves much of the credit for the completion of this document.

My children, their spouses/significant others, my dad, my mom, my siblings, and close friends all must be recognized for their inspirational support. They never let me give up. Each gave me space to work, let me argue with them and debate my half-hatched ideas. Always they believed in me and prodded me to finish.

I'd like to make special mention of my grandmother, Helen Ruth McCann. She is, at this writing, 99 years young, and the epitome of a life-long learner. She continually inspires me because she is interested in everything, listens to new ideas, and even changes her opinions with new information. Together we read the new poems, share interesting books and comb through magazines to improve ourselves. Most importantly, she reminds me to stay on the road, no matter the obstacles.

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Chapter I. Introduction

Overview of the Study

Thomas Jefferson, writing about democracy said, “The qualifications for self-government in society are not innate. They are the result of habit and long training” (Jefferson, 1824, in Kahne and Middaugh, 2009, p. 1). George Counts (1949) articulated this for a more modern age when he stated; “the major difficulty which all democracies confront here is the achievement through the democratic process of an education program designed to strengthen democracy” (p. 269). The word democracy is powerful. It evokes intense emotion, debate, conflict, and relief. Its meanings are unique and ubiquitous, simple and complicated, individual and public. “Democracy is not simply a question of structures. It is a state of mind. It is an activity” (Stewart, 2012). Americans hold democracy as sacred, and yet they take it for granted. They complain endlessly about it, but will defend it until death. This back and forth yin and yang pervades discussions of schooling too. Nothing seems to inspire debate and consternation more than public schooling. Democracy and schooling, and the synergy between the two, warrant careful attention and examination, especially by those who wish to preserve them for subsequent generations, as both are so important and so vital to American identity.

It has long been the practice for public schools to bear the lion’s share of responsibility for inculcating in children the values and principals of democracy (Youniss and Levine, 2009; Counts, 1949, p. 267; Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett, 2008). Some would argue that, in fact, it is a foundational directive, though often lost in the *mêlée*, that public school’s most important function in the community is to prepare democratic citizens (Dewey, 1916 as cited in Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett, 2007; Nussbaum, 2010). That preparation must include teaching children

to know, understand the importance of, and to be able to enact democratic citizenship. By doing so, students will learn to live by and know how to protect the most foundational document, The United States Constitution. In this way the purposes set by the fifty-two words of its preamble will continue to frame our democracy (Levinson, 2012; Nussbaum, 2010). Among others the responsibility for safeguarding such preparation falls to the school leader. It is the school leader who, as has been demonstrated through empirical research, is second only to the classroom teacher in having a significant impact on learning and improving anything in the schools (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, 2008). It is the school leader who has a defining influence on whether or not the school can achieve the tacit twin goals of improving academic achievement and preparing future citizens (Gale, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 2010). It is the school leader who empowers teachers to go beyond the dominant discourse of a standardized curriculum (Rodrigues & Alanis, 2011). There is a great deal written and discussed about how school leaders can improve academics, but the conversation is rarely focused on how those leaders support the kind of education that will prepare children to become citizens who will preserve democracy (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003).

Today's public school principals are acutely focused on the business of raising student academic achievement, spurred on by an overwhelming amount of public and political sentiment, discussion, and debate that pushes for common academic standards and accountability measures (Møller, 2012). Nevertheless, an educated citizenry in the United States must also be prepared to sustain a vital democracy and a singular focus on academics, while important, isn't enough (Lawy & Biesta, 2006; Mirra, et al., 2013). In spite of the lack of public focus, and policy mandates that seem counterintuitive, those charged with leadership in public schools have a responsibility to teach students to deliberate and form their own conceptions of justice, virtue,

and the public good (Gutmann, 2012; Gale, 2010). It follows then that the public school principal must ensure that the school provides students with the “knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become fully engaged participants in a democratic society” (Bellamy & Goodlad, 2008, p. 566).

Rationale for the Study

In the school where I, as its principal, hold a modicum of influence over the means used to educate our particular students, am nearly exhausted from holding back the proverbial floodgates against the pressure to make certain that most students meet or exceed state testing benchmarks. Our school sends approximately 20% of the student population to college; yet peers question my judgment when I ask whether every student should be required to take algebra and trigonometry instead of courses of applied mathematics. My words have been dismissively ignored in leadership council meetings when voicing concern that students’ aesthetic education is compromised when we fill their schedules with doubled up reading and math interventions at the expense of social studies, music, and fine art. I risk accusations of negligence as I bargain for more time for my English language learning students to develop literacy in both their languages in lieu of drilling them on narrowly focused literacy skills that bear no resemblance to the best practices of language acquisition instruction. Under the cloak of raising the bar we are left with an astonishingly narrow and disrespectful attitude towards developing in our students curiosity, intellect, thinking for oneself, and a concern or responsibility for the common good. We have fallen prey to the corruption that is encouraged by the current education legislation such as NCLB (Noddings, 2007; Ravitch, 2010b,) where educators, schools, and even states are pitted one against another in a battle over numbers. Improving teacher performance has been conflated

with spending billions of dollars on elaborate audit mechanisms (Rheingold, 2012). Instead of spending those billions to create optimal learning environments for all students (Knight and Pearl, 2000), we label children, their teachers, and schools as failures (Kumashiro, 2012). These practices run counter to constitutional freedoms and to their preservation through schooling for a strong democracy (Abowitz, 2011; Fazzaro, 2006, p. 15; Pinto, Portelli, Rottmann, Pashby, Barrett, and Mujuwamariya, 2012).

The present system of stringent, even strident accountability, coupled with standardized, homogenized, and regimented curriculum delivery methods are proving to be detrimental to critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation and civic (and civil) discourse (Nussbaum, 2010, Ch. 2; Zhao, 2012; Noddings, 2011; Ravitch, 2010a; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Critical education scholarship and research problematizes and even denounces the current education policy, yet public school educators themselves have not mounted serious opposition to it (Zhou, 2011). It is an absolute falsity to believe that life-long learning will be achieved by coercion, bribery, punishments, fear or common core standards (Noddings, 2007; Ravitch, 2010a). This unquestioned, unchallenged, but pervasive and pernicious attitude of “the end justifies the means,” works powerfully against the school principal.

Research Statement Overview

Thoughtful educational scholars adamantly advocate that schools do things differently if they care about children and care about preserving democracy (Noddings, 2007, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Nussbaum, 2010). The United States Constitution's charge to "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity" (U.S. Constitution, Preamble) applies to schools. But how? How does the public school principal conceptualize democratic citizenship and his or her role in its promotion? What do most educators know of how to promote democracy in a public school setting? What do they think is their role, in the U. S. education system, for growing citizens who can flourish in a democratic nation? Do school principals have a shared idea of a democratic ethos? How does a school leader contend with federally sanctioned policies that "misconstrue the very nature of education in a liberal democracy" (Noddings, 2007, p. 7)? These tantalizing questions drive this study.

Our collective and tacit understanding is that a public education is a cornerstone of American democracy preparing students to be good citizens. There is a growing body of research about educating for democracy, and researchers agree that those in the education field can and should conduct inquiry to determine the field's adherence towards the goals of education in a democracy (Mason and Delandshere, 2010) even though there appears to be very little public and political concern for this side of the educated citizenry imperative (Todd, 2009; Banks, 2008; Goodlad, 2008). Additionally, there is quite a lot written about effective school leadership and the qualities of the ideal principal (Supovitz, Sirinides and May, 2010). What strikes me as significant is that there is so little research, training or leadership preparation coursework supporting principals as they educate for democratic citizenship (Bennett, 2012). It is left unclear what school principals understand as their role in ensuring a strong democracy (Goodlad,

2004). This study attempts to explore how public school principals conceptualize democratic citizenship and their role in its promotion. I hope to contribute the voice of the school principal in the ongoing quest to preserve democracy.

Chapter II. Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of public schooling is to ensure an educated citizenry (Parker, 2012; Fazzaro, 2006, 2011). It is generally accepted that *educated* [emphasis added] means that graduates of public schooling have achieved an academic prowess sufficient enough for them to be self-supportive and able to contribute positively to the nation's economy. As if that wasn't by itself a complicated and daunting task, education in a democratic society carries unique responsibilities to insure that children are prepared to support and maintain a democracy (Counts, 1949, p. 267). While there is much in education literature discussing this dual commitment, it is unclear what school principals understand as their role in ensuring a strong democracy (Goodlad, 2004). The structure of this literature review has three sections: first, there is a brief examination of the scholarship of those concerned with public school's role in a democracy; second is an examination of current education policy and ways it impacts schooling for a democracy; and third an exploration of school principals' roles in furthering democracy.

Purpose and Role of Education in a Democracy

Biesta (2011) reminds us that democracy is “an ongoing and never-ending experiment [that is] rooted in the democratic values of equality and freedom [and that participation] can engender meaningful forms of citizenship and democratic agency” (Biesta, 2011, p. 33).

Biesta's words help frame the following section of the literature review, which is intended to provide context and definition to a study concerned with schooling for democracy. His words remind us that democracy is unstable and vulnerable, that it has agreed upon rules that must be taught, and that people need space to in which practice democratic citizenship. This section

begins with the charge that democracy is in trouble. It then provides a description of the concepts of democracy supporting the framework of this research study. Lastly, three subsections provide an explanation of how citizens must be involved, why schools should participate in educating citizens, and ending with some ways that schools do educate for democracy.

Concern for Democracy

Democracy in the United States is under siege. Citizen engagement is weak, the chasm between the classes is ever widening with a shrinking middle class and burgeoning lower class, growing inequalities, rampant consumerism, and a government unable to function effectively (Barber, 2008, 2013). The *American democracy report card* [emphasis added], if one might call it that, shows failing grades in nearly every indicator. One need only pay attention to news media for a few minutes to find a plethora of examples arousing concern for the injustices and inequities caused by unchecked capitalism including recent confirming statements by Robert Reich and Peter Edelman, two former cabinet members who are also experts on U.S. economics and poverty (Edelman, 2012; Neyfakh, 2013; Stan, 2013). Former president Jimmy Carter publically stated that he is worried that democracy is no longer working in the United States (Riva, 2013). Newly elected Pope Francis decries the current culture whereby the power of money over ethics, and rampant consumerism at the expense of the common good, is in service to a dictatorship of an economy “lacking in any humane goal” (Pope, *Financial Reform*, 2013). The focus of this paper is not to provide a litany of the problems of democracy, but to state that the health of the U.S. democracy is in doubt, with many scholars lamenting its imminent demise (Apple, 2012; Barber, 2013; Ayers, 2010).

The founders of American Democracy recognized its fragility with John Adams’ (1814)

famous warning that democracy never lasts long and Madison's (1788) vigorous argument for a constitution to make sure that it would. Adams and Madison, along with Jefferson, Hamilton, Washington, Webster and brethren, insisted that the only way to protect the fledgling Constitution, and thus democracy, was through a populous of educated, virtuous, and moral citizens. They saw first-hand that citizens are capable of throwing off tyranny and oppression by throwing their lot behind a government that protects life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all (The U.S. Constitution, 1787). Modern thinkers echo the founders' words and stress the need for citizens to be ever faithful to the principals of democracy because it continues to be true that only a strong democracy can successfully rebel against tyranny, injustice and the dominance of powerful people (Barber, 2013; Parker, 2012, p. 4; McNeil, 2002, p. 243; Gutmann, 1999b, p. 61). Because, as John Dewey (1916) explains, only in a democratic society, with citizens "educated to initiative and adaptability" (p. 33) will its members see the benefit of, and share in, the protection of the interests of the group (p. 43). Yet, of grave concern to critical educational theorists is their opinion that Americans are seemingly unconcerned about the erosion of their liberties and freedom, and further that they demonstrate an ignorance of the core principals that simultaneously define and safeguard democracy (Barber, 2011b, p.115; Kahne and Middaugh, 2009, p. 1).

Democracy Revisited

However imperfect, ambiguous, or unsustainable, and however many enemies it might have, overwhelmingly, people prefer democracy (Gutmann, 1999b, p. 59). Scholars globally, and throughout history, have written volumes on the subject of democracy, yet there is an enduring difficulty in agreeing upon a clear definition. This is particularly true of American democracy, whose meanings, interpretations, and manifestations, are both hotly debated and

naively presumed by U.S. citizens. Often, understanding is reduced to a dichotomy: individual rights vs. the common good, small government vs. welfare state, public vs. private institutions. Such an elastic and complex concept will be tough to agree upon so it is important to examine some of the ideas about democracy that worried educational scholars reiterate.

Perhaps most fundamental to American ideas of democracy, and very often cited by current education scholarship, is the philosophy of John Dewey who famously wrote that democracy is a mode of living with others in community, “of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 1916, p. 32). Robert Dahl (2000) clarifies it as “designed for members of an association who are willing to agree to treat one another as equals” (p. 35). Woods and Gronn (2009) add that democracy must entail “self-governance, protection from arbitrary power, and legitimacy grounded in consent” (p. 433). The key therefore, to understanding democracy, is to value and protect the concept of equality (Knight and Pearl, 2000, p. 221) through continual reexamination of the rights and freedoms of all members of the community (Diamond, 1997, p. 250) by the community and through respectful communication.

The very definition of democracy expands and contracts as communities strive for equality. This is demonstrated again and again when communities renew debate on equality, resulting in a redefinition of exactly who is considered to be a citizen, and usually leads to the inclusion of some previously marginalized group (Parker 2012, p. 614). The research of Peter Gronn (2010) bears this out with historical analysis that tracks trends showing how society seems to be moving always towards egalitarian goals. As communities interpret democracy differently in reference to their citizens’ changing needs, there is a continual contestation of its meaning, resulting in something more inclusive, more visible, and more open (Abowitz, 2008, p. 359). As such, the overall idea of democracy is expanded and must be recognized to be more than the

simplistic concept of majority rule, and importantly, more than allowing the rights of others to be ignored just to achieve a *good result* (Gutmann, 1999b, p. 59) [emphasis added]. This more inclusive interpretation of democracy leads to “the kind of society in which we want to live” (Apple, 2011, p. 23) and ultimately results in an elastic understanding of what is called a public, or in other words, the public good, or civil society.

On a more practical level, Dahl states that people conceive of democracy as both an ideal and an institution and they will ally themselves to either the ideal, the institution, or to both (Dahl, 2000, p. 35). Democracy, as an ideal is in a precarious position because, as stated earlier, in order to remain strong and relevant it must be constantly debated and defined by thoughtful and informed citizens (Gale, 2010; Gause, 2007; Kahne and Westheimer, 2003, p. 35). Democracy as a form of government is protected only when citizens both have, and act upon, a deep understanding of those integral components that enfranchise a free and equal people so that they might perpetuate an egalitarian community. Both the ideal and the government are threatened when the balance of opposing interests is tipped in favor of a few, and when citizens either forget or are unaware of their responsibility to protect the delicate balance (Fazzaro, 2006, p. 25; Madison, 1788; Levinson, 2012, Ch. 1).

It is human nature to simplify choices, and thus understandable that people choose sides of a democracy dyad. Paradoxically, reflective individuals come to understand themselves in reference to their opposition, those on the other side, or those who are different from them. The implication is that people learn who they are and what it means to be a citizen through participation within the collective, from exchange and debate with other members of “the public” (Feinberg, 2012, p. 2; Dewey, 1916, p. 32). Regardless, “Democracy is a terrain of struggle” (Ayers, 2009, p. 5; Goodman, 1992; Meier, 2009, p. 18) and requires an educated, thoughtful

populous to keep it alive and the processes needed to establish and maintain this.

Another contestable and complicated component of democracy is the notion of freedom. Democracy scholars point out that for the individual and the collective, freedom can only be won by recognizing the freedom of others (Woods and Gronn, 2009, p. 447). It is important to understand that the individual realizes his or her freedom through interactions with others who are different from one's self (Biesta, 2010). These interactions consist of conversation, dialogue, discourse, debate and compromise (Gutmann and Thompson, 2013) in service of the common good. These interactions serve the public best when informed by knowledge of the constitution, when grounded by a historical perspective, and when there is a deep understanding of local concerns (Gibson and Levine, 2003). Ultimately, one grows in freedom by granting freedom to others (Sen, 2012, p. 368) and by valuing others' freedoms.

Citizens Create Democracy

The overarching idea I want to convey is that "for true democracy to flourish there must be citizens" (Barber, 2001, p. 12). Citizens in a democracy are free, believe in equality, and are not only committed to individual liberty, but know how to safeguard it for all others. Walter Feinberg (2012, p. 2) explains that citizens enact democracy by means of a vertical and horizontal exchange of ideas, meaning that the public is working for the common good while simultaneously respecting one another's differences through some form of collective decision-making (p. 19). Eleanor Ostrom's forty-year, and Nobel honored, research demonstrated that engaged citizens, when empowered to develop and manage their local resources, do so far more effectively and efficiently than can a remote central agency or government (Levine, 2011, p. 7). Acting as co-creators, individuals developed mutually beneficial relationships, they understood and could predict the problems the community would encounter, and over time they developed

and strengthened capacity, leading to an expansion of democracy manifested by a championing of people over markets (Slater, 2012, p. 389).

Any discussion of democracy, education, and citizenship must include the work of Westheimer and Kahne (2004). They posit that there are three kinds of citizen: the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen (p. 237-269). Their research, aimed at those teaching citizenship in the schools, stems from examining the politically charged civic education curricula and undergirds a great deal of subsequent scholarship on education for democracy. Westheimer and Kahne describe personally responsible citizens as those who have good character, act responsibly, morally, and obey laws (p. 241). The participatory citizen not only acts responsibly personally, but also “actively participates in the civic affairs and the social life of the community at the state, local. And national levels” (pp. 241-242). And justice-oriented citizens go a step further because they not only participate in civic affairs, but they also work to understand the root causes of social issues and will pursue solutions to them (p. 242). Educators have a significant impact on their students’ growing consciences and therefore must fully appreciate the nuances of each kind of citizenship, and more importantly, take care to understand the instructional and political implications of their curriculum and delivery method decisions (p. 265). The insights of Westheimer and Kahne highlight the contestable nature of citizenship (Biesta, 2011, p. 31).

Citizenship as a legal status may be bestowed by birth or naturalization, but behaving like a democratic citizen isn’t automatic, intuitive, or easy (Barber, 2001, p. 12). Put another way, people are not born knowing how to be citizens because citizenship is learned behavior (Goodlad, 2004, p. 17). Democratic citizens learn to be accountable to self and to others -- specifically to democratic society as a whole (Levinson, 2011) through their relationships with

others. Citizens learn to support the public good (Parker, 2012). They develop individual capabilities, and at the same time, champion those of others. One of the more challenging aspects of democratic citizenship and of learning one's responsibility as a citizen, is the recognition that one's own liberty is directly related to the liberties or freedom given to all other members of the society (Slater, 2012; Biesta, 2011). Banks (2008) argues that such an understanding also comes about by recognizing the political, civic, and economic rights of different cultural, racial, ethnic, and language groups (p. 129). Ultimately, people who understand what a democracy is, create democracy (Biesta, 2011, p. 33).

The democratic citizen balances the twin virtues of individual freedom and concern for the public good. This struggle creates tension, but is necessary to support a strong democracy. It is in the examination of this tension that one finds democracy scholarship today. While we may optimally strive for the balance between these two, more often than not, problems arise when one or the other achieves elevated importance (Goodman, 1992; Gutmann, 1999a). Many scholars agree that the current imbalance has jeopardized the public altogether. Several are sounding an alarm because they see the goals of the public as having been hijacked by the agendas of neoliberalism, runaway market capitalism, and shortsighted libertarianism (Barber, 2013; Apple, 2012), ideologies that heavily favor individualism and intentionally minimize or subvert the public good. Giroux (2005) and Barber (2011) write that the country has been overly influenced by neoliberalism where, in Giroux's words, "the market becomes the template for organizing the rest of society and enshrines rabid individualism" (2005, p. xvii). Market capitalism "decivilizes and dehumanizes women and men through its obsession with materialism and consumption" (Barber, 2011b, p. 126). Libertarians hold misfortune as weakness and proudly use the US Constitution as a weapon, but their inflexible and uncompromising interpretation is

antidemocratic (Gutmann and Thompson, 2013, p. 195). None of these ideologies should be found in a true democracy, at least not for long (Slater, 2012, p. 389). Democracy scholars warn that it is imperative to achieve and maintain the delicate balance between individual and national interests, between economic and social rights and between political and developmental democracy lest our cherished democracy die out (Slater, 2012, p. 388).

As stated earlier, the concept of citizenship is contestable in and of itself; therefore it follows that learning to be a citizen anywhere is complex (Biesta, Lawy, and Kelly, 2009, p. 21). Democratic citizenship is particularly challenging because, as explained by Diamond (1997), it entails a deep understanding of democracy's basic principals, requires continual advocacy and desire to make democracy work, and it demands a commitment by the individual to serve and protect democratic institutions while warding off encroaching opposition or tyrannies (p. 244). This complex level of understanding comes about when the public takes responsibility for actively and thoroughly transmitting democratic citizenship know-how to its children (Mathews, 2008). The preponderance of research from education scholars warns that without a commitment to the basic tenets of democracy, and especially to fostering them in the public schools, democracy will cease to exist (Biesta, 2011, p. 32; Fazzaro, 2011; Goodlad, 2004, p. 16; Slater, 2012, p. 393).

Public Schools Educate Democratic Citizens

To cut to the chase, no effective democratic school system, no democratic society. (Harkavy, 2011, p. 2.)

Public schools are in the best position to educate democratic citizens (Gutmann, 2012, p. 8; Reitzug, 2010; Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett, 2008, p. 76; Parker, 2012; Mathews, 2008; Apple, 1991, p. 22). Americans expect the public school system to play a major role in

preparing children to assume the mantle of democratic citizenship when appropriate. Indeed most people, when asked, state that the role of the public school is to prepare citizens (Benninga and Quinn, 2011, p. 104). People on the right and the left have reason to support civic education (Youniss and Levine, 2009, p. 26). Nearly every member of society is touched by the public school system in some way. Schools are such places where students experience models of democratic action through classroom strategies of questioning, advocating fairness and respectfully challenging ideas (Gale, 2010, p. 316). They are crucial sites of struggle with populations and problems mirrored in society (Saltman, 2012). Schools are also sites of transformative democracy (Banks, 2008, p. 135) and models of resistance to hegemony when they push inclusiveness while continually seeking ways to overcome the inequalities that deny students full citizenship, equal resources, even teacher preparation, and optimum learning environments (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 65). Lastly, it is the public school's charter to educate for the public good, and not just to educate the public (Feinberg, 2012, p. 19).

The historical rationale for public education in the United States as vital to a free and democratic society is widely understood and well documented. The Founding Fathers penned their support for public education when they passed the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 even before the Constitution was ratified, (Fazzaro, 2006, p. 12). Though the U.S. constitution does not specifically mandate public schools, giving that power to state governments through the tenth amendment, for more than two centuries all three branches of the federal government have used it to uphold the continued need for public schools. The powerful voices designing our democracy, including Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, insisted that only an educated populace could ward off tyranny and oppression and protect a very fragile democracy (Gutmann, 1999a; McNeil, 2002; Thomas, 2009). Nearly two centuries later, Justice Warren (1954), in his

landmark Supreme Court opinion in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision, argued that there is no more important government function in a democratic society than educating its children and preparing them to be good citizens (Warren, 1954).

One might argue that it is the responsibility of any form of government to educate its citizens. Most governments have national education objectives that purport to prepare their citizens to compete competitively and globally in math, language, knowledge and skills. Even anarchists acknowledge the need to educate children so that as adults, they carry out the aims of the society. In fact, according to some remarkable results on globally accepted academic assessments (PISA), non-democratic governments, at times, appear to do a better job at educating citizens than the United States (Zhou, 2012, p. 56). However, the ultimate citizenship aims of totalitarian governments and a democracy are entirely different (Westheimer, 2008, 2010; Barber, 2013). What distinguishes a democracy is that its educational system must seek to educate its citizenry to participate fully in its very continuation (Ayers, 2009). Levinson (2011) states it more succinctly: “education must equip students *for* democracy” (p. 127).

Educational scholars have written extensively about public education’s role in advancing and protecting democracy. They insist that education is a public concern and that society must educate all those children who are educable so that they are capable of participating meaningfully and collectively in shaping their society (Gutmann, 2012). An educated populace must be informed and engaged in making the types of decisions that will ensure democracy’s stability and health. Bob Pepperman Taylor (2010) reminds us that Horace Mann, a 19th century education giant, articulated the mission of public education as building “civic equality and producing responsible citizens” in addition to the development of a strong intellect, (Ch. 1). William Ayers (2009) writes that schooling in a democracy must promote the idea that “every

human being is of infinite and incalculable value, each a unique force” (p. 1). And Amy Gutmann (1999a) takes this idea further by suggesting that a public education prepares free and unique citizens to understand, respect, and value the differences of others, and thus armed with the power of these virtues, protect and defend participatory democracy and the self-governance, which has been bestowed upon them.

Gutmann and coauthor Thompson (1996) insist that the public school is the one institution most important in maintaining a deliberative democracy (as cited in Gause, 2007, p. 359). Sharon Todd (2009) explains that as educators create safe places for students to make sense of and develop an understanding of *others*, of human rights, and of social justice -- while they also practice their powers of communication -- education becomes a place that will “produce lively social and intellectual communities” (p. 75), the hallmarks of an effective democracy. Students then have a place in which to wrestle with uncertainties, explore injustices, and question the responsibilities they themselves have in connections with the lives and realities of others (p. 76). In effect, they can practice Dewey’s notion of living in community.

Educational scholars have also written about the confusion that both the general public and the teaching establishment have about democracy and especially about public school’s involvement in furthering democracy (Benninga and Quinn, 2011, p. 108). They point out that even more astonishing, considering the volumes of rhetoric and research on how best to educate students, is that there is little if any consensus about what the schools should be doing to ensure that they turn out citizens who maintain a strong democracy (Youniss, 2011, p. 99). It may be a question of ideologies as some scholars suggest that the debate tracks with the conflicted concept of private assets versus public good (Apple, 2011, p. 29; Abowitz, 2008, p. 361; Barber, 2013; Biesta, 2007, p. 742; Giroux, 2009, p. 9; Parker, 2012; Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). This is a

fundamental question that may also define one's concept of *the public* [emphasis added], and by extension the public's role in schooling. Still other scholars suggest that the real problem is a lack or absence of frank and open discussions about how and why schools teach, espouse, and support democracy (Levinson, 2011, p. 126; Barber, 2013; Kahne and Westheimer, 2003, p. 35; Benninga and Quinn, 2011, p. 108). Public schools should not be exempt from participation in such discussion (Apple, 2011, p. 23).

Schooling for Democracy

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argue that public education is responsible for the kind of citizen that ultimately emerges from schools (p. 265). They insist that schools make a conscientious effort to prepare students for active citizenship along with rigorous academic priorities (p. 21). There may be a lack of public debate on the subject, but it turns out that there is a growing body of research on schooling for democracy. A number of scholars have been compiling data and analysis gathered on students who attend schools that explicitly promote civic engagement (Youniss, 2011, p. 98). Others contrast measures of civic engagement against pedagogies and practices common in the K-12 and university settings. In general, schooling for a strong democracy is a great deal more than implementing a prescriptive civics curriculum. The literature suggests several major themes to consider, namely civics education programs, dispositions that nurture budding citizens, and an education environment that encourages democratic action.

Civics Education

Logically, civics programs figure prominently in the literature on schooling for democracy. Citizenship courses have been around for centuries. Many educators lament that civics education has taken a back seat to the current overemphasis on reading and math. Retired

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor is perhaps the most recognized voice supporting the reenergizing of civics education. She has attracted a number of followers who advocate a greater emphasis on programs that teach civics content, especially content that instills in students a solid knowledge and appreciation of US history and important documents such as the constitution, the articles of confederation, etc. (National Taskforce on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). Content delivery methods dominate the discussion but typically advocate for a combination of traditional lecturing and project-based learning or service learning. But the more nuanced debates are about implementing ideologically based programs that teach civic responsibility. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) highly regarded for framing the many perspectives on education for democracy, outline three major visions of citizenship education methods. Each approach situates the learner's level of participation and connection to democratic engagement (p. 3). They correlate these variations to their three types of citizenship: personal responsibility – teaching students to act as responsible citizens and building personal character, but with no connection to public problems or their causes; participatory action – teaching students about civic action and to participate in community action; and lastly a justice oriented citizen – who not only participates in community action, but all seeks ways to improve society through analysis and problem solving of social issues and injustice (p. 4). These authors caution schools to carefully examine their choice for one approach over another because there are significant societal implications associated with the choice (p. 2) and the teaching staff's knowledge, preparation, and delivery methods will have an impact on the student.

Dispositions that Nurture Budding Citizens

The second theme in the literature on schooling for democracy addresses dispositions that should be nurtured for active and engaged democratic citizenship. These might be called soft

skills or democratic attitudes and appreciations, or social theory (Bode, 1937). Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) stresses that the lessons taught in schools must empower all students to think critically so that they might take control of their own learning, become life-long learners, and assume characteristics of self-determination, especially in today's fast-paced, knowledge-based world (p. 28). Deborah Meier (2010) implores that teachers nourish democracy by making certain that students know and understand the Constitution as well as master tools to lead a public life. Noddings (2007) insists that improved learning can only be achieved through careful study of the learners themselves coupled with a keen knowledge of those skills, appreciations, and aesthetics that will be essential for those students' continued learning, (Noddings, 2007, p. 60). Maxine Greene (1995) advocates for a public education system that values and nurtures intellectual freedom. She suggests that schools provide a rich liberal arts education¹ to help students to become fully aware of the ever-changing world around them, activating the imagination, honoring personal perspective and privileging the learner's contributions (Ch. 2). Feinberg (2012) emphasizes that public schools equip children with the "skills, dispositions, and perspectives required to engage with strangers about their shared interests and common fate and to contribute to shaping a public sphere" (p. 19). Doing so means that students can encounter different groups and ensures that the public is continually renewed (p. 20). Schools educate students to ask questions and to develop informed judgments, which just might prevent tyranny and oppression (Fazzaro, 2006, p. 25). Each of these educational theorists advocates passionately for schools to teach beyond what is currently the *in vogue* and heavily assessed pedagogy. Democratic citizens need to be exposed to a diversity of thought and a variety of

¹ Liberal Arts is defined as schooling that will expose students to a variety of perspectives so that they might take an active part in civic life. Greene (1979) herself makes the point that liberal arts education expands one's universe, reveals the common world, prepares the student to have vision and voice and, quoting Freire, will humanize students.

experiences so that they can engage in critical inquiry and make decisions that further the goals of the community (Greene, 1995, p. 66).

Education that Encourages Democratic Action

The third theme found in the literature advocates that schools operate as the kind of environment that might best foster democratic engagement – in other words simulate a public space². Schools ought to be set up more democratically, providing both a model and a place to enact democracy (Gause, 2007; Garrison, 2003). This would include giving all constituents not only a voice, but also decision-making powers. Schools present themselves as public places, where students can encounter, identify and discuss real issues and current problems that affect the community and participate in democratic deliberations. Classmates, teachers, and the community work towards resolutions in unique ways, designing them cooperatively through the exchange of information with others who are different from themselves (Rheingold, 2012, p. 8). Public schools privilege a way of operating in an environment that values respect and working to solve problems to a satisfactory end (Todd, 2009, p. 115). Schools that operate as democratic public spheres teach students to safely engage with others in discussions of rights and responsibilities, injustice and disagreement.

The preponderance of research from education scholars argues for a revival of American democratic engagement and a reconceptualization of how the public schools should successfully transmit the knowledge, skills, and will to be engaged citizens. Perhaps stating the obvious, Kahne and Westheimer (2003) have made it abundantly clear; “Improving society requires making democracy work. And making democracy work requires that schools take this goal

² Feingold (2012) defines the “public space” not as a place, but as an ideal, as a forum for connected individuals to shape a common future. Members of the public, “work to secure the conditions of everyone’s freedoms” (Erickson, as cited in Feingold, 2012, p.14).

seriously: to educate and nurture engaged and informed democratic citizens” (p. 36). While schools are not the only institutions or places where children will experience life as a citizen in a democracy, it is the schools that have a more formal role to play in taking children where they are and seeing to it that they all learn that it is the necessary to support and maintain an American democracy (Goodlad, 2004, p. 14). Public schools have the backing of *the people*, the historical provenance, and the scholarly authorization to carry out this foundational work. Schools create a public sphere and thus a place to confront differences and discuss possibilities, a place where problems are made public and solving them is the norm (Parker, 2012, p. 616). Education has a role in challenging the status quo, in resisting dominance (Apple, 2011), and renewing the public (Feinberg, p. 20). In short, public schools provide students with opportunity to practice the skills that are vital to enacting democracy (Biesta, 2007; Emmett, 2013).

Current Education Policy and its Affect on Public Education and Democracy

Today’s educational climate, policies, and practices are in direct conflict with the theorems, bodies of research, and scholarly wisdom that are known to support life-long learning in a society (Meier, 2006, 2010; Nussbaum, 2010; Reitzug, 2010). Education researchers implore educators to provide instruction that will develop in children vital habits of mind: intellect, creativity, curiosity, and problem solving skills, which are not coincidentally principles that support democratic engagement (Feinberg, 2012, p. 19). The millionaires’ club, the secretary of the USDOE, conservative pundits, educational testing companies, and an uncritical media have driven home the point, quite literally, that high-stakes testing and its attendant ladder of rewards or punishments hitched to strict adherence to national standards are the only means to ensuring an education system worthy of a world power (Fazzaro, 2006, p. 12). Compounding

these concerns, public education countrywide is under serious attack with some arguing that the fundamental right of an effective public education is in jeopardy (p. 12). The country is locked in a debate that pits educators against policy-makers, economic powerbrokers, and even one against another in the struggle to promote the kind of learning that will further the democratic aims of our country and the mission of public schooling to bring about those reforms as necessary for children to succeed in the 21st century (Meier, 2010, p. 23). Educators on the front lines have become marginalized, their voices ignored or shrouded in accusations of being self-serving and protectionist (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2008, p. 136). Most disconcerting, their leaders, especially school principals, have been persuaded to allow what they know and what research has proven about student learning and knowledge acquisition to take a back seat to the implementation of these policies (Pinto, Portelli, Rottmann, Pashby and Barrett, 2012, p. 9).

Many well-respected educational thinkers are very concerned about the current state of public education. Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) writes that the century old model of efficiency education detracts from quality instruction, limits access to varied subject matter, and shuns the nurturing and caring so important to student learning, (p. 31). In her book, *The Flat World of Education*, (Darling-Hammond, 2010), she provides countless examples of what's wrong with the United States' education system including continued inequities in funding and the lack of political will to address poverty and racism (Ch. 1). Nel Noddings, Deb Meier, and Diane Ravitch have extensively throughout their careers described how current policies in the form of NCLB have serious ramifications and implications on current public policy and on democracy. The intent of NCLB, the nation's most sweeping reform effort, was ostensibly to level the playing field to help all of the nation's students achieve world-class excellence by creating an accountability system that compels educators at all levels to bring every student to

grade level in reading and math (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 67; Noddings, 2007, p. 14; Ravitch, 2010a, Ch. 6). In this endeavor, one might expect the learner to be of primary importance. But the present system is moving not towards addressing the specific needs of learners, but rather on creating more stringent accountability systems for the adults (Ravitch, 2010a, Ch. 6).

Teachers, as research has shown over and over again, are the primary agents in improving student achievement (Ravitch, 2010a, citing William Sanders, 1997). Yet, instead of receiving support, the press, business moguls, and politicians vilify teachers if a single test's results do not show that 100% of their students achieve at or above grade level in reading and math (Kumashiro, 2012). This directive persists even though, in the words of Meira Levinson (2012), "there's little if any evidence that high-stake testing improves instructional practice in any field" (p. 258). One test is simply not an accurate reflection of a child's education. Ravitch (2010a) hammers home her point; are we making impactful decisions based upon a single test score. Alarming, even the president of the United States continues to advocate that we judge the effectiveness of our teachers and entire school districts on the basis of high stakes testing (pp. 153, 183).

Nel Noddings (2007) questions the sincerity of those who push high-stakes testing and accountability measures. If we truly cared about children, and cared about democracy, we would not assign students to labels and tracks, sorting them on the basis of test scores, (Noddings, 2007, p. 11). Schools that dehumanize students, deskill teachers, remove choice, and ignore the particularities of a very diverse population will not prepare active and engaged citizens to further democracy (Ch. 1). It may be more accurate to say that policy makers and business leaders are more concerned with training students to be economic resources rather than free citizens,

(Noddings, 2007, p. 19; Greene, 1995, p. 32). Noddings (2007) makes a powerful argument:

If social interactions, teacher-student relations, school attendance, curiosity and enthusiasm, cooperation, safety, and school pride are all positive or improving, schools should be credited with meeting important responsibilities. Almost certainly, these responsibilities are best encouraged by intelligent support, not by threats, shame, and penalties that now accompany high-stakes testing. (p. 69.)

Elliot Eisner (2001) writes that because of the overemphasis on testing as a means to improve schools, any meaningful understanding of a democratic education itself has become a casualty. He cautions that the justification for measuring school success by assessing a limited number of standardized outcomes derails the mission to improve quality and address equity. This approach devalues thinking, problem solving, and raising questions to foster innovation in favor of creating a product that can be used by the nation to compete in the world economy (pp. 370-372). Mark Goldberg (2005) points out that teachers frequently complain about the amount of time dedicated to preparing students for tests takes away from training students how to approach a problem or think creatively, or even to work in cooperative groups (p. 389). Sewell (2005) writes that

Federal mandates have forced an emphasis in functional literacy over critical literacy, and as a result, students do not see the connection between their reading material and society. Standardized tests dominate schools' efforts to meet Adequate Yearly Progress, but the opportunity to explore more appropriate evaluative measures increases when states shift away from NCLB. (Sewell, 2005, p. 12.)

Even higher quality assessments suffer as a result of NCLB demands. Haas and colleagues report on the fact that Maryland, a state with an exemplary assessment that provided a more authentic view of student understandings in many subject areas, has now scrapped that test in favor of a more cost effective NCLB compliant test (Haas, Wilson, Cobb, & Rallis, 2005).

Another casualty in the high stakes testing arena is the public trust. Paul Zavitkovsky (2010) studied Illinois ISAT (Illinois State Achievement Test) results using two major forms of analysis. He concluded that there were a sufficient number of variances in the testing to negate its construct validity (p. 9). He indicates that the test misrepresents what it attempts to accomplish and “reinforces rote instruction of basic skills” (p. 9). However, the state blindly published these results as valid measures of student ability and educators are placed in a position to explain, mediate, and defend students.

In the current economic times scarce resources are often diverted from one area to another to cover rising education costs. No one would seriously deny spending monies to deliver high quality instruction to students, but the reality is that precious school resources are spent on a handful of narrowly focused curriculum goals, practice workbooks, and testing resources just so that student test results meet arbitrarily determined benchmarks. Subjects that have been a hallmark of a liberal arts American education, and which best prepare citizens for democratic life, are being cut (Levinson, 2012, p. 258; Nussbaum, 2010, pp. 17-18). Many states report that the major casualties of this emphasis on teaching to the test are the fine arts, social studies, foreign language, and even science (Ravitch, 2010a, p. 226; Haas, et al., 2005, p. 184; Noddings, 2007, p. 62). Civics education is one of the casualties. In response to both budget cuts and standardized testing, teachers have been forced to spend far less time on American government and history than is needed for high-quality civic education (Levinson, 2012, p. 258). What’s worse, students who are not making adequate progress, typically the most vulnerable and arguably the ones who need civic learning opportunities the most, are the first to have it cut in favor of more drilling on skills that are tested (Kahne and Middaugh, 2009). Principals, and other school leaders who might see a bigger picture, are unsympathetic. They do not have their

attention on matters pertaining to democracy and, in fact, they have only very thin knowledge of those practices that support equity, diversity, and social justice even if they have a personal concept of how these create a democratic ethos (Pinto, Portelli, Rottmann, Pashby, Barrett, and Mujuwamariya, 2012, pp. 12-13).

To my mind, the most salient issue raised by the high-stakes accountability measures of NCLB and its successor RTTT (Race to the Top) is the effect it has on teacher-student relationships. As stated earlier, it is well documented that the relationship between student and teacher is the most powerful predictor of academic achievement. The strain put upon teachers to teach to tests often results in less time for individual student attention. Additionally, making teachers out to be the ‘bad guy’ in the failure of schools debate affects the moral of an already battered teacher workforce and does nothing to make the atmosphere more conducive to innovation and creativity components needed to meet the unique needs of low achievers. Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) insists that the punishing of high stakes testing tactics drives good teachers away, further eroding efforts to improve schools for the very neediest of students. She noted research studies conducted of teachers in North Carolina which found that labeling schools as under-performing influenced teacher recruitment and retention of experienced educators (p. 79). Deb Jenson (2010) reports upon the difficulties for today’s teachers. They are not only required to have expert academic knowledge and pedagogical skills, but must also be able to understand and contend with a myriad of social, emotional, and psychological issues that students bring with them to school. Teachers are also expected to be advocates for all students, differentiate instruction for each level of learner in their classroom, be highly moral, socially conscious, and work collegially with all of their colleagues (p. 92). But, this becomes nearly impossible because they frequently lack necessary support when administrators assess teachers

using frameworks that ignore anything but adherence to standards, meeting arbitrary student test result benchmarks, and career preparation (Pinto, et al., 2012, p. 15).

Meira Levinson (2011) suggests that adopting standards, assessments, and accountability systems that promote democracy is a very complicated process. She theorizes that they might, if given very thoughtful attention to goals and outcomes, serve democratic purposes. However her analysis warns against making them the “centerpiece of education reform in a democratic society” (p. 127) given that the nation can’t agree on what should be measured nor on how to measure meaningfully, that what we value as educational is highly political, and that almost no one designing them understands the risks that standards, assessments, and accountability systems can pose for those in a democratic plurality.

Of most serious concerns is that the knowledge and skills that are privileged in today American schooling - from prekindergarten through university – if left unchecked, as Martha Nussbaum (2010) worries, will extinguish democracy. The moves we are making towards favoring educational models that push for economic growth, as opposed to human development, run counter to citizen engagement (p. 142). Current efforts of ‘reforming’ public education seem to have lost sight of American democratic ideals and values. Forcing all students to master that which is deemed career readiness and to test students endlessly relegates things that matter to a healthy democracy to only the elite (Nussbaum, 2010; Ravitch, 2010a). Scholars are concerned that educators are unconcerned about the turn that education has taken and about the absence of democratic thinking (Bloch-Schulman, 2010, p. 406). This is especially obvious in that almost no one has even asked the questions about whether standards, assessments, and accountability systems can promote engaged citizenship, (Levinson, 2011, p. 126). Even more disconcerting, the Frick (2011, 2009, 2008) studies conclude that school principals don’t truly see the unique

needs of their students and have bought into the high stakes testing narrative as the way to meet the maxim of ‘doing what’s best for children.’ It seems that regardless of empirical data, the shape of this debate appears to be driven by the agendas of those who are less interested in whether schools educate children to develop individual intellectual habits, than at best, training them to score competitively in global assessments or at worst, in training them to provide the society with an endless supply of workers to further economic priorities (Levin, 2009, Ch. 2; Giroux, 2009, p. 9). Educators have to confront the dangers of blindly pursuing a standardized path to excellence.

The Role and Influence of Public School Principals: Democratic Leadership

If we accept the premise that schools ought to prepare students for democratic citizenship, but acknowledge that they are currently preoccupied with raising test scores and fueling the economic engine, what or who can bridge this gap? My reading of the literature on public schools is that the school principal has the potential to be that bridge. School principals, by virtue of their role as leader, are in a position of influence and see themselves making a difference. They can give rise to democratic expression by opening dialogue and discourse as they oversee a broad constituency that has an array of often competing priorities. At the very least, principals can stir teachers to action, encouraging grassroots efforts to countering unsound and undemocratic practices. Principals are instructional leaders with the knowledge of how children and adults learn best and, coupled with a keen understanding of educational priorities, the principal is in a position to nurture the learning community. Understandingly, it is the public school principal who can mobilize the school community to create and sustain such a place where all children learn and “that what they learn enables them to be successful citizens and

workers in a morally based knowledge society” (Fullan, 2003, p. 29).

Decades of educational leadership literature point out that the principal is critical to the success of a school, though their influence is seen to be largely indirect (Leithwood 2010; Leithwood and Jantzi 2008; Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi, 2010; Brooks, Havard, Tatum, and Patrick, 2010; Crum, 2010; Moos, 2012; Mulford and Silins, 2011; Sebastian and Allensworth, 2012; Spillane and Hunt, 2010; Supovitz, Sirinides, and May, 2010). Educational research also confirms that the principal’s position in the school is unique (Heck and Hallinger, 2010, p. 246) and their influence is second only to the teacher’s in having an overall effect on student achievement (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, 2008). The focus of recent educational leadership research aims to pinpoint exactly those practices and characteristics that explain what successful leaders do to raise student achievement (Leithwood, Patten, Jantzi, 2010; Robinson, 2010). Precious little research speaks to how principals see themselves or their schools as fostering democracy (Apple, 2011, pp. 24-5; Reitzug, 2010, pp. 319-20; Westheimer and Kahne, 2004, p. 35). However, many findings transcend the focus on accountability and underscore the notion that education is a deeply human endeavor and further, suggest that principals understand that attention must not be shifted from attending to “the value of human growth” (Frick and Gutierrez, 2008, p. 38).

School principals have a mandate to lead and are armed with a passion for their school and a commitment to children, (Moller, 2012, p. 458). They understand that their role is to influence learners’ learning (Gronn, 2010, p. 434). The majority of principals readily accept their obligations, believing they have a deep and binding fiduciary responsibility (Frick and Gutierrez, 2008) to the community to safeguard public education and honor the trust placed in them to fulfill their mission. Most make ethical decisions in the conscious belief that their

decisions will benefit the whole child (Frick, 2011). Principals knowingly thrust themselves into a world that is moral, ethical, and relational and they prepare themselves to understand and promote pedagogies of difference (Blackmore, 2010, p. 655). They are highly conscious of the realities of those considered *other* in the school community (Day, 2005), and acknowledge how those others are either able to take advantage of or are disadvantaged by that ‘otherness,’ (Blackmore, 2010, p. 648). Seeing this, principals will adjust school practices to better support their particular population. They make decisions by considering values, context, and the results of past experiences (Frick, 2009, p. 69). The literature is clear that principals maintain values as they mediate those pressures that attempt to divert attention from the real mission – teaching children to think for themselves – while attending to many competing priorities (Deenmamode, 2011).

Effective principals see themselves instructional leaders and also as learners. They become skilled at reading complicated situations, employing a range of skills, recognizing the potential magnitude of consequences for bad decision making and harnessing diverse resources that could be used to effectively lead schools (Gronn, 2010, p. 435). In fact, successful school leaders understand that their expertise doesn’t just happen, but is explicitly developed across domains and learning opportunities (Bush, 2009). Taking advantage of multiple and varied *opportunities to learn* or job embedded professional development and networking activities (Spillane, Healy, and Parise, 2009), principals are better able to focus attention on the needs of particular populations of students rather than on non-specific educational practices. Their growing expertise results in the dissemination of information throughout the organization, minimizing groupthink, adding new knowledge, and building capacity (Spillane and Hunt, 2010).

Principals contend that leadership is really about coordination; using the right tools at the right time to achieve the best possible outcomes envisioned by the community (Bryk, 2010). They develop a depth of knowledge of those characteristics and change management strategies (levers) that are found in successful schools (Fullan, 2010) and understand where and when such levers are best applied. Influential principals understand that these levers are to be pushed upon flexibly, specifically, and potentially simultaneously in combination with other levers (Leithwood, 2010, p. 673). In the long run, smart principals are shaped by the learning that takes place throughout the entire school community (Heck and Hallinger, 2010, p. 227), and they work consciously and deliberately to build a culture of possibilities (Gale, 2010, p. 318). More importantly, such actions are the same as those found in a healthy democracy and are therefore essential for the school to be a model for democratic citizenship.

Principals also foster democratic action when they employ a variety of good leadership practices. One key strategy used by principals, often cited in the literature, is shared leadership. Principals recognize that for the school to be successful, they must spend far more time co-performing instructional activities with other school personnel, and not necessarily leading activities themselves (Spillane and Hunt, 2010, p. 303). This approach, where leadership manifests itself in a combination of role sets (p. 425), is more effective than any approaches the principal takes alone (Seashore Louis and Wahlstrom, 2011; Marks and Printy, 2003; Printy and Marks, 2006; Wood, 2011) and provides the principal with greater leverage and influence. Shared leadership creates a tension – between leaders and followers, principals and students, teachers and parents – a push and pull between innovation and change against stability and maintaining the status quo (Printy and Marks, 2006, p. 131).

Shared leadership is also a practice found in a healthy democracy. Opportunities are

maximized as all parties work together, but with different perspectives, skills, and agendas, towards organizational goals (Wahlstrom and Seashore Louis, 2008, p. 485). Teachers and principals who have opportunities to work in professional learning communities where power is balanced, reported more focused instruction, commitment to the job, greater job satisfaction, staff cohesion, and importantly, increased student achievement suggesting that “when the power differential is lessened, greater learning occurs,” (Heather Price, 2012, p. 485; Price, 2012; Tschannen and Tschannen, 2011). Teachers act more professionally when given leadership opportunities (Wood, 2011) and assume responsibility for student learning when their leaders trust their decision-making (p. 495). Those principals who shared leadership with parents, especially those working with minority and disadvantaged populations, have been shown to build the optimum climate for learning (Rodrigues and Alanis, 2011, p. 114; Witherspoon and Arnold, 2010, p. 227).

Schools are complex organizations where personal, social, and professional practices interact seamlessly (Bryk, 2010, p. 26). Principals interested in real and lasting improvement pay attention to the social responsibilities in their schools, not just the technical aspects of school improvement (Moolenaar, Daly, and Slegers, 2010, p. 655). They enact practices affecting culture and climate, which can significantly and positively impact student achievement (Leithwood, et al., 2010, p. 673). School leaders engage in multiple holistic practices (Leithwood and Jantzi 2008). They promote professional networks, thoughtful professional development, innovation, and experimentation, by way of commitment, inclusivity, high expectations and professional discipline (Becker and Smith, 2011). They model advanced social skills such as engendering trust, building relationships, sharing vision, and establishing collaboration as the *modus operandi* (Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe, 2008; Mulford and Silins,

2011 p. 77). Principals know that when social and emotional needs of their students and staff are supported with the same passion and laser focus with which academic needs are supported, overall growth is sustained (Ramalho, Garza, and Merchant, 2010).

Principals straddle the fluid terrain between school and community needs, and government and global aims by making use of negotiations and reciprocal processes (Moos, 2012, p. 467). They recognize the interdependencies and look for patterns and principles while using social processes to solve school problems (Robinson, 2010, p. 21). Principals have learned to take time to build relationships not only with staff and parents, but also with the children whom they serve. Often the principal is changed by this relationship and is emboldened to make a difference (Benham, Murakami-Ramalho, 2010, p. 90). Principals use their role as leader to support student needs and will work creatively to mitigate inequities and limitations of local, state, and federal policies without breaking the law (Witherspoon, and Makoto Arnold, 2010). Frequently a principal will do what he/she considers fair and equitable and not necessarily follow the rules (p. 229). Inner city schools with high poverty rates have experienced significant improvements when their principals implemented creative alternatives to typical school routines which were based upon knowledge of unique community needs (Malone, 2011). They promote acceptance of culturally and linguistically diverse groups, mediate tensions that result from change (p. 104), fearlessly take risks to bring in necessary programs for their particular students, and unwaveringly advocate for social justice for their community (Rodriguez and Alanis, 2011, p.109). In this way, the principal plays a crucial role that may change the balance of power (p. 108), influence social justice, extend the interpretation of freedom, and enact democracy.

Results of several studies highlight a public relations angle that stresses the need for principals to become publicly recognized as educational experts and spokespersons for their

schools (Merchant, Ärlestig, Garza, Johansson, Murakami-Ramalho, and Törnsén, 2012, p. 440). This puts them in a unique position to foster a democratic ethos as they push dialogue beyond prescribed academic growth and towards issues and concerns that matter to the community (Bellamy and Goodlad, 2008, p. 569). They have the opportunity to be knowledgeable about current research on learning and use it as a buffer between the school and disconnected educational policies. They have an opportunity to construct a public persona of a leader who reflects passion, motivation, and expertise, along with ethical and strategic decision-making (Moller, 2012, p. 459). Principals who vocally strive to protect instructional practices that serve the academic, social, and emotional needs of all children, and which may be in jeopardy from politically charged government tactics and policies, publically honor what they and their school communities have learned (p. 458). They offer a counter narrative to our audit-happy, deficit-thinking, economic-growth driven culture. They present hope for democracy. And as Nel Noddings said,

We can get ideas from many times and places, however, without trying to reproduce exactly what other have done. The road forward is rarely behind us. The question for us is how to create schools that will serve as incubators of democracy (Noddings, 2011, p. 5).

Conclusion

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it, and by the same token save it from that ruin which except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (Arendt, 1954, p. 196.)

Schools respectful of democratic principles empower teachers and students by giving them freedom to struggle together (Carnoy and Levin, 1998). That struggle is intended to produce the most effective ways to meet their very particular academic and social emotional learning goals for their very particular students (Wood, 2004). The nature of a public education is, in the words of Deborah Meier (2009) “happily consistent with the struggle to create good schools – if we share that struggle with our staff, families, and above all, the kids” (p. 18). Struggling together with the hard earned knowledge, skills, and moral imperative that comes from caring for our students has the potential to transform isolated classrooms into powerful professional learning communities. These learning communities put structures in place that translate our best hopes into action (Sergiovanni, 2004). But, as Fullan (2001) reminds us, it isn’t automatic that a learning community works well or produces good results. It is up to the school leader to ensure that these learning communities cause better results to be achieved, lessen inequities, and keep the focus on the mission agreed upon (p. 65).

Clearly school leaders have a significant impact on learning and influence on the ethos of the school. Schools are complex environments that require continuous evaluation of priorities, demands, resources, and will. Their unique position compels principals to stimulate these conversations among constituents, create dialogues that interrogate the enacted curriculum state and restate the vision, values, mission, and goals for the education of their particular students. This mandate is all the more real in a democracy. Current literature on education is massive. Much is written about how schools can improve test scores, about effective professional learning communities, and the qualities of great principals. There is a growing body of scholarship on educating for democracy. There is precious little about how the school principal should go about

such important work.

As an educator and school leader, I see that my responsibility is synonymous with the charge to help all of my students to “secure the blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity” (U.S. Constitution, Preamble). That charge requires me to be wholeheartedly committed to the principles of democracy. It asks that I understand both the large and small environments within which I work, including government and community priorities and sensibilities, though framed by good teaching and learning practices. Those who dwell in possibilities, the true nurturers of our communities, have a deep passion for the welfare of all people, for knowledge, for achieving equity, and a fierce desire to truly protect democracy.

Chapter III. Research Design

This research was designed to understand how school principals conceptualize democratic citizenship and enact their role in its promotion. The purpose of this section is to provide information about how I conducted this study. I used a qualitative methodology – narrative inquiry – to explore the perceptions and experiences of principals in public elementary schools in terms of how they prepare students to be active democratic citizens. I included my own perspectives in this investigation, as I too, am a practicing principal and as Denzin (2010) states a “researcher [is] historically and locally situated within the very processes being studied” (p. 23). The intention of this study was to use theoretical lenses of democratic education as envisioned by John Dewey and expanded upon by Gutmann and Thompson (1999), Meira Levinson (2012), and Westheimer and Kahne (2004), along with the tenets of an ethic of care framework as outlined by Nel Noddings (1995, 2005). These theoretical approaches helped me to critically examine and analyze the practices of public school principals as they navigate compelling and competing priorities that impact their mission to prepare public school students for our U.S. democracy. This methodology chapter includes a reminder of the research questions, as well as a description of the design, procedures, ethical and quality issues that were used in this study. I begin with a statement of positionality because it drives my motivation for undertaking this study and explains why I chose the methodology of narrative inquiry.

Positionality

I am a principal in a small school district that has, for the past decade at least, been considered the worst performing school district in the county as measured by standardized test scores. Making that statement stirs emotions, defensiveness, and concern. This is particularly

distressing because the school district, and each district principal, makes no excuses and has for the past seven years responded appropriately to the limits of the community's limited resources to improve in nearly every educational practice that experts claim will contribute to the academic success. Further, even when our students, who are 58% Hispanic, 67% low SES (Appendix C), and one quarter limited English proficient, show positive results on measures of academic progress, which clearly indicate that they are demonstrating significant growth, the school can not escape the official judgment of below state expectations and achieving inadequate progress. My concern led to inquiry, investigating additional programs and strategies that might be implemented. This inquiry necessitated an interrogation of the very purpose of education, especially education in a democratic society where all students, including mine, deserve an education that helps them to have the same opportunities for success – those same opportunities to pursue life, liberty and happiness – as every other student in the United States. Ultimately my questioning pushed me to become a vocal advocate for students who do not come from upper middle class or economically privileged schools, because for them, the goal posts of academic success seem placed purposely out of reach.

It has become clear to me that our public schools, for a variety of reasons, are no longer protected by, nor living up to the expectations of, state and federal constitutions which promise to educate citizens so that they might be prepared to understand, protect and strengthen democracy. As a practicing public school principal, this weighs heavily on my conscience. It is my position that educators are obligated to create schools that are democratic places where students explore their democracy and have ample opportunities to practice democratic actions including participation in decision-making in their public sphere. This position compels me to examine my own practices and look to other principals, my peers, to better understand their

thinking about the role schools have in supporting democracy.

Gathering data about how school principals enact a democratic education is challenging. However, narrative inquiry can provide a glimpse of what's truly important to a principal. Stories principals tell of their personal struggles to balance current accountability pressures against core beliefs that are informed by best practices and their understanding of the purpose of an education highlight ways they are empowered and/or how they work to empower students to act in democratic ways. Narrative inquiry has guided me to faithfully and accurately record the details, impressions, concerns, and experiences of study participants. Using a narrative inquiry approach, as Schram (2006) hints, provided a counterpoint to our profession's over emphasis on numbers, categories, and disaggregation of data. Exploring not only context, but also the perspectives, meanings, and motives that practicing principals ascribe to their experiences (Schram, p. 105) created a more realistic picture of current priorities. The methodology of narrative inquiry allowed me to shine a light on the humanity of principals whose professional lives are complicated by competing challenges of our times (Josselson, 2006, p. 3). In this research study I was a participant and an observer, a member of the group and a researcher, and my personal stories contributed to this study through interpretations, interview flow, and reflective memos. The use of my own experiences was interrogated with the same rigor as any data gathered on other principal participants (Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez, 2012, p. 26). Most important to me, these stories provided a more hopeful view of how democracy is kept alive.

Research Focus and Research Questions

The United States Department of Education (USDOE, 2012) recognizes the importance

of, and indeed national imperative for, schools to protect and strengthen democracy by teaching students to become engaged and knowledgeable citizens. Critical scholars adamantly advocate that if educators were to care deeply about children and care seriously about preserving our democracy then they would do things differently, meaning that they would attend to more than academics. They would also empower learners to take control of their learning, teach them to think critically about problems—including the root causes and potential solutions, encourage them to think passionately about the possibilities for their own lives and compassionately about the lives of others, develop in them an understanding of community, and nurture their imagination and consciousness of a better world (Greene, 1995; Noddings, 2007, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 28; Nussbaum, 2010, p. 119). In today’s educational climate, doing things differently would include teaching students how to participate actively as deeply engaged citizens of a democracy. Public elementary schools play a vital role in educating students with the knowledge of the fundamental principles of civil government, an understanding of how and why those principles are necessary to preserve the “blessings of freedom and liberty,” and to “recognize their corresponding individual obligations and responsibilities” (Illinois Constitution, Section 23), to safeguard and perpetuate democracy. Schools also provide a safe forum for students to practice and hone those skills and capabilities necessary for a democratic life.

The principals of public elementary schools, by virtue of their significant influence on student achievement and school climate, are primary actors in setting the tone, direction and priorities for their schools. Further, how one defines the conception of democracy defines the type of role that one chooses to play (Wood, 1998, pp. 181-182). It is therefore of great importance to find out what school principals think about democracy, what part they will choose to take in the mission to educate democratic citizens, and how they handle challenges to goals.

The following questions guided this inquiry:

- How do principals perceive their role in nurturing democratic citizens?
- How do principals nurture democracy in elementary schools?
- In what way(s) do principals promote democratic practices?
- What pressures do they encounter?
- Do school principals have a shared idea of a democratic ethos?
- What is the nature of that shared idea, if there is one?
- Or if there isn't, what is the variety of thinking about democracy?
- How does a school leader contend with federally sanctioned policies that “misconstrue the very nature of education in a liberal democracy” (Noddings, 2007, p. 7)?

Conceptual Framework

Surely it is an obligation of education in a democracy to empower the young to become members of the public, to participate, and play articulate roles in the public space. (Greene 1985, p. 4.)

Four theoretical lenses are combined to create a conceptual framework of democratic education and served to guide this study: participatory democracy, a concept of a good citizen, ethic of care theory, and transformative leadership theory. Primarily informed by the work of John Dewey (1916), Gail Furman and Carolyn Shields (2005, 2010), Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne (2004), Nel Noddings (1995), and Maxine Greene (1995), this concept of democratic education recognizes that students live in an interconnected, ever changing, technically advancing, complex and complicated global society. I believe that educators do see a world of incredible hope and possibility, and because of a core value of caring, do feel morally obligated to adjust leadership practices in such a way as to prepare student to be participating

democratic citizens.

The concept of participatory democracy was used throughout this research. It is a concept of thick democracy, envisioned by John Dewey and expanded upon by others and often referred to as deep democracy (Gutmann, 1999a). To Dewey (1916), democracy is more than a structure of government; it is a way of life, a way of “living in community” with others who also understand that the very nature of the community is constantly evolving through continued efforts by the group to make it better (Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett, 2007, p. 5). Members of the community are interactive and interdependent (Benson, et al., p. xii). The community requires engaged and informed participation through dialogue and solution-seeking to public problems with a recognition that the work will always be in the process of continual renewal (Fung, 2012; Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett, 2008). Intellect is valued and nurtured through experiences (Goodman, 2009, p. 454). Democracy is maintained through a deep desire to improve life for the self and for all members the community (Fung, 2012, p. 610).

Dewey believed that it is through education that a person develops an understanding and appreciation of how to enact democracy and to interpret one’s role as a citizen (Apple & Beane, 1995, p.7). Schools are the best places to provide opportunities for children to learn about democracy, understand its historical place in their lives, and practice habits of good citizenship (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004b; Apple and Beane, 1995, p. 8; Furman and Starratt, 2002; Gutmann, 2012, p. 8). Gail Furman and Carolyn Shields (2005) expanded on these ideas and proposed a concept of democratic community (p. 122). They believe that schools must act as democratic communities, “involving participation in deep democratic practices by all members of the school community, in the interests of the common good” (p. 122.) They created a framework that researchers might use to explore how well schools adhere to principles of a

democratic community. Their framework augments the concept of democratic education and is useful to this study as a guide for interpreting principals' stories as they might hint at democratic community.

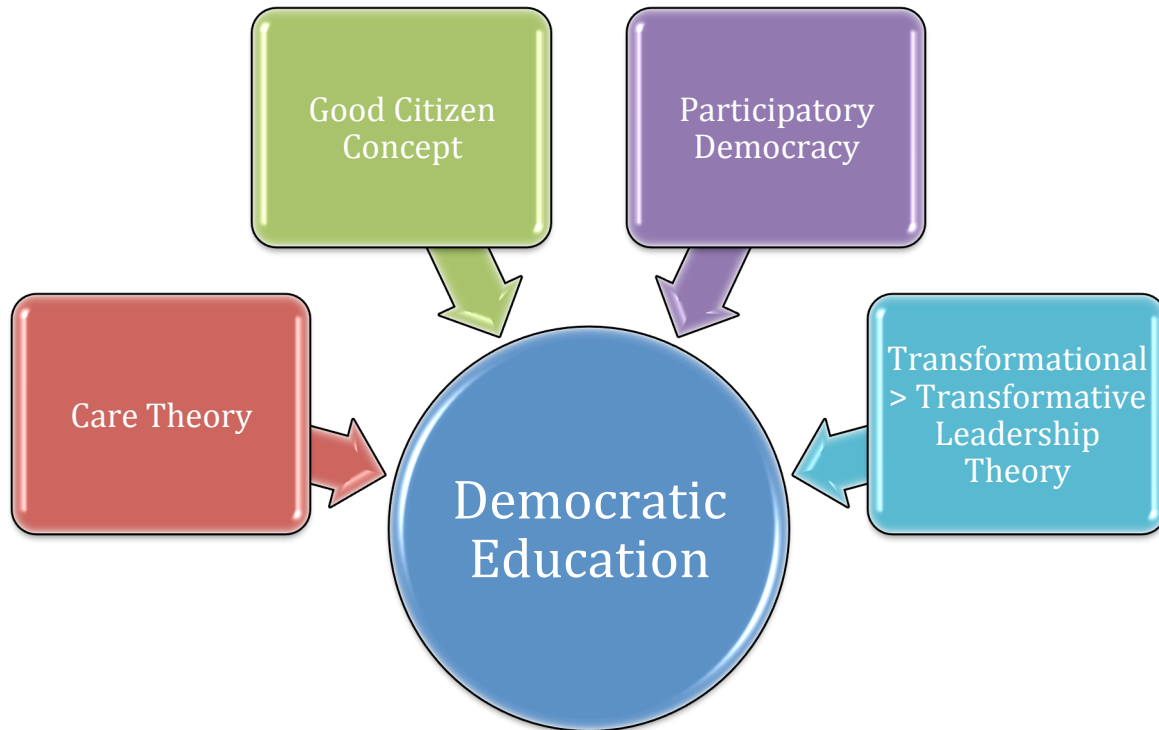
Westheimer and Kahne (2004) provide an excellent explanation of concepts of the good citizen. Their theory of the "good citizen" describes three types of citizen: personally responsible, participatory, and socially responsible (p. 239). While there is some overlap, and no definitive one-to-one connection, these three types of citizenship generally track with the concepts of representative (thin) (Zyngier, 2012), participatory/deliberative (thick) (Gandin & Apple, 2002; Furman and Shields, 2005) or strong (Barber, 2011a), and critical (Goodman, Kuzmic, & Wu, 1992, p. 176) democracy.

I believe that because the school is a community defined by human relationships, in which theories of care (Noddings, 1995) and transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2003) may help to interpret the actions and perceptions of school principals. In today's pressurized climate, with outsiders turning what has been considered a public good into a commodity, it is important to discern a principal's moral code. Nel Noddings's (2005) theory of an ethic of care is consistent with teaching for democracy (p. 147). She explains that the act of caring for students is a quest for competence for the students (those who are cared-for) and educators (carer) (Noddings, 2005, p. 1). Quite simply, we want to do our best for those for whom we care (Noddings, 2006, p. 341). We form reciprocal relationships with our students and out of those relationships we both change; each becomes more respectful of one another, understands one another's needs more clearly, and is fueled by the desire to make a positive, future-oriented difference in each other's lives (Noddings, 2006, p. 343). An ethic of care may shed light on how the principal does things differently with, and for, the students and staff of the school.

Motivations for doing things differently may also be explained by the theory of transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2003). Principals who are applying democratic principles to their organization will share leadership and decision-making with all constituents. Transformational leaders, according to Hallinger (2003), build capacity throughout the organization by flattening hierarchies, increasing commitment to the school's vision, mission, and goals, celebrating innovation, and jointly creating a future through collective action (pp. 331-338). These are traits found in strong democracies. Transformational principals become models for good citizen and continually grow and evolve as they learn from their students and staff and employ the qualities and capacities that nurture the democratic citizen. (See Figure 1.) However, in schooling for democracy, the construct of transformational leadership does not go far enough.

Carolyn Shields (2004, 2010) has written about transformative leadership an idea that builds upon transformational change, but takes it a step further. Her scholarship in transformative leadership suggests that should school leaders wish to transform their schools to become more just, more inclusive, and more democratic learning environments, then their efforts must be grounded in "moral and ethical values in a social context" (2010, p. 559). All decisions regarding the school's educational practices, programs, curriculum and assessments should first be critiqued against what will provide a better life for all members of the community. Questions of equity and fairness, justice and freedom, for the public good as well as for individuals, must be asked before implementation. School community members must make room for and learn how to respectfully conduct conversations that challenge those practices that are undemocratic. To accomplish this lofty goal, schools need transformative school leaders who both recognize and attend to this responsibility.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Methodology – A Narrative Inquiry

I chose to conduct a narrative inquiry for my study because telling stories is an effective and rich method of getting people to reveal a lot about themselves, their experiences, and their perceptions and opinions in a more natural way. Stories that are re-told (analyzed and re-presented) convey richness and nuance that is important to understanding complex concepts. Narrative inquiry also permits the listener to learn from the experience of the telling of the story. This storied approach includes juxtaposing my own my own orientations toward these same issues and examining how my interactions and experiences with the interviewees informs and shapes my own narrative (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Orr, 2009). It promoted a deeper understanding and even allowed things that were completely hidden to surface (p. 83).

Stories from public elementary school principals were collected through interviews.

These stories constituted the primary source of data as principals' stories both informed and inspired (Willis, 2007, p. 244). These stories provided a window into the mind of principals, revealing how they perceived the impact they have on their students, faculty, school community, and the ultimately, the country. Listening to the stories of principals provided me insight into how they make sense of their twin challenges of preparing students to be engaged citizens while attending to the significant accountability imperatives imposed from outside the school building. Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray Orr (2007, citing previous Clandinin and Connelly research), wrote that educators study and improve their own educational practices often through the use of narrative inquiry. New insights were gained and in turn were shaped through the interaction with and attention to the stories related by other principals (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009, p. 88; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, pp. 33-34). The methodology of narrative inquiry embraces the story as a way of thinking about and making sense of lived experiences (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006). Mishler (as quoted in Merriam, 2009) reminds us that we as researchers are coauthors with our subjects in the telling of their beliefs, values, and assumptions about their work (Merriam, 2009, p. 34). The individual's life work is honored when lived experiences and human action are given voice. Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Orr (2009) also suggest that a richer understanding might surface from listening to multiple stories that describe the tensions that different principals experience as they confront and make sense of accountability practices beyond their control (p. 82). Examining that tension will provide greater insights into the principals and their relationships with their school community (p. 88). Over the course of this research study, I found all of these predictions to be true.

This study uses narrative inquiry as the methodology and interviews were the primary method of data collection.

Recruitment and Participant Selection

This study was a qualitative narrative inquiry, designed to make sense of the experiences and perceptions of elementary school principals. Participants were principals who are building administrators in public elementary schools in Northern Illinois. Participant principals came from schools that serve a large percentage of minority and low SES students; these are similar to the school in which I am principal. Schools with diverse populations are more likely to incorporate strategies of democratic engagement as they consider and implement policies, systems, and curricula that support marginalized families and their children (Marshall & Oliva, 2006, Ch. 1). I interviewed eleven principals for this study.

I was able to recruit ten public elementary school principals who serve in schools that have student demographics similar to those found in my own school and one high school principal. I found these participants using two strategies. Using one strategy I invited participants from a group of principals I have met through a democracy and schooling discussion group and who are also elementary school principals, like me. This was a small group of principals who were part of a round table discussion group convened by a DePaul University professor in the spring of 2014. The group met specifically because each has an interest in schooling for democracy. Because of their expressed commitment, I surmised that interviewing them could provide rich data for analysis and add counterpoint to the data collected from principals, recruited through the second strategy, who may not have directly expressed an interest in schooling for democracy. I contacted this group through email, explained my study and invited them to participate. Two of the study participants came from this group.

In the second recruitment strategy I invited principals who fit a selection criteria,

determined by me, by sending them an email request for participation. Names of potential participants were generated by using a database of schools in Illinois that have similar student demographics as those in my own school. This database was created by using the Illinois Interactive School Report Card Database (<http://iirc.niu.edu/CompareSchoolList>), which allows filters to be set to generate a list of schools in Illinois with demographics that are indicative of any particular student population. The list is available to the public, and the names of principals are readily available from that list. Filters will be set by me to display K-8 elementary schools where the school population is over 40% minority and over 40% low SES and have a school population of between 300 and 800 students. These parameters have been chosen to closely resemble similar demographic characteristics of the school where I am the principal.

The list was further culled to a) include only principals who are in the geographical region of Illinois that would be considered north of Interstate 80, and b) have had more than two years of experience as a school principal. Limiting the region to northern Illinois made sense because there are very few schools south of Interstate 80 that fit the demographical profile of my own school, and the farther south one goes the more the context changes. Limiting principals to having two or more years of experience was important because those with less experience are fully occupied with learning the role of school leader and have not had sufficient time to put their own imprint on the school, nor are the more theoretical concerns such as democracy on their current agenda yet. Next, and to allow me to manage the recruitment process, the list was sorted by the school's demographic information, specifically by the percentage of minority and low SES students and then alphabetically by school name.

From the resulting list, I sent out recruitment emails to potential participants in groupings. The first batch consisted of ten schools whose demographics closely parallel my

school, which has 60% minority, 67% low income. I did not get any participants from the first batch of invitations, so I moved on to the next grouping and moved outwards on this list toward larger percentages before using lower percentages. Additional groupings of ten were sent out until I found a total of 11 participants, through both recruitment strategies, who agree to be interviewed. I sent out 40 emails in this process. I did have two participants who initially accepted the invitation, but later did not have the time for the interview.

The recruitment email inviting participation consisted of a general outline of the research project, and an invitation to schedule an interview. Participant principals responded through both return email and phone calls. When the principal agreed to be interviewed, he/she was contacted by me, by phone, to set up the face-to-face interview at a mutually agreed upon location and date. I deferred to the participant to name the location. Informed consent was presented and reviewed at the beginning of the first meeting; I provided a Consent Form for signature, which was procured before any data were collected.

Data Collection³

Study participants were interviewed and interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions provided the primary source of data. The only other data used was demographic information about each school's student characteristics. That data was found on either the school's website or on the Illinois School Report Card database.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. The first interview was approximately 60 minutes in duration. Interviews took place in a variety of locations. I was able meet seven of the principals in their schools, however; only two of them were able to give me a tour of their

³ DePaul University's IRB approved this research; see Appendix A.

school. This was because the interviews took place in summer and most of their schools were undergoing summer cleaning and maintenance. Four of the principals met me at alternate locations because their schools were completely closed for renovations or vacation. I met three of the 4 at different coffee shops, and one a public park. I had originally hoped for school visits, thinking that it would provide richer context for the stories shared by participants.

The interviews were digitally recorded audio. Interview questions were open-ended to allow the participant to open up about their lives and share stories that have meaning to them. Questions were loosely organized into subtopics suggested by the democratic community framework of Furman and Shields (2005, p. 136) (see Appendix B, Interview Guide). Those participants who agreed to be interviewed in their school were asked for a tour of the school so that I had the opportunity for true context of the school environment and to facilitate a richer understanding of our conversation. Participants were asked about their professional, personal, and school background. Other questions probed for stories and perspectives from participants that would give a rich description of their school environment, their students and staff. Participants were asked to comment on how they balance the realities of school with against pressures of accountability policies.

After the interviews, the digital audio recordings were transcribed. I personally transcribed one interview and used an online service provider www.Transcriptionhub.com for the other ten. Transcription Hub signed a Confidentiality Agreement as required by DePaul's IRB. I had expected, after transcribing the first interview for each participant, to invite him/her for a second interview to follow up on themes or issues that need fuller explication or clarification. These interviews did not take place. Data gathered from the first interview was rich and provided ample information for analysis. In summary, I interviewed participants once

for not more than 90 minutes each.

Seidman (2006) describes the delicate balance that must be maintained between researcher and participant, between having an interview and not a conversation in which I am too verbal, thus reminding me to build just enough rapport with each principal to allow them to tell me their own story, independent of mine (p. 96). To do this, I maintained a polite, positive and respectful, relationship throughout all interactions with the participant. I offered to share my analysis of their interview(s), the transcription of their interview(s), and the final dissertation should they be interested.

After interviews, memos were written immediately detailing the setting, impressions, events or incidents, observations, and other important or vivid information that was important to remember to best preserve the accounts of the interviews (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, Ch. 2). Additional memos were written after time had elapsed and I had time to reflect upon the interview or collection of interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process. I analyzed the collected data through a process of repeated and focused sessions. Data was coded organically, and as themes emerged, was organized thematically, ultimately to form the basis of a story of today's public school principal. Quotes from each participant were captured and my interpretations added.

While interviews were transcribed into text, it was important for me to also listen to the audio recordings, not only to check the accuracy of the transcriptions, but also to get a richer sense of the lives of the principals interviewed, and possibility to pick up on more nuanced

language or a change of tone that might signal the thinking and meaning making of the interviewee. I listened to each interview at least twice. I read and reread every transcription at least three more times. During this analysis phase, I wrote additional memos, called integrative memos, to record the impressions, connections, comparisons, trends, and other discoveries that emerge from combing through the data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 143) and which also added new codes to the data analysis.

Ethical Issues

The data that was gathered from personal interviews was treated with the utmost confidentiality and respect for the privacy of the participants. The interview process itself was conducted with sensitivity and mindfulness of the participant's feelings, position, and confidences. A degree of trust was established between the interviewee and interviewer so that the participants felt that I will maintain a strict code of ethics to protect them. I used several strategies to maintain an ethical study. Pseudonyms protect the identities of the participants. The real names of the schools and locations were not reported. And any information that could reveal identities was omitted or obscured. I have not discussed information gleaned from individual participants with anyone other than that participant. These concerns were explained to the participants during the recruitment phase, covered in the Consent Form, and reviewed before the interview begins.

Any information shared by the principals potentially could be of a highly personal and sensitive nature and thus was treated with respect and confidentiality. Principals are frequently met with pressures and resistance that cannot be trivialized and that might be hidden to the interviewer. Discussing democracy might not fit into current school priorities and remarks could

be taken out of context and put the principal at risk. For this reason, all conversations were held in strict confidence; the interviewee chose the location and date of the meeting. Only pseudonyms have been used as references in transcriptions, all drafts, and in the final report. All data gathered has been kept securely. Print materials will be kept in a locked file drawer for which only the researcher will have a key, and this has been housed in my locked home. All electronic documents are password-protected and only I, the researcher, know the password. I will destroy audio recordings data gathered for this research project after the dissertation has been approved. All paper documents and other electronic documents gathered or created for this project will be destroyed three years after the dissertation committee has approved the dissertation.

Quality Issues: Trustworthiness

My job as the researcher was to gather data from fellow principals who face challenges in their school settings that may be similar to mine, but may be interpreted by them very differently. It was of high importance for me to establish an honest rapport with the participants and to convey a genuine interest in learning their stories, free from my own judgment and personal bias. My status as a practicing principal and my work with a professional organization that advocates for school principals helped me to cultivate camaraderie, facilitating conversation. However, I acknowledged that the participants may have seen me as an outsider (Schram, 2006, pp. 137-142) because I am not from their district and not familiar with the unique culture of their particular community. At the very least, my background provided me general school context and freed me to probe for each participant's particular understandings and interpretations (Willis, 2007, p. 290). I was able to ask more in-depth questions as long as I retained a respectful and

research oriented approach (Seidman, 2006, p. 96).

I carried out this narrative inquiry in accordance with those practices that have been suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) so that throughout this qualitative study, I maintain integrity and perform quality research. Readers and participants expect that the data collection methods for this qualitative dissertation, the handling and subsequent analysis of the data, and final write up were carried out in a trustworthy manner, and include the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Trustworthiness must be practiced so that participants and readers of this research are convinced that the study was carried out with integrity and competence (Merriam, 2009, pp. 228-229). I used methods that are accepted practices of qualitative researchers so that the stories shared by practicing principals are real and paint a clear and genuine picture of the interviewee's truth.

The four criteria for trustworthiness can be summarized as follows. *Credibility* is concerned with the fit between the participant's perspectives and understandings and the researcher's representation of them. In other words, the reader must have confidence that the findings are truthful. *Transferability* asks how the findings of this research are applicable in other contexts, or useful to other settings. Again, the reader must be able to see how the results might be transferable to settings of which they are familiar. *Dependability* interrogates the researcher's process. Was the study conducted logically, with consistency, and with documentation to support the researcher's work? Is the study repeatable? Lastly, *confirmability* focuses on how well the research maintains objectivity and/or neutrality. The reader needs to know that the participants, and not the researcher's personal biases or conjectures, shape findings and interpretations.

Three strategies were used throughout the study to guide my activities in an effort to be

trustworthy to participants and readers. These are peer review, thick descriptions and an audit trail.

Peer review was conducted with another principal who is in the doctoral program at DePaul University. Talking through the process and wrestling with the emerging analysis to see how it resonates with him, served to provide me with a fresh perspective. Questions and observations from a peer reviewer helped me to refine my process, analysis, explanations, and arguments.

The strategy of thick description was used. I quoted liberally from the actual data to let the data speak for itself so that the entire experience can be more adequately conveyed in the final write-up (Creswell, 2009, p. 191).

An audit trail was maintained through the use of a document system that I used to record all logistical steps undertaken during this study. The audit document included specific information about schedules, time, place, and duration of interviews, phone calls, and emails and all decisions that were conducted. It included anything else that could track the operational details and minutiae of the research study.

Lastly, reflexivity was used. Reflexivity is a confirmability strategy that is common to qualitative research (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). I wrote daily journal entries about myself that reflected upon my own experiences as a principal and a researcher and that pertained to my study. I explored how my own experiences shaped my interpretations of the data uncovered in this study.

The table below list the principals interviewed for this study. This list highlights some of the principal participant statistics. The study's principals are an experienced group. They have worked in their current position for between two and 11 years, but have been in the field of

education between 14 and 29 years. Four of the 11 principals have terminal degrees. Most of the schools represent students of very diverse populations. This chart may be helpful as a reference while reading the next section.

Table 1. The Principals

Principal	Enrollment	Grades	% Low	%White	%Black	%Hispanic	Highest Degree	Year ED	Years Postion
Washington	4000	9-12	5	70	1	10	ABD	22	4
Adams	375	K-5	53	30	30	30	Ed.D	21	11
Jefferson	375	PK-8	98	5	50	20	ABD	17	2
Madison	474	K-5	62	30	5	50	MS	29	9
Monroe	675	1-6	53	50	2	45	MS	15	2
Jackson	650	PK-5	54	50	2	45	Ed.D	24	10
Van Buren	550	K-6	57	40	6	45	MS	17	9
Harrison	650	K-6	55	40	8	40	MS	14	2
Tyler	1000	1-3	31	50	7	30	MS	26	8
Polk	525	1-5	49	50	2	40	MS	19	2
Taylor	450	K-5	91	10	2	90	MS	20	9
Investigator	400	4-5	67	40	1	60	ABD	17	9

Note: All numbers rounded up.

Conclusion

The intent of this narrative inquiry was to paint a detailed picture of the lives of public school principals as they wrestle with issues of schooling for democracy. It was my intention to follow the scholarly practices for solid qualitative research as has been described in this chapter so that this study can be perceived by others as adding to the public discourse that is vital to having good schools, nurturing good citizens and renewing democracy.

Chapter IV. The Principals

Introduction

I sat down nervously with each principal, but after each hour-long conversation, I came away feeling optimistic and almost relieved, not for myself, but for our public school students. This happened again and again over the course of one summer as I interviewed eleven highly focused and dedicated educators. Except for two of them, I had never met the principals before and our interviews were conducted at a variety of locations chosen by them. I was mindful that I was taking up an hour or more of very precious time, but principals were extraordinarily gracious and willing to give of themselves. Through candid and open conversations all eleven principals shared their personal stories and gave me a glimpse into life at their school. I came away from each interview struck by two things: the level of commitment that each has for every child in the school, and the respect each has for the educators with whom they work. As one principal articulated for the group when speaking about her own staff, “there is nobody slacking, nobody relaxing, nobody who takes your kid’s education for granted” (Adams, 2014).

The power of the principal to direct and control a school’s mission, vision, values, and goals is constrained by quite a number of external forces. Still, as the building leader, and frequently the only administrator, they are influential in shaping a public space in which staff and students work within, and potentially the school’s commitment to larger goals of a public education. The interviewed principals were open and honest with me, but discovering how they perceived democracy in their schools proved more elusive. Listening for those things that the principal sees as most important, and to what they choose to commit valuable resources and energy might reveal their democratic ethos, or beliefs about democracy in schooling.

What follows is a rendering of the conversations I had with the eleven principals who

shared with me the work they do to create a learning atmosphere and public space for children and adults in their schools. I have also included responses of the principals' when directly asked questions about democracy in school. The reader will note three main sections: First, I open with brief vignettes that introduce each of the principals. These sketches are in no particular order and are intended to provide the reader context for the subsequent findings. Second, the findings are shared in a section called: Shaping the School Environment. This section reports on the findings and is based upon four themes that surfaced when looking at all of the principals' responses. Lastly, I offer a short conclusion of the findings.

Mrs. Monroe

I met Mrs. Monroe in her school office on a hot summer afternoon. She was having a busy working day, but was able to meet me one early afternoon. Summer school had let out for the day and she and her assistant principal were making plans for registration for the next school year. The school is in an older suburb close to a major Midwestern city. The neighborhood had traditionally been of a single European ethnic group, but is currently undergoing a transformation with the addition of two very different ethnic and racial groups. This elementary school has a little over 650 students in grades 1-6. Demographics show a low-income population of just over 50%. School spending is right at the state's average. This is a small district and the principals and assistant principals double as curriculum and instructional coaches. Along with the implementation of state required common core, PARCC testing and changes to the teacher evaluation system, the school is in the early stages of adding early childhood and dual language programs.

Mrs. Monroe has just completed her second year as a principal and her first at this school.

She has been in education, a second career, for about 15 years, having started teaching around the age of 30. An admired principal for whom she worked in her early career as a special education teacher mentored her, unofficially, and that continued encouragement led her to ever increasing responsibilities in school leadership positions. She landed a job as a principal because she has an excellent track record as a teacher and district literacy coach. She believes that she has found her calling as a principal and loves her job.

Monroe is new to Illinois, having lived most of her life in the West. She and her husband moved here because he was raised in the Midwest and wanted to return. They both love their new life here and are enjoying living in the city with its many things to do and places to see. We had a very friendly and open conversation and I found Mrs. Monroe to be ambitious, knowledgeable, hopeful, and driven to be her best. She is idealistic and progressive. She sees herself as lucky. She loves her staff and her district peers. She and her assistant principal, also new, are “fumbling, but figuring it out.” Inspired by kids and her parents, she lit up when she talked about a talented 1st grader with whom she had a special lunchtime connection. She is empathetic to the plights of poor families having grown up in a struggling low-income household herself and is determined that the parents of her students not find school as unwelcoming as her mother did years ago. Her school community has many non-traditional families and she wants her staff to understand what those students go through, especially those who are homeless and living in poverty. She believes that her students don’t learn in traditional ways, but that they do learn, though in different ways.

Mrs. Monroe’s mission is to move the school forward academically without alienating the previous culture’s emphasis on social activities. She explained to me that her teachers need to learn how to make data driven decisions and implement best practices in literacy, math, and

science that are focused on instruction and learning because they have not kept up with either the changing student population, or ways that their current students learn best. “I feel like we’re stuck in the 50s.”

Mrs. Monroe is humble and honest, recognizing that she has much to learn. Yet she is also sure of researched instructional methods and is determined to bring her staff into 21st century education best practices. Mrs. Monroe has well-informed ideas for how to improve her school and is in fact an expert in literacy. She is looking to balance the established culture of the school against new instructional strategies. Students are not measuring up to state benchmarking scores and that is not ok. She intends to listen to staff first, but is eager to make changes she believes are what is needed.

Though the job is hard, Principal Monroe won’t feel sorry for herself. She learned valuable lessons at her first job as a principal, in a different district, that left her somewhat disillusioned with the job’s ability to make changes in a highly political environment. None-the-less, she believes that she is there to make a difference. She is determined to lead by example and through coaching. She gingerly navigates the territory between friendship with her staff and being their boss. She promises to be very visible to parents and students to build trust in the schools. Mrs. Monroe wants to be known as someone who cares... about people and what she is doing to improve education.

Mr. Washington

Mr. Washington says that he feels a bit like Forrest Gump. He landed the role of principal in a large and well-respected high school just two years ago with only two years as an assistant principal under his belt. He told me that it is not a typical path for high school

administrators. Mr. Washington taught high school science for 18 years and loved it, every day, loved it. He loved working directly with students and developing programs that made a difference in their lives. Now, he's like the mayor of a small city but is staying grounded through a deep commitment to child-centered education and doing what's right for all kids. He has also moved into the community, bringing his young family, and is reminded by his own youth and living next to his school principal. He intends to continue making a difference in the lives of his students.

The community drives the goals and pushes this school hard. Indeed, the school is only in existence because a little over half a century ago the homeowners wanted it to be a world-class educational facility and put their money behind that goal. The school has every resource at its disposal. It has every academic advantage: clubs, sports, visual and performing arts, and college level courses. The vast majority of the kids who attend this school have it drilled into them at an early age that they will attend a prestigious college. These are nice kids and there is very little "trouble" to deal with. But the students feel intense pressure. The pressure to succeed is huge, from outside and from within the kids themselves. They have a high level of accountability and they have a lot of worry over grades and placement. It is the school's mission to keep every door open for every student while striving to help them manage expectations in healthy ways. Mr. Washington is keenly focused on helping students and their families focus on a path that might help them to achieve their personal goals, not just get to Harvard or Yale University.

Mr. Washington has seen the other side of this coin in his positions in other schools. Perhaps because he knows that other high schools work just as hard, but have different trajectories, he can 'keep it real' in this privileged place. One of the biggest tasks that Mr. Washington has in realizing community goals, and his, is in communicating them to the teachers

and staff. He has worked on an elaborate scheme to insure that every staff member hears his message and that they know that he hears each of them. He brings an open door policy to a traditionally top-down organization.

This principal is at the helm of a school with an incredible track record for getting kids to college. But, he is just as concerned, or perhaps more, about the 20% who struggle academically, who may not be interested in college, or who simply do not understand their educational options. He's drilling down deeply through surveys and interviews to figure out what each of those students need. This includes looking at potential causes to explain when students do not do well in school. Then, he and his staff work with counselors, social workers, teachers, and other support personnel to design individual plans to provide the what that the student might need to succeed.

Mr. Washington took me on a tour of the school. He showed me everything from social studies classrooms to the swimming pool. It is clear that he is proud of the school, as it seemed to me that he really knew every part of it and that every worker that we ran across knew him. On our tour I heard his vision for each subject area and his desire for the school to grow and change to meet the changing ways that students learn. He has put his mark on many things even in the short time he has been there.

Mr. Washington draws inspiration from a former colleague who had also previously been a principal. She stood for justice for all students and often, when he is faced with a conundrum, he thinks about what she would do. Through careful observations and shared reflections with staff, he is convinced that the reason for any lack of school success can be found in poverty, not race, not language, nor a lack of a student's intelligence.

Mrs. Taylor

Mrs. Taylor was drawn to education both through personal experience and a need to be an advocate for children who often have no voice of their own. She has been an education professional for over 20 years, entering the profession after having lived in several different states with her husband and children and returning to Illinois and her own education. Mrs. Taylor started out in college wanting to be an engineer, recognized that it wasn't for her, and married before finishing her degree. Teaching came naturally after the young mom realized that she should get paid for all the work she did as a volunteer, like teaching Spanish, in her own children's schools. After her children were in school full time, she obtained her teaching degree and planted herself in a school district that served students who were bilingual and often poor.

Mrs. Taylor understands her students deeply because she was one of them when growing up. She believes that she was well prepared for college even though she was an American-born child of immigrant parents, had no bilingual education until high school and spoke no English until entering the public school system as a kindergartener. Mrs. Taylor was, however, a reader. She found books and they opened doors and opportunities for her. Now, she is determined that schools help children unlock the secrets of reading and then learn to advocate for themselves. She thinks that she can do this in two basic ways; helping teachers to really understand the needs of their students and comprehend how they learn, and by deliberately connecting the school to families.

Having landed her first job in a very large district, Taylor was recruited to her present district where she helped develop their first bilingual programs. She became a teacher leader and dabbled in administration as a part time assistant principal. She was then recruited back to her

first district where she took advantage of the rich professional development opportunities and collegial peer interactions. Her reputation as a truly effective dual language teacher created opportunities to take on greater and more challenging roles until becoming one of only a handful of bilingual principals in the suburban Midwest. Taking note of the problems found in larger districts, Mrs. Taylor was drawn back to her present district. Though she serves a much smaller community, she feels she can do more.

Mrs. Taylor has been on a journey and a mission to bring out the best in children and adults. She must continually advocate for her neighborhood school's unique needs, even with members of the school board. This is no small feat as she works in a mid-sized district that, except for her school, serves a population of very affluent and privileged children. There is a huge difference in the student demographics, their educational needs, and their standardized test scores. Most of Taylor's students are Hispanic and from low-income families. Many have non-traditional family structures. Many families speak no English at home. But, to Taylor, every challenge is an opportunity and though she is fighting the status quo, respectfully, she is determined to make the school a safe haven for families. She believes that her particular students can eventually catch up to those who come to school further along the school readiness continuum. She asks, "How can we do school differently?"

Doing things differently starts with the principal who won't make excuses for her teachers or her students by saying that they don't come to school prepared. Rather, her focus is on what can be done about how the students are coming to school. There is no talk of student deficits, only about how to help students come to love reading and learning. She wants to build in them a confidence and a feeling of expertise. She feels lucky to work with these students. She keeps class sizes low. She gives students a voice in school decision-making. She runs a summer

school program in 2 three-week sessions that bookend the beginning and end of the school year. Students learn to care for one another. Adults learn to listen to students. Every communication is presented in two languages. Many of the staff speak both languages, especially the main support personnel; nurse, the social workers, and psychologist. Taylor champions a dual language teaching approach to help her students to learn academically in both English and Spanish equally well. Students are given opportunities that help bridge the gap between what affluent students get naturally and what her families can't do. She explained that it is critically important to build connections, relationships, and most of all trust between school and home.

Forthright, articulate, and forward thinking, Mrs. Taylor is bursting with energy. In her presence, I felt that all of her personal energies are directed to helping others become their best. There is an overriding sense that Mrs. Taylor is an advocate for teachers too. She provides her staff with opportunities to be leaders, with the knowledge that it will make it difficult for her to replace them when they move on to leadership opportunities. She and I talked about how difficult our jobs are and how unless you are in the position, you can't know crazy. But we both left the interview smiling, knowing that this school is a place of possibilities. This is a place where children are respected and have a voice. How unique.

Ms. Jackson

I met Dr. Jackson in her school one hot sunny day in July. Construction was taking place in the building, but there were no others around and the office was quiet. Ms. Jackson answered the doorbell of the school and ushered me into her office. We sat at a table that is across from her desk. I got the feeling that she likes to sit at this table more than her desk. Our conversation was open and honest.

“I tell people that I love my job, almost every day. It's a great thing to do.” I was struck

by the imagery that Dr. Jackson used throughout our conversation. First up was her farm connection. Daughter of Iowa farmers, she reminded me that farmers care for the land because it will help the future. Caring for children, nurturing them helps the future. They are the ones who will be out in the world when we're gone.

Dr. Jackson loves her job. She's been the principal of this school for over ten years. She's been in education now 24 years starting as an elementary teacher and moving into leadership positions. She never dreamed that she'd want to be a building principal, but an observant principal kept on encouraging her to go for it and as she took school leadership classes, she realized that she could. The job doesn't get old and even though she has her doctoral degree, she's not ready to leave it just yet. She tells me that it's fun, it's about problem solving, it's about being with children who give immediate feedback, it's about working with adults, and it's about thinking and collaboratively continually making things better.

This school serves students who live in an old neighborhood in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city. There are between 600 and 650 Pre-Kindergarten through 5th grade students. The population of the school is over 50% low-income and White and Hispanic students amount to roughly the same percentage, and make up all but 8% of the population. District spending is above the state average.

It's clear that Dr. Jackson loves her work, people, and baseball. She knows every student by name. They come to her with suggestions and recommendations. Parents trust her and they keep a strong PTA (Appendix C) alive, even in difficult financial times. They help keep school traditions alive and they support the arts, unique in elementary schools. Jackson has built collaborative relationships with her parents, staff and her peers. Inspiration comes from everywhere and everyone around her. She reads books and consults with others to learn about

things she needs to know to best support her staff. Baseball provided endless metaphors for the game of life.

One of Dr. Jackson's favorite sayings is that there is no crying in baseball. But there has been reason for crying in this school over the past two years. There were an unusually high number of serious health concerns among staff members, including the death of the physical education teacher's infant, three teachers having cancer, and the death of a beloved music teacher. Telling staff and students the bad news each time was one of the toughest things that Ms. Jackson has had to do as principal. She gets nervous each time someone comes into her office now and shuts the door. The school rallies by sticking together, raising money to help grieving families, and taking turns caring for each other.

The job requires long hours, moving fast, and paying close attention to everything. Dr. Jackson is keenly aware of the many stresses, both internal and external, that teachers face day in and day out. Many times she has to remind her staff to go home so that they have enough for the long haul. She acts as their cheerleader and coach. She knows that the staff can handle anything as long as they continue to look at what they are doing right and where they need to go. With her encouragement the staff continues a strong tradition of supporting each other that goes far beyond determining the building's professional development needs. This collaborative team sets goals for the school and maintain the school's culture. I could sense that this is a school where teachers are happy to come to work each day.

Dr. Adams

I met Dr. Adams at her school on a warm summer day, bright after big storms had hit the prior evening and water puddled everywhere. She was alone in the building and answered the

door for me herself, though workmen were fixing things and it appeared that there was some type of camp going on at the very end of the building. Dr. Adams was gracious, warm, inviting, unhurried, and gave me her undivided attention. She was patient with me as I was nervous. Her phone rang frequently, but until an hour passed, Dr. Adams ignored it. She also had just graduated with her doctorate and shared with me the topic of her recently defended dissertation. The office had a very large paper quilt of what appeared to be self-portraits of each student. I asked about whether it pictured all of the students, and she replied that it captured most, but that the teacher had left before it was completely finished. There were also lots of pictures of children and uplifting notes pinned to the credenza's bulletin board.

The school is one story and built in the 1950s. It serves a very diverse neighborhood, in a large urban area, with a student population of just about 370 and student demographics of over 50% low-income and percentages for Black, Hispanic, and White just about evenly divided. The school shares a campus with a senior center, a neighborhood garden and a large city park. The district is large and has significant financial resources. Funding for this school is well above the state's average.

Dr. Adams considers herself blessed. She has a dream job working with a mix of veteran and new teachers who are hardworking and dedicated to children. She explained that she has never worked in a lovelier working environment. Staff genuinely likes one another. They work well together and talk through issues, concerns, and the steps they need to take to be even better. Things may not have started out this way, but over 11 years, this principal has been able to mold and shape a school that values respectful behavior and a continual improvement model. Successes are celebrated, but are tempered with an honest appraisal of exactly what they are good at doing, and what needs more work.

Teachers are the primary focus of Dr. Adams' attention and she treats them with the utmost respect. She shared that she learned early on in her career, from a harsh principal, that she should not make people cry every day. "You have to remember that teachers are human beings... and I need to treat them with respect, even when they are not doing well." Most staff members are not afraid to have frank and difficult conversations about student growth. They bring data to conversations with their principal, she asks questions of them, and they frequently see for themselves what might be done differently. Dr. Adams appreciates them and is inspired by them. She also expects teachers (and parents) to treat children respectfully at all times. "There is no yelling here, ever."

This principal started out in the Peace Corps teaching science and has spent the majority of her career in education working in schools that support the children of poor and working class families. It was one of the things that drew her to this school over ten years ago. She calls her families real; people whom she would befriend. She values their authenticity and diversity and this school seems to epitomize the best of intentions of the neighborhood. Families are actively involved as much as they can be. In fact, Adams credits neighborhood parent efforts for the successful implementation of their inclusion program - including special education students in regular education classes.

Most of the families sending children to this school are considered working poor. However, the district has resources for teachers so that families can concentrate on volunteering time instead of money. Families get involved and stay involved even after their children move on. They tend a neighborhood garden started by the school. They frequently run after school activities. They run a PTA. The senior citizen center and the school share facilities and health improvement classes.

Dr. Adams explained that the school teaches by modeling. Teachers model respectful interpersonal interactions, joint decision-making, caring for the earth, and having each other's back. Students learn how to solve problems respectfully from watching their teachers and because teachers use a constructivist learning approach to designing instruction. They have received praise from outside the district for their work on problem solving and implementing common core standards. And while Adams coaches teachers to help students learn to think for themselves, she also want students to know that they are a part of something much larger than themselves so there are plenty of opportunities for shared learning.

Ms. Adams had a strong mentor in one of the first principals that she worked under as an assistant principal. She credits her success to the teachings of that principal/mentor. She returns the favor by mentoring new principals herself. This, she told me, is also inspirational and she learns as much from them as they may learn from her.

Mrs. Polk

Mrs. Polk just completed her first year as principal of an elementary school. She had been an assistant in the adjoining middle school for seven years and had been a math and science teacher in the same middle school for 11 years prior to joining administration. Mrs. Polk grew up in the suburbs and now lives and works in a community that is just outside of what is traditionally considered an urban area. Her school is part of a large district serving over 6,500 students in 10 schools. Among some of the usual school district goals, this district has made a major commitment to a dual language program and has initiated a 1-to-1-technology push that starts with children in the elementary schools and progresses through the middle and high schools.

Mrs. Polk has two children who also attend her district's schools. She keeps herself sane by "carving out time" to be with kids at their activities and to be with family and friends. She loves doing outside activities. It was my impression that Mrs. Polk likes learning and takes the time to research areas that could help her to be a better educator. She is keenly aware of the importance of teaching her students to be familiar with a variety of tech tools so that they can compete in an ever changing world, turning on a dime, and able to figure things out for themselves.

Mrs. Polk values her colleagues as inspirational and as comrades. She would like to see her district hire forward thinking leaders who know the logistics of leading school change. She is concerned about the overall lack of materials available to teachers to successfully implement common core state standards (CCSS) with fidelity. She also sees a lack of uniformity between schools and school districts across the state, in the implementation of CCSS. She is concerned about the large number of students in the district who are not meeting the state standards. She has noticed that schools have pockets of good things going on, but points out that its disjointed and there is a lack of cohesive administrative oversight. She doesn't blame teachers for this, considering them very hard workers. She sees many teachers making progress in the quest to tie all instruction to the standards. But, she believes that teachers need to be mindful of the time they have to work with kids and thus should maximize their instruction in order to be efficient and purposeful.

Mrs. Polk has a vision that students will utilize expanding technology to figure things out and further, that they will adapt to anything that is put in front of them. She is proud of her part in leading this effort and proud of the teachers with whom she works that both share her vision and who are transforming their classrooms with technology. She believes that teachers need to

attend to student engagement by way of technology, and through the technology, make innovative changes to their instructional practices. She explained that successful teachers in the 21st century take advantage of the power that technology has to motivate, and then steer students towards harnessing easily obtained information so that they may use it to solve problems or create something. She stressed the need to move beyond older ideas of having students use computers just to look things up for reports. Mrs. Polk doesn't order her teachers to change, but rather works through a leadership team to achieve buy-in and to disseminate the message. She talked about using positive peer pressure with both students and teachers to persuade. She has a definite idea of what good teaching should look like and when she has concerns, she calls attention to them by asking questions in the leadership team about teacher practices. As the team answers those questions, she is nudging them to come up with solutions that will better address student's needs. She seems quite emphatic that teachers not focus attention on things outside of their control, like parents helping with homework. But, rather, she wants teachers to spend energies on things within their control, like implementing small group instruction effectively and promoting student learning independence.

Mrs. Polk is proud of efforts that have been made through a school-wide program of "Rachel's Challenge." She is also proud of the fact that the superintendent gave her the current position, because she was ready for the task. She is proud of the advances that her teachers have made in technology through her leadership in that area.

There are a couple of programs/activities going on in Mrs. Polk's school that foster student agency. She convenes a student leadership team that meets monthly and students bring up problems and she guides them to figure out their own solutions. I found it interesting that she used a book called Verbal Judo as a guide in helping facilitate student dialogue. That book is

well known as a tool for law enforcement personnel to use to diffuse difficult situations and to foster tolerance. The school's PTO, with a handful of active parents, promotes quarterly celebrations and student health and wellness activities. The school has a reward system of paw print stickers given to students who are caught doing something that exemplifies how they grew as a person.

The school hosts a lot of visitors who want to see how the district's flagship programs are implemented. Dual language is one of these programs. DL has promoted a significant lessening of the divide between races that used to plague the district. And along those same lines, Mrs. Polk was particularly proud of a program she was heavily involved in at her previous AP position that promoted random acts of kindness, affirmations and small groups of students working to make the school more positive. This program was jump-started by a parent and ultimately it appeared to have significantly reduced the number of discipline referrals.

Mrs. Polk is very positive about her staff. She sees them as leaders in the district about technology and developing materials for CCSS. She is excited about the conversations she has with her leadership team. Personally, Mrs. Polk meets challenges head on, and she comes across as sure of herself. She is ultimately responsible for student safety and learning and she takes this job very seriously. I also sense that Mrs. Polk is tough on teachers, holding them accountable to things that have been agreed upon so that students get the very best instruction.

Mrs. Madison

I met with Mrs. Madison on a hot day in July at a Starbucks. She was officially on vacation as her district's principals do not work in July, but she agreed to meet with me. Mrs. Madison has been an educator for 29 years. She taught in regular education classrooms and was

a gifted resource teacher. After her first 17 years, she spent 7 years job sharing while her own children were young. She got into administration through a gifted program coordinator job, which in turn became part time assistant principal, part time gifted coordinator. She's been principal for the past 9, the last six at her current school.

Her school district is relatively small though her school has 500 students. It is in an older suburb in a large urban area and over the years it has come to serve a primarily low income, frequently immigrant student population. Over 20 languages are spoken in the homes of her students, but the majority of immigrants are Hispanic. The school does have a significant advantage in that retail-shopping dollars are able to provide the school district with more money per pupil than many schools serving similar demographics. This allows Mrs. Madison to hire more teachers and staff that can lower class sizes and support before and afterschool programs. The relatively small size of the school district provides welcome autonomy, intimate knowledge of what's going on, and good collaboration with district administration. It also means that Mrs. Madison has to serve on just about every district committee or large initiative.

Mrs. Madison has been able to shape the culture of the school over the past several years through a variety of strategies. She considers herself progressive and keeps up with the latest and greatest educational wisdom through study, workshops, and collaborating with staff and peers. Describing herself as pushy, Mrs. Madison brings her staff along through book studies, collaboration, gentle persuasion, or evaluation pressure. She has also carefully hired and fired teachers who exhibit the same passion for student growth as she has and that she wants to promote throughout the building. The bottom line is that the dedicated teachers on Madison's staff continually inspire her. I could feel the pride that she has in her staff members. She used the word intelligent to describe them several times.

Mrs. Madison is an extremely hard worker with her eyes on her goals at all times. She continues to work as hard or harder than she did when she first started. Ten-hour days are common. She participates on most district committees so that she has a voice and can prepare her staff for what's coming. She keeps current by attending lectures and workshops and reading a lot. She particularly likes to network with other principals at workshops and seminars, sharing with them what works and what doesn't. Mrs. Madison brings these ideas and best practices back to her building. One such idea is helping her staff address the white privilege mindset that often can be found because they are a primarily upper middle class white female staff who serves a population that is significantly different racially and income wise. She believes opening their eyes will help them deliver better instruction. At times, it seems to her staff as though she is pushing them faster than other schools in district are pushing their teachers. This sometimes causes her frustration with the union as some teachers see that the other schools are not required to implement best practices as quickly or as thoroughly as her school.

Madison knows how hard her teachers are working. She says that they know their students "at the microscopic level" and are working to meet their needs academically, through teaching behaviors, and offering after school support. However, many are beginning to feel defeated and complain that school just isn't fun anymore for teachers or students. But they persevere. The school is adorned with student artwork. They value physical education, art and music. Students have physical education daily, rare in elementary schools today. Students sing a school song weekly and have a focus on going to college through their *No Excuses University* participation. They earn rewards for doing the right thing and are learning to set and track their own academic goals. Mrs. Madison has brought in a chess club that is growing by leaps and bounds. She initiated a program that brings dads into the school to volunteer in classrooms.

I came away feeling that Mrs. Madison is a truly dedicated and hard working principal. She listens to parent feedback and surveys indicate that they trust her. Students are given some leadership opportunities as 5th graders through a Kiwanis program that fosters service to the school and community. Mrs. Madison pushes herself to be the kind of leader that stresses student learning above all else. She is doing everything that she can to help teachers to provide students with the tools they need in order to be literate in math, reading, and writing. She believes that if they are literate, than they will be better citizens.

Mrs. Van Buren

I met Mrs. Van Buren one hot sunny afternoon after she had been sitting in district meetings for three days straight. As she unlocked the door she told me that this was the first time that she'd been allowed back into the building since summer maintenance closing. She had also just returned from a vacation where she had visited schools in Africa with one of her daughters. We moved into her office after she disarmed the alarm system and pushed a few things out of the way so that we could sit at her desk. I was immediately comfortable in her office even though it was completely unadorned and full of boxes. Mrs. Van Buren gave me her complete attention and we chatted easily and afterwards toured this open plan school.

Mrs. Van Buren has been a principal for eight of her 17 years in education and all of this in the same, very large district of which both she and her family also were products. She started after having begun own family. Over the course of her education career, she has assumed a variety of leadership roles in the district that have given her PK-5 building some advantages. The 550+ building serves a community of primarily low income working families, a lot of whom are Hispanic. Most of the students are walkers except for two programs that bus students in for

the self-contained BD/ED (Behavior Disorder / Emotionally Disturbed) (See Appendix C) program.

Mrs. Van Buren took on this building as her first administrator assignment and when it was a smaller school, thinking that it would be a stepping-stone to a larger building. Instead, the building population grew and its programs expanded. She stays because she loves it. She is challenged and learns something every day. There are many programs in this building from exceptional needs to dual language. A new gifted pilot program to a BD/ED cross-categorical classroom. Mrs. Van Buren is highly involved in writing curriculum in the district. She encourages her teachers to be involved in both building and district committees because it will give them an edge on implementation. Discipline problems are rare, except in the special needs self-contained classrooms because the building has been a long-time implementer of PBIS – Positive Behavior Intervention System (Appendix C). Teachers’ work in grade level teams of three per grade and each team member also serves on one of the building’s committees so that everyone is involved in all manner of discussions and decision-making. Mrs. Van Buren attends all committee meetings, but can’t always get to weekly grade level meetings because she is the building’s only administrator.

Listening to Mrs. Van Buren is inspiring. Over her eight years, she has assembled a staff that supports the students, the diversity of the community, the district’s mission, the principal, and one another. Her peers and staff inspire her and she takes notice of the work that they are doing everyday. They are ordinary everyday people and she can see what they are doing, in real time, to improve their schools and neighborhoods.

Deliberately setting out to help her staff to do their best, Mrs. Van Buren has become a coach to her staff. She encourages them to be the first person between home and school. She

models building relationships with parents, reminds staff to empathize with them as parents, to be humble, to listen, and even to apologize if something went wrong. Staff is told that they hold responsibility for student safety and education, but they are not alone, as Mrs. Van Buren will sit beside them. The entire staff lives out the mission of the school. Students even teach the code of conduct to substitutes. Community building in the school involves family. Mrs. Van Buren brings parents in to help. She has parents leveling books even when they don't speak English. The neighborhood and school are interconnected and the neighborhood looks out for the school. This is a school I would want my children and/or my students to attend.

Days are long for Mrs. Van Buren. She has to move fast and is always on guard. This is a big district that has many challenges. The superintendent, as of this writing, has very high expectations for his principals. He expects them to be in classrooms and actively working as an instructional leader during school hours, and not at their desks. He might drop in on them at any time and they need to be ready. A bigger challenge still, Mrs. Van Buren has two high needs BD classrooms that have most of their students bused in from their homes that are 45 minutes away. Parents cannot come to get them in times of sickness or when discipline requires removal from the school. These highly volatile students burn out their teachers, even the most talented, and Mrs. Van Buren herself has to be in these rooms often. She sees this taking away time from the rest of the building and from the other programs. She loves these kids, but without assistance, something suffers.

It's not only the principal who is stressed. The entire building frets about student test results, which do not accurately reflect the progress that their students made. This school has been honored several times for their PBIS efforts, but state test results put them in a bad position. The state's new emphasis on student test results as a measure of teacher effectiveness is causing

much anxiety. New tests are computer based and the school hasn't enough technology to give kids enough practice in doing keyboarding activities let alone using computers to take state exams. So, Mrs. Van Buren and her staff have been playing with the schedule to maximize time. They are eager to try anything that might help the students. They are good at problem solving and have gotten better and better over time. I'm guessing it's because of their principal. She is sticking with it because "it's growing and challenging all around. I'm learning every day."

Mrs. Jefferson

I met with a young principal of an inner city school in a challenged neighborhood. The school is old, but freshly and brightly painted. The few people I encountered on this beautiful summer day were friendly and open. I could feel that the school is typically very busy, but that things are pretty quiet right now. The kids were hauntingly missing. There are student drawings and paintings all over the bright blue walls. I was told that summer school was going on but I could not hear anything. The district made a decision that students that are served by this school this summer are those who are diagnosed as severe and profound special education inclusion students. This is not what the principal had hoped for, requested, nor applied for this summer. She wanted the school to host their own students' summer school because the kids are connected to their neighborhood school, cared-for, fed, and clothed. Instead, she's limited to seeing them each morning to make sure that they all get on the right bus that transports them to whichever school they are sent. Nineteen buses take these neighborhood kids to different locations all summer. This principal doesn't know how its determined, but she makes sure everyday that everyone gets on the right bus. She's still not sure where one of her kiddos is. He hasn't been seen yet this summer. She's clearly worried. I'm still thinking about how she puts them all on

the bus when she tells me that it's the severe and profound students who are making her smile these days. They are quiet, hard to understand, but are clearly cared-for in this environment.

One of the people responsible for caring for students is the school police officer who I immediately could sense isn't your typical cop. She waved me to the right adult washroom when I first arrived with a broad and welcoming gesture but wary eyes. Though at an elementary school, I could not hear children and didn't see any either until I was leaving the building. It was then that I noticed a big group of red-shirted young people crossing the street with older students acting as crossing guards while the little ones skipped across a busy city street. Something drew my attention to the older kids more than the little ones, as they took their job so seriously, coaxing the little ones across in a somewhat orderly fashion.

Ms. Jefferson was open and honest, her language and demeanor were dressed for comfort and color. Her smile was broad, but she sized me up and caught me a bit off guard. Young and ambitious, yet with 17 years under her belt, this principal is an example of how hard we're working for our students, though we are all told that we're failing because the students have not attained grade level. This K-8 school is housed in two buildings and the principal has to frequently walk between buildings that are about a block apart. Jefferson describes the school as a place where the staff goes the extra mile, and uses all available community resources to make the school a welcoming, caring, learning focused environment. The school also serves as the neighborhood's education hub and community center. Teachers spend a lot of time counseling parents about the parent's own social emotional issues more than they are able to talk how the child is doing.

Ms. Jefferson believes in shared leadership. She is working with a veteran team in whom she has enormous trust and admiration. The staff works together collaboratively to get things

done. They set building goals and priorities and then divvy up the jobs so that everyone is helping. There is no AP in this school because the principal suggested, and the teachers agreed, that that job could be shared by four teacher leaders who would each get a stipend for the extra responsibilities that they would do. Those teachers are working over the summer even though they don't have to. If you listen to this principal, she and her staff work many long hours every day most of the year. They do it because they truly care about their students and they know that it is only by their constant presences and building relationships with these students that they have even a remote chance of helping them attain grade level performance.

Gutsy, Ms. Jefferson was invited to meet with one of the high schools that her school feeds. The agenda was preparing students to be HS ready, with the conversation focused squarely on those things that the elementary school must do. Ms. Jefferson countered by asking the high school principal what they were prepared to do for her students too. Surprisingly, the high school principal jumped on board and asked the K-8 principal to submit a list of what the eighth graders needed from them.

Ms. Jefferson feels lucky to be working in this school. She has other ambitions including finishing her doctorate, but right now, she is very happy in this environment. She trusts and admires most of her staff. She loves her students, and she is professionally qualified to help parents. The business and organized volunteer community is heavily involved in this school. They sponsor Christmas coats and boots distribution and a Santa's workshop to help students buy presents for their families. Ladies in the neighborhood sponsor fun activities and are reading partners. The Boys and Girls Club shares a campus with the school along with some personnel. The school sits on a city park and many activities of the school are held in the park with the neighborhood attending. Ms. Jefferson gets teary talking about how much the community

pitches in. There are many positives at this school even though Jefferson is often left defending the school.

Mr. Tyler

I met with Mr. Tyler on a very early summer day. He was a bit out of sorts because he'd been up worrying about a school matter at 3:00 AM. He had intended to have the day off, but was instead going off to work after our interview. I had an overwhelming feeling that the weight of the world was on Mr. Tyler's shoulders. I felt a surge of sympathy and wanted to help him. Throughout the interview, I sensed a deep frustration in him that there are so many things that are out of his control and yet he's left to deal with them all and try to make things better for everyone. He made a reference to Don Quixote that really summed it up for me: that he will continue to fight the good fight, but he's in a maddeningly obtuse world.

Mr. Tyler has been in education for over 25 years. He taught science for the first 15 years and has been an administrator for the rest. He currently works in an elementary setting in a very large building with a lot of staff. The district is also very large, but comprised of the edges of over a dozen different municipalities. Every child in the school rides a bus. The district is made up of grade centers but the number of students is so large that there are two nearly identical buildings housing his grade levels and they share a campus. Each of these schools houses about 1000 students in three grades. Tyler tells me that fairness nearly always rules the day in this district, so kids from even number houses attend one of the two schools and the odd numbered homes attend the other.

Mr. Tyler draws his inspiration from his first principal and the lessons he learned were to put children first, always use a sense of humor, and get good information. He enjoys being in the

district where he started, and in fact has returned to it after serving in two other districts. He stays because he enjoys working with his colleagues – ‘warts and all’. His major goal is to clear the way for good teachers to do their best work. He shared several stories that illustrated really compassionate teachers who do excellent work.

Tyler’s experience helps him understand what a good education should look like and how to obtain it. He wants to continue striving to achieve it, but he is getting more and more frustrated because the job is getting increasingly difficult as political issues, people's magical thinking, and the demand for fairness -across the board- is obscuring what is needed to provide a good education.

According to Tyler, there are quite a number of things that get in his way, in the way of helping teachers to do their best work. He thinks that there aren’t enough conversations devoted to figuring out what’s good for educating children. Today’s schools see unusual, difficult, unbalanced behaviors becoming increasingly more prevalent. Families are stressed and their lives are getting tougher. Teachers, unions, school boards, parents, and students are preoccupied with having to have everything be fair, even when it’s nearly impossible to achieve fairness. School board meetings focus on everything but children, and board members are especially concerned with saving money by eliminating programs that have a big impact on student needs. Parents fight for things that aren’t even on the chopping block. Parents often believe their child over the principal mostly because they have a beef with other parents. Politicians look for easy, quantifiable answers. Even good superintendents are focused on things that should not be in play. “We’ve been assessing forever in education, so that’s nothing new. We’ve been accountable forever, and that’s nothing new either. But, we’re focused on those things to the exclusion of things that would make a difference in the life of a child” (Tyler).

Children tug at this man's heartstrings. They are what keep him going. He shared several stories of children who are really difficult at times, but he had built a relationship with them, and watched them grow and make positive strides with their behavior. He revered teachers, specialists, and the assistant principals because they do incredible things for kids and one another. His wishes are to devote more time to those teachers. He believes that educators have to be fearless in the quest to care for teachers because they care for the students.

Mr. Harrison

I met Mr. Harrison on a summer evening at a park near my house. A family man with four little girls, he was in charge of three of them while his wife worked and another daughter had a friend date. I tried to let him off the hook, but he wanted to honor his word about being a participant in my study and so we worked around the childcare by meeting at a place that would accommodate the girls. I sensed that the girls were used to working around their parents' work life intruding on their family life. They took it all in. As dad spoke with me, and interacted with his girls, I projected that his exchanges with students were probably similarly easy-going and playful.

Mr. Harrison grew up in Indiana and started his teaching career as a science teacher at a middle school after being recruited by the principal of that middle school of an affluent Midwestern suburban town. He taught there for six years with a brief stint in a high school where he learned that the politics of high school sports wasn't for him. He then became an assistant principal through teacher leadership activities. He was then asked to be principal of an elementary school for three years. Next the superintendent, who he admired greatly, asked him to take over as a middle school principal during a difficult transition period for the school. That

experience left him drained and he left public schooling to try his hand at working in a large education consulting company. Again, he learned something about himself, and left after two years. He missed being with children, and returned right away, this past year, to be principal in a wholly different district from whence he came.

Mr. Harrison works in a school district that is much larger than in districts he previous worked. He likes it that way because it gives him more autonomy. His school also has a different clientele and it is one of only a handful of schools in the district, based upon the neighborhood, which has students who have difficulty meeting AYP. The school is fairly large with almost 650 students. Demographically, they are over 50% low income, and there are four racial groups represented: White and Hispanic student students percentage is nearly the same, 12% Asian and 8% Black population. The district spends a little more than the state average per pupil.

Mr. Harrison just completed his first year as this school's principal. He told me that the school personnel have great pride in their accomplishments, and are very protective of the students even though standardized test results report that students are not performing up to benchmarked standards. This is a challenge for Mr. Harrison. Though he thinks highly of his teachers, and appreciates them, he believes that teachers need to expect more from the students. At the same time he also acknowledged that the students are being measured against a test that is unfair for them at this point in their schooling, especially as a quarter of the students are English language learners and their bilingual programs stop at the end of 2nd grade.

Mr. Harrison is a self-proclaimed networker. He pays close attention to the people he meets and is interested in where they work, what excites them, and what specifically they are doing in the field. He had been involved in coaching at the high school level for most of his

teaching years. He is very well versed in current education trends and knows the work of a number of the big players in the education industry. He is trying to incorporate their highly touted best practices in his school. He sees himself as a coach and spends his time building solid working relationships with his teachers. He is cautiously optimistic about the future of education.

Conclusion

I spent the better part of the summer interviewing these eleven principals. And through the dissertation process I have spent countless hours listening to the interviews, reading, and rereading the transcripts. I feel as though I know these principals. In truth, it was a gift to have had the opportunity to interview them. I learned so much from each. I have been energized and inspired in my own practice with what I've learned from them. Our conversations have informed some of my practices this school year. Overall, these eleven principals are giving to people every day, including people like me. They work incredibly hard, and put in interminably long hours. Within the personal stories and professional journeys of each principal are elements that can be admired. One of the principals summed it up for all, describing how she has to move so quickly to get everything done that it's really quite comical to watch her. I know exactly how she feels. They may not see it as I do, but they exude a confidence that belies the frenetic pace that each maintains as they do their best for our children, and our future.

Chapter V. Shaping the School Environment

Introduction

The interviews pointed out that the eleven principals concentrate their efforts on many of the same things and share a deep commitment to the success of their schools. Their reflections about students, staff, and parent community convinced me that they are well informed, people-oriented leaders whose actions are deliberate and purposeful. They work to shape an environment that they believe best supports student learning. They do this by making conscious decisions to concentrate their efforts on those things, which they believe that they can control, and which will have a positive result.

What follows tells a story of our public schools. It provides a glimpse into the participants' worlds. From the principals' words we hear their perceptions and perspectives on the work they do and for which they are entirely, and joyfully committed. Their stories show how they shape the school environment – with and for the people of the school. These stories also point out how principals deal with seemingly endless and cyclical mandates, the disrespect for the profession, and the effects that achievement scores have on a school's reputation. The principals' reflections provide a rich description of public schooling today, and may alternatively point out what is missing in them.

The participants' stories are represented in five themes that are discussed in this findings section: Community Building, Shared Decision-Making, Leadership and Learning, Responding to Change, and Dispositions of the Principals.

Community Building: Cultivating Care, Compassion, and Relationships

“I think the most important thing is to realize that you’re dealing with human beings.”
(Adams)

The overwhelming sentiment of the eleven principals that I interviewed was their passionate desire to create an environment that cared for their students and teachers. All efforts, long and short term, are directed toward doing what they believe is good for all students while also being respectful of staff members. Their reflections revealed that they make decisions highly conscious of the impact their decisions will have on the people affected. Little is taken lightly, taken for granted, or spoken of in an off-handed way. A caring environment has a focus on students, on teachers, and on the community. And, as with caring relationships, each is changed because of their care for one another (Noddings, 2006).

Students

Tellingly, when asked for what they would like to be remembered, nine of the eleven principals stated that they’d like to be remembered for having cared for kids. In fact, several of the principals stated that they did not care about being remembered for anything other than caring for students. Principal Tyler was emphatic:

My hope is, and why I wanted to be a principal, was to make sure that all of our kids were being educated to the best of their ability, which isn’t just lip service. I hope they say that I was fair and that I took care of my kids. Actually, that I took care of my kids and I don’t really care about being fair, but that I took care of my kids and took care of my teachers."

Principals are committed to doing what’s right for their students. They hope that their efforts meet their students’ varied and ever-changing needs.

...because at the end of the day, that's why I'm here: because I care about, I cared about individuals, I cared about what I'm doing. ...I go down to first grade lunch every day if I'm in the building and if I'm not in a meeting. And there are a couple of reasons for that: one, just to get to know them, and [pause] I know that I have to be the instructional leader here, but I also have to build relationships with kids and get to know them. (Monroe)

And another principal is adamant about her mission.

I would want kids to remember that I had high expectations, but more that I was fair and that I cared about them. I know almost everybody: I know every kid's name. Their parents are like, "How does she know your name?" and I say, "Your child spends six hours a day here. Shouldn't I know their name?" I am in the lunchroom almost every day. We play stump Dr. Jackson some days, and I try to ask them a question and then they get to ask me questions. All for a pencil. You can do a lot with kids for a pencil. But I think that's what I'd want them to remember...you know, it's not about me. It's really never been about me. I don't <pause> I'm here to do this job because it's really about getting you to where you need to be and what you want to be. (Jackson)

Principals spend time with children and build relationships with them.

It was the third week of school and I was standing in –between two lines of kindergarteners and I was zipping somebody's coat up, or something like that, so I was bending over and I had on a silk dress. All of a sudden, I can hear my name, Ms. Adams, Ms. Adams, Ms. Adams. And I realize that there is a kindergartener behind me rubbing my rear-end in circles while saying Ms. Adams, Ms. Adams. He wanted to be tapping me, but that's where he could reach and it feels good to touch a silk dress. And he just kept on because I was working with the other child and so couldn't just turn around. And then I finally turn around and said, 'Yes, Angel, and he throws his little arms around my waist and says, 'I love you, Ms. Adams.'

Principals shared that they care about every student.

So one of the things when I started was, well, everybody was like, wow this place is great. There are 80% of the kids meeting state standards, which is an awesome number, but I'm like, wait a minute, there's a 1,000 kids in the junior class that means that 200 kids didn't pass. That's a lot. <pause> And they're like, yeah, but 80% of the kids are doing great. I'm like, yeah but that's 200 kids! That's more kids than there are in some high schools. So over the

last four years, <pause> [after] one of my first months where I gave a talk about Chris and Sean. I made up two kids names and sort of talked through at a faculty meeting these kids' trajectory of their first couple years at school, and how they struggled and had not found a place to really catch a foothold. And then the question was, well, it's kind of become a thing around here, for the last couple of years [we ask] What about Chris and Sean? So that those names kind of just stuck. But it's like, when or how are we helping? (Washington)

Principals are hiring and training staff that will project a caring attitude. Principal Taylor articulated what almost every principal talked about.

I think the children, you can see it, the volunteers, parents, all, when they come through our building, even the UPS person, will always say, this place feels really good, okay. It's because you know, we have a really warm and welcoming secretary, administrative assistant, and entire staff. And I'm hoping that we have brokered that over the years by making sure that staff, when we hire, when we train, when we do our professional development, that we're talking about families beyond the educational setting. (Taylor)

Teachers

Every one of the principals insisted that caring for students included caring for teachers. This sentiment was stated clearly by Principal Jackson, "As a principal, I think my job is mostly to take care of kids, but also to take care of my teacher." And she reflected upon why in recounting that she continually asks this herself this question, "What do they need so that they can do their job better, and then what do I need to do to help them get things out of the way, so that they're not worrying about the stuff that is not as important?"

Principals genuinely like the people with whom they work. All used the word lucky when describing their particular situation and almost all gushed about their staffs as hard working, caring adults who work well with one another and who go out of their way for kids

every day. That attitude pays off

I have never worked any place else where the environment is as lovely as it is here. I don't have faculty squabbles. I don't have people who feel like, 'Oh, I work harder than she does.' They work together, and they're kind to each other, and there is really a strong sense of - these are all our kids. So if a child is corrected by another teacher, they straighten up just as much as if it was their own teacher. And it hasn't always been that way. In fact, although there has always been that façade, I think it's a little deeper now. When I first came here, I changed a couple of grade levels, and I did ask who, (pause) [could work with one another] because I did not know. And, I may not have asked quite as much as I think I asked. But, I paired two people together who by all accounts seemed to get along. And apparently <pause> the phone lines were buzzing all that night. But, the teachers actually worked it out. Someone else stepped up and said, 'I'll work with her.' And that was just that. Someone came to me the next morning with a 'how could you put me with her?' And I said, 'I didn't know,... you guys all seemed to be getting along.' And she said, "Well I cannot work with her, but here is the solution. So and so said she wants to work with her.' And I was like, 'wow, this is amazing.' ...And, so my building has become, <pause> not just superficially nice to each other but, I think, genuinely nice to each other, because the new people have come in, and they don't see any buried stuff, and they go 'oh, this is how we act here.' And it's really; it's very, very powerful stuff. It's very powerful. And I've never worked in a building like that before. And I don't hear that from my colleagues that they have that either. (Adams)

Because in the end....

I mean, it comes down to the classroom teacher. And I really see my role, and a lot of this in terms of being an educational leader and all the rigmarole that we, that, <pause>... all the books tell us about what the principals do and the mission and all of that. But when it comes down to it, our job is to make sure that we clear the way for good teachers to take care of kids. And if we do not do that,... bad things happen. (Tyler)

Principal Madison shared that she doesn't take her staff for granted and continually looks for ways that honor the work that they do.

I feel like my teachers work harder, my teachers work smarter. I feel pretty connected to my individual staff. ...And you know, I just take the time to sit and meet individually over the summer

with the new people, you know just orienting them. And I pull together new teacher meetings and I front-load the beginning of the year with extra meetings to make sure that each teacher feels that they all are in-the-know, that they are all on the same page. ... I really try to show appreciation to my teachers. Every year at Christmas time I make a point of writing handwritten individual cards to them and really try to talk about, in those cards, things that I see in them that as individuals, um, that really inspire me, or that I really like about them that I would want to see them continue to do. I'm always looking for ways to recognize teachers. (Madison)

Caring for staff members as people created challenges too. With only two exceptions, principals shared that letting staff members go was the hardest part of their job.

I have a teacher who is probably one of the most caring individuals I've ever met in my life, as far as the way she takes care of kids. And for two years, I begged her to get some content knowledge, and to get some professional development. And she felt like she didn't need it. And she was teaching wrong information to the kids. And this went on and on, and I ... part of the thing was I let it go on too long: I let it go on for two years. And, I really wish that I didn't let it go on, but I really wanted to give her a chance because of her relationships with her kids. And that is so important to me, especially in the situation that we're in. Like, it's so important to me, <pause> but the kids have to be prepared. Part of preparing our kids is preparing them for what they need in the future and there was a lack of understanding of that importance of ... making sure her students were being taught. And, and I tried, I mean I had very real conversations with her, and it was one of the hardest things to do, to release her. One of the hardest things I've ever had to do. (Jefferson)

Parents and Guardians

Many of the principals shared that caring for their students required that the school care for the student's families too. Every principal mentioned that their student population includes non-traditional family structures. The word 'Parents' connotes other family members such as grandparents, foster parents, aunts and uncles, or an appointed guardian.

Several principals talked about being more visible to parents on a regular basis and how it

pays off when they do so. They also shared that communicating with parents helps them understand the school's objectives. Principal Monroe was one of four principals who shared a similar way to connect to parents.

I learn and hear so much when my AP and I walk around the building every morning and every afternoon. So before kids get here, we're outside walking and meeting and talking to parents. And then, we both take different sections. And I purposely try not to have a meeting then so I can get out there within 10 minutes and be right there when the bell rings. It's really helpful. I've had several parents come to me and say, 'I've never seen the principal out here.' And I have one board member who comes here and says 'Why are you out here?' And I was like, 'This is where I get to meet people.' And so, to me it's like, if I have to have you in my office because your child kicked someone, that's going to be an easier conversation if you've seen me out in a social setting or in a friendly way before I have to have you in and embarrass you because your child's been kicking kids. (Monroe)

Principals see real value in building caring relationships with families and try to include them in day-to-day school functions.

So, I have a parent education class and I will get 20 Hispanic parents or 20 low-income parents in and they will join us and they will advocate with their friends, to pull their friends in, so that we have a pretty active group of parents. And I don't speak Spanish. But you know what, all they want to know is somebody cares about their children and somebody cares about them. So a smile, a hug, a wave, and 'oh come on in, come on in, I don't speak Spanish, but I will figure it out with you.' And then I say, I need help to level these bilingual books, and these moms, who don't speak any English at all and they have very little education - I don't think even graduated high school - but they can level books. They just copy the numbers and put back all the books, and are so proud to do it and that I asked them. I can hardly talk to them all, other than just how are you? I can manage that, but by valuing them, they just seem to trust us a little bit more, and then they will help us more. Maybe they can't run a committee, but they will help at fun fairs, they will help in classrooms, they will help with these kinds of things. And they feel valued, and you know what, their kids are at school every day - that's what we need. We need

their kids to be here, and then we can help their kids learn. (Van Buren)

Sometimes required change is hard for parents. Principals share that frequent and consistent communication is vital to understanding.

We had a little issue on security. You know, it is a small town, [and the thought is] nothing is going to happen here. And, I am not that way. So, the staff came to me with some very big concerns because parents did not check in at the office, and [they] just came down into the classrooms and were interrupting class. The teachers were pretty upset and so I made a large change to limit that. And I got some backlash from parents. It was a little bit contentious, I'd say for about a good month. So I explained [to parents] that we live in a day and age where, while you know, we hope nothing bad will happen, things are happening in communities very much like ours. And, I don't know any of you, so while you can be saying all that, I have to say, my number one goal is to protect the staff and students, we are going to have to follow some new protocols and it doesn't mean that I don't want you in the classrooms. It doesn't mean you can't volunteer, but you have to check into the office first. The teacher has to know you are coming. I sent this out in our newsletter, put it on our website, sent home a letter in the mail and put signs on the door that starting Monday, parents have to drop students off at the front door or walk in to the office and make an appointment with the teacher. (Polk)

Other principals shared how parents value the school's commitment to families.

I think that Sherwood School is about family more than anything. It's one of the most unique places I've ever worked. And once you're part of Sherwood, once you've ever been a part of Sherwood, you're a part of Sherwood forever. So it doesn't really matter if... I have families who, um, who ended up taking their student to an academy because he was gifted, and they just thought, they were 'we just think it's a better place for him.' And they still come to our PTG things, because once you're part of Sherwood, you're a part of Sherwood. ...And our PTG treats us very well. We're lucky. They work hard and they are a nice group of people. They really just want things to be good for their kids. That's all they care about. So long as they're happy, as long as

their kids go home happy, they're good. And, 12 years ago, Sherwood became a bilingual program center for the district and we made a commitment to those families, 'if you send your child in kindergarten, even though the program ends at third grade, they can stay here through fifth grade. You can go back to your home school if you want to, but, we are not going to tell you that you have to leave because you started here, you were committed here.' (Jackson)

Another principal explained how important parent support can be to the success of new programs.

We had a challenge, implementation-wise, when we were asked by our superintendent to do inclusion. (Special Education students included for most of their day in reg. ed. classrooms.) And district wide, it wasn't really well rolled out. Now I was really lucky, or I don't know if it's luck, but I hired two incredible people and they kind a' sold it to everyone else in the building. You would see this class coming down the hallway and they were so happy. The teacher was always so happy, the kids were so happy, and you didn't know who the special needs students were. Their classmates were helping them along, and it was really, really wonderful. But I also had to sell this to my community. ... We had a parent who stepped up and said, 'Wow, my son's kindergarten class is freaking out about this. And we didn't know it at the time, but she had her next child down who was going to need to be in the inclusion classroom. So, she said to us, 'I'm inviting everybody over to my house for Popsicle Palooza – teachers, parents, and kids.' So we all went to her house in late August and hung out in the backyard and ate popsicles and everybody found out that it wasn't so scary. They were just people too. And it went really well. (Adams)

Lastly, at least one principal pointed out a much deeper understanding of building caring relationships with parents that was not evident in the interviews with other principals. I was struck by Principal Taylor's response to a question about something she could change if she had the power and resources.

So, I'm not sure if I could change one thing what it would be. ... But for us, I think we need to be continuing to grow and develop our professional growth [opportunities]. But more importantly we

need to grow our human capacity for compassion, okay? Because I think in a building, in a school like Valley View, you need to have that first. You know, it's just [that you must have] kind of that deep understanding and acceptance - not tolerance - but true acceptance and respect for the community, okay? I think you are going to struggle unless you know them, truly accept them on their terms, as opposed to only having a little bit of a sense of who they are, and as something they are lacking. (Taylor)

Creating and sustaining a caring environment is very much on the minds of the principals interviewed in this study. They work on multiple fronts balancing multiple priorities. The findings reflect the thinking of these principals that their interactions with students, teachers, and their parent community shape the climate of their buildings.

Shared Decision-making, Voice, and Collaboration

“Our biggest challenge is to get everybody to voice in.” (Washington).

Another recurring theme in the findings from the interviews was collaboration. There were a number of ways that principals promoted their learning environments as places where constituents have a voice where staff can share in decision-making but primarily, principals talked about how their buildings are collaborative spaces. Principals are aligned around the premise that collaboration is a critical component of an excellent school. Principal Taylor voiced her rationale.

It's not about me, it's not my school, however, it's our school, it's our community, they are our children and we need to look at it that way.

Principals shared that every opportunity for collaboration is explored and given space. Every school has multiple internal committees convened for a variety of purposes including buy-

in, information dissemination, problem solving, and some shared decision-making. Every school has staff members - some who volunteer and some who are paid – who work in teams on long or short-term school improvement goals. These teams are seen as an opportunity for staff collaboration as collaboration is viewed as a way to give people some voice in school operations or to at least provide them some influence on decisions that affect all or some constituents. Principals shared that they are proud of the collaboration that takes place at their schools and at the district level. All of them shared stories of successful staff collaboration efforts. A few schools have collaborative opportunities for students, parent, and the community. Interestingly, principals shared their concern when teachers don't avail themselves of those opportunities of shared decision-making.

Collaboration is a way to foster agreement and to get teachers and other education professionals to own the work that needs to be done.

I'm always trying to broker consensus and trying to bring, you know, because I want buy-in, ...we do our best work when we're committed to it, when we want to do it. I've never worked, um in a setting where you just... [are told] you've just got to do this.
(Taylor)

It is a way to cope with the stress of tackling perplexing and difficult problems.

I remind people that we're a smart group of people, we are incredibly competent and we can figure this out, and you're not alone, you don't have to figure it out on your own. (Jackson)

Most of the principals shared that they carve out staff collaboration time on a regular basis because it is so vital to the success of student growth. One example:

We have basically two to three hours a month during our staff meetings to get that done. We meet two Mondays a month from

3:30 to 5:00. It's part of the culture to meet on Mondays (Jackson).

Assembling the right people is critical for a collaborative environment. Most principals stated at least once that they see themselves as public servants and act accordingly, and they expect the same spirit from their staff members. Over time, principals assemble like-minded individuals who can work together effectively. Once that happens, principals feel that they have a dream staff, dream team, and dream job.

I have a tremendous staff...culturally. If I say, 'hey, you guys look at...', I know, that they jump on board immediately. ... So I'm really, really proud of my staff and it's taken some retirements... and some who say, 'I can't take it, you move too quickly for me, I'm leaving this building.' We've had a lot of that, but because of that they, um, you are able to – it takes a while, - but you can get the staff you really want and I think we have the staff we really want. I have a tremendous SIP team (Appendix C) who leads that work, so it's not coming from me, it comes from the team. So we're problem solving and the bonus is, I don't feel like it was when I first started when it was me telling them – 'this is what we need to do.' And then being stressed, and 'oh my gosh, you are pushing us too hard,' and we are like,it was really difficult the first couple of years. But now, it's like – what do we need to do, you guys? And we all sit down and we all problem solve together and they are telling me ...no, no, I know it's going to be hard, but we're going to do this, we are going to do that. And they are suggesting book studies to do, and they are suggesting.... So it's hard – the hardest part, I don't know if you felt this way, but the first couple of years is hard getting that cohesive collaborative culture. And now that we have it, I don't think I ever want to leave because I don't want to start that all over again. (Van Buren)

For the more seasoned principals, this dream staff came to be after they had been in the job awhile and able to assemble the types of individuals that fit their goals.

“There had been a little bit of a bad culture before I came, just like, like it was okay that parents weren't happy customers. And I understand that parents sometimes get demanding and they are

unreasonable at times. But I look at it like we're public servants, and we are here to educate their kids..." (Madison)

This takes active listening and often, courageous conversations.

...But I do think I listen. I invite people into my office. Tons of people have come into my office and said, this is the first time I've been in the principal's office and they've worked here for 15 years. And so when I started, I did an open door, please come visit me over the summer [campaign]. I'd love to have a conversation. I emphasize that every chance I can. Please come talk to me. When people throw out snarky comments or send out emails to everybody, I always go and find them and say, 'look what you really wanted was to ask me that question. Come ask me that question.' And it's starting to change the way they operate. So that's good. (Washington)

I think now, going into the teaching profession, you really need to think long and hard. It is not an educational system that we grew up on where each of us was our own individual contractor. It's very different. I think it should be the way it is now: it's a profession, it's a practice, it's a craft, it's a science. But I think you're going to be asked to do things sometimes in a very different context. ...So, when (prospective) teachers come in, and they are all excited, and I ask them "why do you want to be in teaching, why do you want to be working in a school?" and I hear, "Well, I love children." I say, it's got to be more than that. I should hope that you love children. I should hope you love humans. (Taylor)

Principal Taylor continues by explaining her building's collaborative culture.

We've had a very strong school improvement team, okay. And I think I've had a really cohesive group of about 14, representative of every grade level, special education, gifted people who have been very committed to the process. We've been working very closely, because of AYP, with Rising Star, okay. Which has just been a vehicle should we say, sometimes it was nuisance. But, but you know what, it really provoked some really good conversations. It was that whole idea of developing a 'culture of candor.' And sometimes, you know, the people who have made the commitment to be at the table for school improvement, are sometimes usually really, is with your teacher leaders, okay. And so, sometimes what

we need to do is, we have to say, okay, now we need to go back, disseminate this information, also bring on our colleagues and hold each other accountable, okay. I'm hoping that we're really nurturing that environment where it's safe... to have conversations about our practices, about our philosophy, but so much of it I think is still an ongoing ... conversation. I think we can be very well intended, and so be not, not have a big focus and not have a big purpose, or each of us is doing something because it's something that I feel comfortable with, but maybe it's not what's going to really move the entire community, okay.

So, I think we have a lot of expertise, again, I think I feel I have lots of teacher leaders. They serve on committees, professional development, they go to conferences, they present, okay. They come back, they share expertise. We tend to kind of grow and generate our own. And I have instructional coaches...who help us to really deeply understand the concept. We have to make sure that everybody is also moving and then differentiate PD for them because I have people who are stellar, who can teach the courses and other who are just learning, and I am part of the learning too. (Taylor)

One principal sees the combination of these ideas as necessary. Principal Tyler summed it up, "I just feel that my job should be to clear the way to allow good teachers to do their job. And it's getting harder and harder, (Tyler)." He says that he constantly has his ear to the ground and an open door policy that allows him to listen to what teachers and staff are saying. He allows them to try things, even if they might fail. He encourages his staff to establish professional learning communities (PLC) on those topics that will help them teach more effectively. He told me that these PLCs help teacher morale because when teams of teachers bring usable data to solve problems with a child or group of children, they get and give one another support and advice. He says this "all circles back to allowing good teachers to do what they need to do for kids" (Tyler).

Power sharing was another theme that emerged from the data and there was variation

about how principals shared power with teachers. Most principals have reciprocal dialogue with teachers through a variety of school advisory teams. All principals stated that they want teachers to weigh in on decisions and to voice their opinions, and share the workload. Only a handful of them shared that the leadership team actually makes decisions that impact more than extra curricular activities or social events. The majority of principals told me that teacher input is advisory in nature because, in the end, the building and the students are their responsibility. One exception surfaced and principals indicated that it has been a more recent phenomenon: the majority of schools have turned over professional development decision-making to teacher teams. Two principals shared how this looks in their building, which was indicative of what other principals shared.

They make 100% of the decision about professional development. It's been a teensy bit of a struggle, because I feel like they look to me to ask if it's okay. And, I guess that's appropriate, but... Well, we have early dismissal once a month. The district puts out the calendar at the beginning of the year and says, October and March we're coming together as a district for professional development, but the rest of the time you are directing. And then we have meetings every other week that we direct probably 80% of. You know you have to do diversity training, insurance, etc. But the rest we can direct. Each school was allowed to take on whatever they wanted and it's so interesting to hear what the different schools have done. I'm really proud of what we've done. ... They directed all of the PD. It's been great. And, I don't have to think it all up. They are driving it entirely. And, I am so thrilled that we as a school have a focus and have had direction. (Adams)

We meet once a month to discuss PD. We discuss what we need, how we're going to make it happen, how it's going to make sense to people. And, you know, we have basically two to three hours a month during our staff meetings to get that done because we meet two Mondays a month as a building. We meet from 3:30 to 5, two Mondays a month. Then another Monday is for the district PD. (Jackson)

Three principals do work to flatten the hierarchy of school decision-making. One believes in giving teachers gradually more and more leadership responsibility, even though it will ultimately cause her more work.

And it's about giving opportunities, and you can see people who have a passion, and [you] let them have the opportunities to grow it and run with it. I think when we're all a part of the decision-making, its buy-in. And so I'm hoping that I give people opportunities to find things that are – that they have, that are unique, and have an opportunity to learn it, grow it, be it. I've had people who have moved into leadership roles, which then, I need to find a teacher to replace [them]. So what – but your team was awesome: and now, how do we grow another awesome team, when maybe we lose a key member? And at the same time, I might say, 'oh I'm so glad you went into that, because I need you there, but [at the same time] I need you here too. I'm not going to hold you back. You know here or elsewhere, you are a great teacher, but now you need to jazz it up a little, so now you're going to try something that's going to challenge you and push you.' I've got some people who are like, 'oh my God, I don't know why I'm doing this role, really.' But I'm thinking, 'you're going to enjoy it, once you are gone, you will love it. It's a new journey for you.' And, some people need a little more encouragement. (Taylor)

For some principals giving teachers more decision-making is a shift in school thinking.

One example of how a principal persists in power sharing came from the high school principal.

The guy before me was a very top down person and believed in ...he took away the power of many of the midlevel administrators to make decisions and would expect them to come to him with everything. So, I've been undoing that for the last few years, trying to get people back in to the mode of shared decision-making. People appreciate it, but they still show up in my office and ask me a question for just about everything. So, sometimes I just won't tell them. They ask, 'What do you think we should do?' And I ask, 'what do you think we should do?' They say, 'I think we should do it.' And I say, 'Ok, then, I think you should go do that. I think it's a good idea to try that.' When they ask 'what if it doesn't work?' I say, 'then you'll need to go come up with something else.' It's been interesting because it been a culture change. (Washington)

One other major exception was an elementary principal who took the bold step of forgoing an assistant principal and used that money to give stipends to four teacher leaders who share the AP type responsibilities. She reported that her teachers make most of the decisions for the building and she serves as advisor and coach.

So, I have an amazing group. I no longer have an assistant principal. We used the money to make classroom sizes smaller just because of our student needs and to hire another counselor because we had a larger case management load and she just couldn't keep up as we do so much crisis counseling. So, we are actually a teacher-led school I have four deans that all take on different areas and I put stipends on their salaries, so they're basically making as much as an assistant principal would without having that title. And they rotate nights. They're all here now. [It is summer and teachers are not on contract] You'll see them working: scheduling, purchasing, grant writing, attendance, and stuff. I have a really good team. They make all the curriculum decisions, they do a better job than I would because they are the experts. I don't really make a lot of decisions except with individual teachers through collaborative conversations and coaching. (Jefferson)

Teacher / principal collaboration is not without some controversy. First, the path to membership on the teacher advisory teams can lead to tension. In this study, as in most elementary schools, it is typical to have naturally occurring grade-level teams, and frequently one of those teachers serves on the school's leadership team. Similarly, teachers also advise principals when they serve on curriculum or content area committees. The high school has an elaborate system of formal department chairs, discipline/subject area experts, and a newly established cross-department representative team. For many schools the tension comes in because some committees are strictly voluntary, while some other committees allow members to be paid through a contract controlled union sanctioned stipend. Three principals shared their

mixed feelings about the commitment and sincerity of teachers who are paid to be on advisory teams. Principal Madison summed it up.

I feel like I have a lot of teacher leadership. My steering committee to me is the natural teacher leaders in the building. But I also have a school improvement team, but they are all getting paid stipends to be on it. So, they just get representatives from the grade level, someone who is going to get their \$400 stipend, you know. I don't have a lot of respect for that. Whereas my steering committee is made of people who are dedicated, and who really want to be on it. (Madison)

Teacher voice is also important at the district level. In every interview, principals expressed considerable concern with having a 'place at the table' on district-wide committees. They stated that it was vitally important that they serve or that they have some of their staff participate on district-wide committees, especially curriculum committees and other topics that are currently controversial. They see their participation as giving the school a huge advantage for two reasons. First, they want to be in-the-know about what is coming down from the district so that they can be prepared. Secondly, their participation helps them shape the conversation at the district level about current high profile, high priority issues. At the very least their participation helps them to be ahead of the curve at implementation time and goes a long way towards being able to manage scarce resources. Principal Jackson described her reasoning.

So my goal is to figure out what the district plan is and make sure that I understand it so that whatever we're doing is supporting that, and aligning, so that it doesn't feel like a bunch of different stuff. So that's what I think my job is, to make sure I really understand what's going to happen at the district level, and how that might look. And then, try to layer in what we think because sometimes that is exactly what we need, and sometimes it's not. We might be a little bit further ahead or a little bit further behind. And then I bring in all of that [to the staff] and say 'Okay, here's what's happening at the district level. This is what they're going to be asking us to work on and get better at this year. Let's be honest,

where are we pretty good with that? And, where are we just ‘eh’ that we could maybe, pick the stuff that is really going to make sense to us? And, does it really fit with what’s happening here at Sherwood? ‘This is what I think from my observations, what do you guys think? What are your observations? When you guys are sitting with your teams and talking about stuff, and I’m not there what do you think you guys really need?’ (Jackson)

Principal Van Buren explained it further.

And so we’re trying to work through it [PARCC] but we are really struggling with it. So our philosophy has always been to get people on the district level committees so that we know what is happening and get the most valuable training. So myself and a fifth grade teacher are on the common core curriculum language arts writing committee. One of my third grade teachers was on the math pilot committee and next year, my second grade teacher is going to pilot the actual material. The pilot committee kind of looked at different materials, looked at the common core to see what matched and we are piloting EngageNY in all the materials. So my second grade teachers, one is on the committee and another one is just going to pilot it all that that there are two piloting the materials.

So what we’re trying to do is to always be the first ones. The disadvantage is then that you make them stay. The advantage is that you feel like you have a head’s up on understanding what’s happening. We work well with other schools. We watch videos, we have done book studies, we are doing ‘Datawise as a SIP tem. We reach out to people to help us know what we are doing. And we’re just diving in there trying to do the best we can. It’s not perfect. My staff is usually the first, [in the district] and they are ... (Van Buren)

One finding that popped up in nearly every interview was a concern principals raised about why teachers squandered opportunities they were given to make decisions for the school.

Principal Washington likely voiced it most succinctly.

“After a year of this job some said ...what is the thing that surprised you the most? And I said, the thing that surprises me the most is how willing people are to relinquish their ability to make

decisions. 'Just tell me what do.' I wasn't that way as a teacher, I mean I would, I would always. I wanted to be like this....(expanded arms out side). (Washington)

District expectations, teacher contracts, and past practices sometimes dictate the types of decision that teachers can have. But principals are surprised that even when given a voice contractually, teachers frequently shun the responsibility and ask the principal to make the decisions. Principal Harrison may have hinted why.

What we experienced this year was a lot of comments like 'what this principal needs to do is to make more decisions...he spends too much time talking and trying to get everybody's input.' So my message to the staff afterwards was, 'Whoa! Timeout! By contract, your contract, I am obligated to provide you with this opportunity. I am. So remember, in August, when we have the shared decision making, make sure that you know the things that you want me to decide upon.' Well, then we get together in a committee and they are like, 'Well, I do not want to make a decision about whether my colleague gets that stipend, or extra duty pay.' And I ask why? And they say, 'Well that is their livelihood.' (Harrison)

Student Voice

Principals in this study stated that developing student voice is important. However, I found that in the ten elementary schools, only three have student councils where students have a formal opportunity to participate in school decision-making. One additional school has recently replaced their student council with a club for older students that is run by the local Kiwanis Club. That club is set up for students to perform service projects. One of the three student councils only serves to run school-based social events. A second school has started a new student council but it does sit down regularly with the principal.

We have a student council, and they love to do it. Sometimes they do different events, sometimes they organize a little fund raising. Whether it's doing something for working on bullying, on peer mediation, we want them to become, to have that voice of advocacy for themselves. It's still a little student council. I think they're just trying to figure out what it is to be a rep and have a voice for your classroom. But they do have elections and we haven't gotten into the really meaty kinds of things. Teachers run it. We do have meetings, they do their fund raising when we have an after-school event. Maybe they are trying to raise some funds to put some flowers around the school. They've donated a park bench. (Taylor)

The most advanced student council is a student group that is nurtured by the principal and attempts to solve student problems.

So I also have a student leadership group. Fourth and fifth grade students, the homeroom teacher gives me a boy and a girl from each of those, and there are four classrooms at the fourth and four at the fifth. And we meet once a month and we talk about issues that they have or that the school is having. So last year we had kind of a lot of messing around going on the bathroom, of course. Oh my gosh! Toilet paper fights and whatever. And so they said, 'this is gross. If you go into the bathroom, there is urine on the seat or on the wall or whatever. And so we have to change that and what should we do?' And then they said, 'Well, we are going to – let's make posters and let's put them up in the bathrooms and then let's – we will be like the kind of look-outs for our classrooms, so we can know that they are screwing around going on in there and we have to tell our teacher and we will take that upon us since we are the leaders.' And I said, 'that's a great idea.' And it worked, it absolutely did. Positive peer pressure: that's the best kind of positive pressure there is. And then they came to me with a playground issue, 'what do we do when kids want to change the rules to a game?' And so we kind of worked through some dialog, and I read a book called Verbal Judo, by Doc Thomason, a great little book. And it's all about – he was a high school English teacher that turned to being a police officer. And it was all about how you kind of deflect and diffuse situations. So I even used some of that verbiage with those students. I'm like, 'so how do you do that? Somebody is saying that you are not playing fair and you think you are and how do you diffuse the situation?' So we did some of that too. (Polk)

Parent Voice

Parents are obviously major constituents of the school environment. Principals discussed strong ties that they have with parents and they all valued the relationships that they have with parents. However, though that might be true, there are few opportunities for parent voice, other than through Parent-Teacher Organizations. Parent-Teacher organizations are frequently responsible for fundraising and they spend significant dollars on purchases for the school: field trips, technology equipment, student assemblies, etc. As an aside, and for clarification, there are a variety of names used for these volunteer parent-teacher groups. They include PTA, PTG, PTO, and PTC and their name results from the group's specific charter and bylaws. The national organization known as PTA, has very stringent guidelines for any Parent-Teacher association and schools must be very clear about the name used for such organizations.

Principals typically manage the school's PTO/PTA/PTG relationships to make sure that the parents communicate clearly to the school and to other parents and to insure that any events or money spent support school's mission, vision, values, and goals. It is vital that money or purchases are fairly distributed throughout the grades and students. Those conversations have led to some interesting opportunities for shared decision-making. One school PTA does exercise its voice as noticed in this principal's comments.

We had a fierce year shared with the PTA president who didn't want to invest in translations [of PTA handouts] for Spanish speaking parents, and [he] was just like.... 'Why, they don't read it anyways?' And the community kind of pummeled him, which frankly he deserved. I had to stand by but be neutral, but it was, you know... We have some non-negotiables that he and I had some pretty serious conflict over. Everything that goes out from the school will go out in both languages, you know, it just will. And if you are the PTA, you're sending out stuff because you're

our PTA, and it will go out in both languages, it just will. He tried to say that it will mean that communication [will be] less than we'd like it to be because we're not sending out 50 different versions of the reminders. But the rest of the community said, 'no, no, no, no... we're not going to exclude a group, any group. You will not exclude Latino parents by not publishing the newsletter [in Spanish].' I was so proud of the community. (Adams)

Another school principal celebrates her parent community as her PTC.

We have an incredibly supporting PTC as we call it. It's like our PTA. I mean they're fabulous. They raise a lot of money. I don't know how they do it every year, but they do. They are only about 20 people who do most of the work, which is fine. But they really have been saying, "We need to figure out why more people aren't participating, and it's not just the economy. It's some of it, but it's not all of it." They say, 'People don't really know what we do and they don't know why and because they don't see it. Their kids see what we give. The school sees what we give. We know, because we come to these meetings and we made the decisions.' So I think that they're working on a plan now. But they also do teacher grants, they are working to add playground equipment. Last year they got some iPads and iPad carts because we didn't have any other funding sources. They treat us well and they are a nice group of people. (Jackson)

Principals in this study emphasized that collaboration is something they value and promote. They offered evidence of collaborative actions through stories of sharing power, expanding leadership opportunities, and giving constituents a voice. In particular, they celebrated their staff for taking on more shared decision-making and for the power realized when collaborative effort was focused on implementing better instruction.

Leadership and Learning: Controlling What Can be Controlled

"There's no crying in baseball.... There's no crying at Sherwood School" (Jackson).

It is an understatement to say that there is a great deal of frustration in schools today.

Principals are in a precarious position. Often wrestling with competing priorities, most of the principals shared that school personnel are under a great deal of stress. The principals interviewed talked about continually balancing the everyday stresses faced by teachers and students against their primary responsibility for teaching and learning through educational best practices. Principals see that part of their role is to ease the tensions of outside pressures in order help the staff to remain upbeat and focused on meeting the real and everyday need of their students. They also are driven by a personal mission to do right by each and every child. From the principal's vantage point, coupled often with unique relationships with individual students, principals know of specific needs that may or may not be met by the school. But, decisions must be based upon what they think will be good for all children and the see themselves as public servants who are duty bound to uphold and/or enforce current policy. All principals reflected upon this tension during the interviews. Principal Taylor articulated it here.

Ok, so we are still in that dilemma. I mean, there's a lot of politics in education, there's a lot of politics and we know it. We are caught, and the children are caught right now.... I'm talking about a 7 or 8 year old, who is dealing with separation, or sickness, or immigration issues. So if they come to school, we need to smile and celebrate that they are here. I think we are thrown in with a lot of current politics, and there is a lot going on in educational reform. We're still trying to figure out assessments, and accountability, and teacher evaluations, and administrator evaluations. How do you hold everybody accountable? Well, you know, we're sometimes, like, my goodness, you're going to hold me accountable the same as if I was in a school where children already come in at grade level? And what of a new student who comes in with special education needs, with an IEP (Appendix C)? If they were on grade level, would we even be considering an IEP? Now, you're saying I need to have all children grow at a comparable rate with peers, typically developing peers. Then, how do we do right by every single child? Who sets the standards? Who is going to set the measure? How are we going to make this an assessment that is appropriate for a student with an IEP, for a student who is gifted, for a student who is a typically developing

one, who is a second language learner? It's complicated. And you can see the stress, you can feel the stress in the building, you can see the stress on teachers and administrators? How do we move everyone [forward]? (Taylor)

And Harrison goes on...

Well, and we both know this, it's a game. We do not control the rules, we just play by them. And I have got a whole bunch of second graders that are leaving their transitional bilingual education class, reading above the second grade level in Spanish, and what do we do? We plop them down in an English-only classroom and then all of a sudden, what... they are three years behind? Well you know what, how well do you read Spanish? I mean, we know intellectually that it is just ridiculous. We take all comers, and our staff is very, very, very protective of our kids. You know, on one hand we say that the population has changed and really that is not-so-subtle talk for 'we have way more non-English speaking students and poor kids that we have ever had before.' But our people get mad when others are critical of our school. Teachers are very stressed...and they are frustrated that kids are 'not learning' [according to test scores]. (Harrison)

Consensus among the principals was that school personnel are working against many obstacles that are outside the control of schools, but they persist in their mission. Mr. Tyler offered an explanation.

We just have to keep [going] you know, we have got to be fearless, we have to be intentional, and we have to just keep ticking away at it, we've got to keep at it. And you know what, we may never get there. There is a lot of factors against us and that has to do with money. (Tyler)

As Principal Harrison stated above, they don't get to make the rules, but they do have to play by them. And so they carefully assess the challenges to meeting the human needs and the school's goals, reconciled against the mandates of the state or federal government, and squared

with educational policy and best practices. All of the elementary principals expressed that this is difficult, but all emphatically maintained that they are not making excuses: rather they are focused on doing things that they think can help their students, things that are within their control. Principal Polk described her “no excuses” philosophy:

We spend less time talking about the things we are not in control of. You know, so I can't control if they're reading at home. That's out of our hands. So those kinds of factors that we can, we do...we can control every minute that they are here. 'So how are we being most efficient with our time?' I really challenge the staff, 'I need you to look at every minute of your day.' So if that bathroom break is really taking 25 minutes, I say that has to be shortened. We need to make it fun and be purposeful at the same time, (Polk).

One of the major themes that popped up over and over again was that principals do not want to be thought of as making excuses for any failings of their school. Perhaps it is a response to what they've heard bandied about, outside the schools, that educators will try to blame anyone and everything but themselves. But, they very pointedly expressed that they will not, nor will they tolerate it from any teachers, lay the blame for sub-standard performance on that which they can not control: students, parents, poverty, race, government policy. The findings showed universal agreement that these principals direct school efforts to things that they can control. Among study participants, three sub-themes rose to the top of the pile of things that schools principals have some control over: implementing accountability mandates with fidelity, implementing best practices of teaching and learning, and educating themselves.

Implementing Accountability Mandates

All of the principals discussed ways that they work to meet the mandates of CCSS (Common Core State Standards), PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College

and Careers), and the state's Teacher Evaluation measures referred to in Illinois as PERA (Performance Evaluation Reform Act) (Appendix C). Each principal indicated that they are doing all that they can to comply with current accountability measures.

Some principals see CCSS to be a blueprint for teachers to use so that all students will be taught through a more rigorous curriculum and with instruction that values text complexity, deeper thinking, and using evidence. Some expressed that past curriculum and instruction wasn't as purposeful in that goal. All work hard to insure that curriculum and instruction in their buildings is realigned to promote those intellectual abilities that foster deeper and more complex thinking. Most of the staff development efforts that were described by the principals related to implementation of CCSS. All of the principals shared the opinion that the Common Core State Standards are a positive advancement in education positing that CCSS will help schools to more uniformly instruct students and will go a long way towards developing stronger thinking skills. One principal pointed out that CCSS might insure that students across the nation will be expected to learn to do the same grade level materials, making it easier when children move from school district to school district (Polk, 2014). Two principals described a process echoed by all of the principals.

I am always asking my teachers to go to the next level. We just did a CCSS project. This year we took two of the ELA strands (English Language Arts) (Appendix C) at every grade level and we made these 'I Can' statements and I had the teachers posting them. And, I had them post them while they were teaching. I will say that the project wasn't perfect and it needs to be revised some because it is very cumbersome having all of these 'I Cans' and you can hit six 'I Cans' all in one lesson. And so we are still wrapping our heads around this. (Madison)

So each school was allowed to take on whatever they wanted and it's so interesting to hear what the different schools have done.

I'm most proud of what we've done. So many schools went to their teams and said, 'what do you want to work on, and first grade wants something different from second grade and something different from third grade. We decided to work on Common Core. And so we started with language arts because most of the PD team was reading specialists. We just started unpacking [the standards] and giving teachers PD. Then at the end of this year, at the end of year two, we started saying to them, 'okay, come and show us what you're doing. Present to your colleagues a lesson that utilizes close reading [strategy] and talk about why you selected that passage and/or why that part of that passage and what do the kids do and how did you get into some depth. Then we started with questioning, how do you ask them more challenging questions? How do you get away from the I have a [right there] connection?' And then we looked at text complexity at length. We bought some materials and then this year we said to teams, 'okay so all the work that we did last year on integration of the Common Core, this year we want to see you do that in social studies...' (Adams).

A second area of outside accountability focus is adhering to PARCC testing. The principals are under significant stress to ready their students to take PARCC tests. Much of their focus is readying the building and the students for these computer-based tests. Many of the schools are not ready with either enough technology or with teaching students the technology skills needed to navigate the tests. Principal Van Buren explains:

Now PARCC is right around the corner and we are supposed to be taking this test on a computer, but the kids don't even know how to keyboard, and we did the pilot test for PARCC for the third grade and they could not keyboard. And I can tell you, at third grade it literally took, well we could only do one grade per day because it took so much time to do it and set it up. I don't think we could do two tests in a day. We only have one lab. We have reached out to our parent group and said, 'okay, as much as we like having assemblies and as much as we like having the \$100 per classroom per teacher for whatever, ... we want you to instead buy us technology.' So last year they spent \$11,000 and bought us 15 laptops on a cart and this year, by November, they should have enough for a second laptop cart. Supposedly, the district is giving us a couple more, but that will give us enough laptops that we can have at least one for say K-1 together, 2nd-3rd, 4th-5th together to

share the laptops. I don't know how we are going to get it done. I am hoping the first year we are going to end up having a paper and pencil test, because we do not have enough technology. (Van Buren in a school of nearly 550 students)

Several of the principals in this study alluded to how achieving the American dream is tied to going to college. Using their responses, I interpreted their use of American Dream to mean that student would be able to pursue a chosen career and adequately provide for themselves and their family. Every principal stated that their school curriculum and instruction has been aligned to adhere to current conceptions of college readiness goals. Mr. Washington, the only high school principal, noted that it is expected that high schools prepare every student for college, but spoke about his school's challenge to help manage the expectations of college selection so that the college experience will be successful.

So for our community, it means lots of AP, lots of college level courses, lots of opportunities, lots of clubs, every sport in the world. Their expectation is that my kid can come here and be a leader on something, be an athlete in something, be in AP, you know. So we have to have all these comprehensive programs that will ultimately get them into a great school, whatever a great school means to them. Every person is different in what that definition means. But that's why they're here. It's for us to get them to their next place, (Washington).

Elementary principals are also highly aware of the current mandate to prepare students for college. In fact two elementary schools use specific outside programs that promote college awareness and acclimates students to what it might look like when they go to college, or what it requires of them as so many of these principals have what might be termed first generation college students. One elementary principal mentioned that they had such a program but are backing away from it because there is already so much college readiness built into the CCSS

(Appendix C) process. Mrs. Madison explained what a visitor will see when the walk through the hallways at her school.

When you start going around the school, one of the things you visually see right away, every hall, every homeroom teacher has a bulletin board outside of their room that has college banners and information. ...”And you know, its just the idea of doing a lot of goal setting and teaching our kids about college, to understand what college is. And on Mondays, its college Monday and our music teacher wrote a song and they come in Mondays and we do our college Monday song, the kids wear their college t-shirts and we have our college vocabulary, (Madison).

Principals are spending a great deal of time paying attention to teacher evaluations. The state of Illinois has passed PERA, a law designed to provide stricter oversight and greater accountability for teacher evaluations, summative ratings, and tenure. In practice, teachers and principals are compelled to provide more evidence, including student test score data, to support claims of proficiency in each domain of the instructional frameworks. Principal Harrison expressed what he believes is the reason for the renewed emphasis on principals attending to teachers.

You know, you could call up any 10 principals on any given day and I think they are all experiencing the exact same things. There is too much pressure [on teachers]. We do not get to teach anymore. The job of has changed. You know, I started in 1999 and I could basically do whatever I wanted. My first year evaluation was all excellents. And that is where the fault has been. I mean 90% of teacher evaluations were proficient or excellent in the United States of America. Well, if that is the case then why aren't 90% of our students performing at acceptable levels of achievement. And I think that ultimately falls upon our shoulders because we did not have the guts to be authentic in our assessment of teachers. I think the Danielson framework helps us to get that fit in that direction.

I think the most difficult decision I had to make was the first time I reached the point where I knew I needed to let a teacher go. Um, that was, that is the tough one. You know, because you know, like,

good people do not necessarily translate into good teachers, but you also know that responsibility is to do what's best for kids. And so, arriving at that decision, and you know the delivery sucks, and you do not sleep, and that is what makes you human, but, it is really hard because you do not want...you want them so badly to succeed, and you view it as a reflection on your leadership, and you view it as a reflection of their sense of self-worth. And that first time I had to do that was probably the most difficult, but at the same time, it did not really get any easier, which I guess is good. (Harrison)

Regardless of rationale, PERA has brought change to teacher evaluation for principals and teachers in workload, in the types of conversations that principals have with their teachers and added a new level of anxiety. Principal Tyler...

This is huge, the stress of scoring their evaluations, it is huge. And I mean, it has not even come to full fruition with PERA yet. I met with some of my staff. I showed them the MAP scores and we highlighted the kind of growth that we're having. But what is interesting is that I had many teachers that already will highlight [growth] and adjust, and then take another look at kind of what that MAP growth looks like. And then you have others that you need to have conversations with: 'but what really was happening here? Tell me about this, what does this show you?' I think that this conversation is going to be important. And simultaneously, on the other side, it will be out of our hands because this will be a union thing and it will be a pain in the butt because they will have to look for ways on how to make this fair for everyone, core teachers and... [all the others]. I will be part of the community and for me the focus is effective teaching. I look at the Frameworks through Teachscape training and think about how they are about good teaching, not about evaluation. What I like about the frameworks for teaching, and I think we need more focus on this, are the critical attributes, and having those critical attributes, that is what you can focus on. It was easier to earn an excellent [before PERA], and I think that it was that those critical attributes were watered down. And now, some portion of the teachers may have a 'needs improvement', simply because of what you observed. And that is going to be, those will be, hard conversations. But I think it is just the idea that we administrators are being held accountable to have that evidence. I started typing my notes and I am so not happy because I want to capture everything, like I literally think

that I need to capture everything. But you really need to focus more and look at what the teacher does and how the kids react, and just do that. And then have those reflective conversations, you have to have focused learning conversations. Then you may be doing coaching on the one end, or calibrating on the other end, or you may literally be saying [to the teacher] this is a non-negotiable thing that needs to be fixed immediately, and it is very directive of you. I think that having those focused conversations will help, even when giving advice, like ‘given what you see in the notes, what would you do differently? What would you continue to do? And then, here are three things that I want you to consider.’
(Tyler)

Some principals were open about their feelings regarding a need to shield their teachers from outside criticism.

It’s my job to shelter the school from things that happen outside, from people who don’t know what we do, or what our purpose is. And I do it a lot. I did it yesterday. Some of my leaders might be aware but, not everybody is aware of the kind of situations that I’m having about evaluations, my teacher evaluations, and that I have been brought up in front of my peers due to the fact that I had some low math scores in winter for my kiddos, and they wanted to know why my teacher was ‘distinguished’. And that’s the same teacher who hit 96% last year, 96%, which I believe was the highest in all of the network. Sorry, but to be brought up in front of your colleagues and have to explain yourself is something that I don’t, ...well, that’s not how I run things. And so it’s just...okay, I’ll explain myself. So you find yourself constantly being questioned. ... I sometimes struggle with this whole accountability piece when really we need to be responsible. And, you know, as Nel Noddings says, responsibility is much deeper [than accountability] and there are a lot of things, conversations that I have network-wise, where I don’t share with them all that’s gone on [with my staff] and I know that it’s important that I keep things that way because I think that they’ll get discouraged. (Jefferson)

Implementing Teaching and Instructional Consistency

Principals are very focused on implementing best practices for teaching and learning. They are expected to be instructional leaders, and as might be expected, this is the area where

principals exert the most energy. It is not the focus of this paper to detail the instructional oversight of principals, but it is important to note some common themes that emerged from the data. Principals were heavily engaged in three areas: coaching teachers in the implementation of best practices as currently interpreted by popular educational gurus, implementing Response to Intervention (RtI), and teaching students to behave using Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

Implementing ‘Best Practices’ – Teachers

Most of the principals shared that in their capacity as an instructional leader they turn to industry experts and research-based programs that have so-called proven track records of success for improved academic performance. Many referenced the work of specific well-known industry practitioners whose names have become synonymous with the mainstream education reform agenda. The use of these strategies, programs, and methods has crept into schools as ‘best practice’ and in some cases, been elevated to a statewide adoption. Principals explained that it has now become an expectation that teachers adhere to these programs purposefully and with fidelity in order for students to show improved performance on state tests. They also shared that the implementation of these de facto programs requires a lot of professional development time and coaching from either the principal or subject-matter experts, and frequently adds to the stress to school personnel. Principal Harrison shared the following:

Are you familiar with Anthony Mohammed’s work? He works with transforming school culture. He designates four types of people: believers, fundamentalists, ‘tweeners, and survivors. And so, I’ve really focused on the believers and the fundamentalists. The believer will do anything at all because they believe in what is right for kids. And then there is Anthony Mohammed’s work on fundamentalists. The first question that the fundamentalist asks is, ‘how does that impact me as a teacher?’ And so, I mean there is

quite a dichotomy, and both can be very good teachers and both can also be not. ... So, it is a mindset. A lot of people do what they do because they believe it is good for kids, but it just isn't good for kids. But in their heart-of-hearts they think that they are doing the right thing. And so, we are sorting it out. And right now we are accessing the work of Doug Fischer and Nancy Fry who have done a lot of work with the literacy piece and they are a great resource on building a culture of high achievements. We're using the one [the book] that talks about a focus on academic press. Sometimes you have to take a step back and look at the roots of the tree, you know, because the roots of the tree are what hold everything there. So that sort of metaphor is what we are using to build. (Harrison)

Principal Monroe articulated some of the work involved in adopting an industry leader's best practice solution.

I use Lucy Calkins, the Writers' Workshop. She just revised and made an aligned version of units of study to the new common core. So, I brought in a sample of that and I brought in a sample of another writing program and the SIP committee got to look at it. I had two teachers kind of playing with it in their classrooms. 'You now, what do you think?' At the end of the day though, I knew who I was going to go with. If you're going to have a writing program, I'm going to go with Lucy Calkins. She's the writing guru, so I'm going to go with the guru, even though it's going to stretch their thinking more. But, I know I want to go towards a workshop model: whether that's writing, reading, math, whatever. So, I know I wanted to adopt that. But, again, as a principal you have to be careful. I mean, I want to give you some input and some decision-making, but at the end of the day, I also know where I want to go. (Monroe)

Principal Taylor expressed the challenges with new hires when they come in without the industry expert training.

I'm finding it difficult in hiring new teachers because I expect them to come in with everything that we've already done. And, um, I keep thinking, oh, but my teachers know this... I need you to know... Singapore math. You need to know Lucy for reading and writing. And I'm thinking, how are we going to get them there?

We've been doing that for now 'x' amount of years. My new teachers are just ...where they are beginning to get a feel for the profession. But its like, we don't have time, we need to get here now. (Taylor)

Responding to Academic Interventions – Students

Principals are highly aware of their students' achievement as measured by test scores. Achievement test scores are a big concern especially as half of the schools from this study reported state testing results that are poorer than the state's average. Several of the schools had been considered as doing well, but this year's scores dropped dramatically because of the state's new calibration scheme. One school was even denied National Blue Ribbon status because of this drop. When the principals researched the winners and losers, she found that none of the winners have any students considered in the low SES subgroup, save one magnet school. So incensed by this, she wrote to the President of the United States, but received a form-letter response reiterating that they know the system is broken.

Each principal shared that they are uncomfortable with the overemphasis on testing, "because we are testing a crazy amount," (Adams). However, they are all also under intense pressure to raise student achievement for all students, and most named RtI as part of their arsenal of programs. RtI (Response to Intervention) is an educational framework that is used by schools nation-wide to give children who struggle, or who are not meeting grade-level benchmarks, intensive academic or behavioral interventions. These interventions typically are in the form of concentrated assistance delivered by reading, math, or behavior specialists and are designed to help students catch up to grade level benchmarks. Students are identified though data (test scores) and are given weekly probes to see that they are making progress. The principals talked about how much this program either is or needs to be in place at their schools. One principal

sees RtI as so important that she left her first principal position because her district was slow to implement it. She moved to her current district because it was rolling it out RtI (Madison).

Principal Washington explained what RtI looks like at the high school level.

So we've started with the teachers who do a great job for the most part but still some kids can still slide through the cracks and now we're beginning to build more concrete RTI structures for kids during mandatory tutoring during lunch periods. Or in very specific learning subjects we have learning centers, two learning centers one on each side of the building, that are housed by math science and social studies teachers all the time that kids can go in there and get help. And that's been good. It's been a good move towards helping those kids and we've been getting better at identifying a lot of folks on learning targets and not giving kids points. So what we were using in the past was like an F, 'okay, a kid got an F. We should go help him.' To now: 'How about we find out why is the kid getting an F?' 'Well, he won't do any of his stuff.' 'Okay, well what does that mean? Why won't he do any of his stuff?' So we've been trying hard to change from that to: 'What are the five learning topics this kid can't do? Let's get him down there so he can struggle with them.' (Washington)

Behavior Management – Students

Most of the principals mentioned that preparing citizens included teaching responsible behavior. And for most, the fabric of their daily lives includes the instruction that elementary schools students receive: explicitly teaching them how to be responsible, respectful, and safe young people. This may sound obvious, as one would expect that each classroom teacher lay out acceptable school behavior for students at the beginning of each year. Regardless, schools have found a school-wide approach to teaching behaviors.

Surprising to me, was in finding that every elementary school had implemented a student behavior intervention system. In fact most, if not all, of the elementary principals proudly talked about having implemented a nationally recognized program called PBIS, (Positive Behavior

Intervention System). If they haven't implemented PBIS, they have something similar and took pains to explain that it was like PBIS. PBIS explicitly instructs students on how to behave appropriately in every school setting, and specifically how to be safe, respectful and responsible learners. Using a school-wide system, with an emphasis on the positive, students practice 'expectations'. The object for school personnel is to teach the behaviors that are expected of students and not to assume that students come to school already knowing how to do so. For example, schools may teach students to walk on the right side of the hallways, using quiet voices and walking feet.

Most of the principals I spoke with were very proud of their staff's efforts to successfully implement this program. Most indicated that it has reduced office discipline referrals as the program matures in their building. Most mentioned that the school community, including parents, uses the same PBIS vocabulary. Full implementation includes having parents and community members on board. One school has won recognition at the highest-level for their program fidelity.

We are a PBIS school and this year we found out that we won the highest level of PBIS, which is platinum, and we were one of 22 schools in the state, so that is exciting for us. PBIS is virtually embedded into everything we do. The students use the language, the teachers use the language, parents use the language, and really, it's there in everything we do. Everybody knows PBIS. Everybody is comfortable with it. It's a very positive culture in our school. You will hear the same verbiage, the same language through our whole day. Our lunch staff is very well trained. We have continual training so they understand what the expectations are, they understand what is expected in the playground. They understand what language to use, so that everyone knows the routine. Even our substitutes, when they come, they know about PBIS. They like being here, and they are aware of everything that we do. And the kids will correct them if they don't – the kids will tell them, 'no, no, we do it this way.' This is how we do it because it's just really part of life. (Madison)

A few principals suggested that doing things for others teaches citizenship.

So, I think, ... you know, we do have our kids who look after each other, which we remind kids and try and use the same language. Make sure you're saying kind words, make sure you're being a friend. Go out of your way to do something for someone else. ... We have partnered with a [suburban mega-church], okay. We have a teacher who is a member of the church and she does her lot with volunteers from the church. They come out here and they mentor children, okay, it's a partnership, it's one adult, one special child. They sometimes stay with that same family or the student for two or three years, okay, so it's a commitment to not just be a mentor whether in first grade, but to travel with them in second grade, okay. And so, they said, you know what, we're working on a service project, at the [mega-church]. We're going to fill a million little seed packets, and then send them off to Central and South America and Africa, so their families could then – would have been able to grow vegetables, beans, whatever.

So, we need all of these packed. And they've had lots of their groups coming in and doing that. And so, with my teacher, she said, you know what, with the exception of kindergarten, we can get all of our first through fifth graders on a school bus, get them over there, for about two, three hours, and we can pack our seeds. We packed off, I don't know how many thousands of little packets. But can you imagine 350 kids, and they were highly organized, I mean, they had a huge gym and it was all set and one group was stamping their seeds, just looking it, somebody else was – they were just diligently filling in a scoop of little things and packing up boxes. And we did that.

The children felt very... it was purposeful activity. Like I said, we are very grateful and blessed to have lots of organizations who donate, but for us to give our time, I mean, kids came back and said, wow, you know, they just felt connected and they felt that they made a difference, in they're own little way. So, it's just service, okay, being of service to someone else. Our kids need to do that as well, not just be the recipients, but in some small way, be helping in the community. So, I think that was a neat experience for my kids to feel that they had purpose, you know, that they could do something in their own little way. (Taylor)

Keeping Up with Their Own Professional Learning

The principals from this study work long hours at school and are nearly always only a phone call or text away from the job. They exemplify the image of a life-long learner. Each of these principals continues to educate themselves, both along with their staff and for personal self-improvement. Most explained that they strive to learn whatever is needed to improve schooling for their students. Some stated that they needed to be ahead of the district learning curve. Some explained that they must know thoroughly that which their teaching staff is expected to know. They continually read about best practices, attend workshops, conferences, and webinars and take classes. Some teach formally at the local universities, and some mentor new principals. And of course, all fulfill mandated state trainings.

I am looking into getting my doctorate. I am actually going to be a student-at-large at NIU starting at the end of this month. I'm really more interested in curriculum and instruction, writing curriculum and that kind of thing, more than I am in the supervision part of it. But I do participate in a lot of district level committees, and I do mentoring and I am the principal mentor for other principals. I take interns, so I'm going to have an intern here with me this year as well. ... And I read a lot. But I try to look toward people who I see doing the work, every-day ordinary people, because it's just easier to see something that is in action than it is for me to read a book and try to implement it. (Van Buren)

Van Buren's words resonate with me and were echoed throughout all of the interviews. In fact, each principal told me that they draw inspiration from those closest to them: students, teachers, other administrators, mentors, and their own family members.

I think there are people who I work with who I think are inspiring, whether that's a teacher or, I have our assistant superintendent of instruction who I think is really, she's really good at her job. And, she's a good friend of mine too and I like to be around how she thinks. I also have people in my personal life who have nothing to do with education in their careers, and I look at some of the stuff

that they do, and how they make decisions, and face challenges in their job. They have kind of become my personal board of directors, I think. (Jackson).

My first principal [name omitted] was probably old school, but he was the best of men: good educator, good principal, always calm, always put kids first. He was the consummate administrator, though he was old school, yet he transcended that. You put him in any situation and he will solve it and he has a sense of humor. He was very dry, very witty, and kind of very knowledgeable. But, I look to him and ask ‘what would he do?’ And I aspire to be even half as good as he was. (Tyler).

When I first started teaching, I worked with a woman who was dean of my department. She became principal of a large high school and then moved on to start an experimental school that was really clever. After she retired, she came back to my school part-time as head of guidance. Anyway, she helped shape a lot of my ideas for justice for kids and what’s right and wrong. I always think about her when I make decisions that seem weird or odd. I think about, what would she do in this situation? If I had to have one person as inspiration, it would be her. (Washington)

The principals in this study believe that everyone in the school community needs keep up with current information. In addition to attending to the professional development of their staff, they attend to their own learning. Whether to stay one step ahead of the curve, to move up in their career, or for personal enjoyment, principals are the school’s head learner. The principals in this study exemplify life-long learning.

Responding to Change

“How do we do right by every single child?” (Taylor)

Every school in this study is coping with a shift in student characteristics that has occurred within the past few years. The two changes most often mentioned are an increase in the

number of students in poverty and the number of students from minority families, and frequently with a different language spoken at home. Nine of the elementary schools now have 50% or more of their students in the Low SES population subgroup. Alarming to the two principals of the more affluent schools, there has been an increase in the number of their students who are living in new poverty situations. All of the elementary schools have seen an increase in the number of students considered English Language Learners. All now have numbers greater than the state's average and seven of the schools have over 25%.

Schools resources are affected. They are serving far more free breakfasts and lunches at school, sponsoring clothing drives, sending home food in back packs over the weekend, partnering with local government agencies, and adding personnel such as health clerks, psychologists, and social workers. Different programming is required to support English language learners including dual language and other bilingual programs. Most of the principals have had to add bilingual teachers, secretaries, nurses' aides and social workers. This is a huge challenge as there is a shortage of highly qualified bilingual personnel. Two of the elementary principals shared stories of the racial tension that has recently surfaced in the school community and for which their staff was ill prepared to handle.

Resourceful as ever, principals find ways to change the environment and/or add programs that will help students so that they are ready to learn. Principal Taylor covered a lot of bases telling me about changes they have made.

The staff is bilingual. We've really morphed into that. So we make sure that our marquee, all our sign boards are in English and in Spanish, and we try and do that, so that it's totally anything that's important is in both languages. If it's important information, all of the community members should have access to it. And I think the community has changed over the last 15 years. And, I think people are now accustomed to come into this building,

feeling that can get information, be treated with respect, and that it's welcoming. And when we hear from our volunteers, you know what, there's just something special here. Here we do – we'll have sometimes a little table, maybe one of the local churches, we're part of a consortium for a share, an agricultural share, and anything that isn't pick up, were going to bring over here. And we'll have a variety of lettuces, tomatoes, and whatever, and maybe my parents are here because they are taking an ESL class or because they are picking up a student, and I'll say stop by the little market, there might be something interesting there. So, we try and do as much of that, because I know that a lot of my families, they are sometime looking for, they need to know where there might be a food pantry, or where might I get this kind of advice or that kind of service.

I think we've even, as a staff, have gone through and said, 'you know what, boys and girls aren't coming in with these skills, okay. [School readiness skills such as letter-sound recognition, use of crayons, scissors, sharing with peers.] Families are struggling with this.' And I say, ah...we wish they had all these, and you know, yeah, that's true. Let's move on. Okay, we can keep beating that dead horse and say, well, they are not coming with X, Y and Z, or we can say 'what do we need to do?' There has to be – we've have gone through and said, you know what, that's excuse making, okay. If a child needs breakfast, we have a breakfast program. If a family qualifies for free and reduced, we do it, that's fine, okay, doesn't matter. We use our title funds money, just for that, we use it so that materials, if we have different organizations ...we're in an area where the community is very generous. So, we'll have clothing drives, we'll have school supplies, we'll have it available. Anything the kids need, okay, just to make sure that we're here and available for learning, and my staff, we need to continue to address and remind ourselves, this isn't about saying that children of poverty can't succeed. This is just that maybe we need to do school a little differently, okay. Not lower our standards, not lower our expectations, um, but we have to keep that in mind. (Taylor)

Principal Washington's told me an amazing story of the how their school took another look at their mission statement and realized that if they were to take it to heart, they would have to do something different for special education students.

The best thing, no doubt, is that we developed, the athletic director and I created, a special education soccer program and we got other schools to join, and we developed it into a varsity sport for our special education kids. And they played six games and we had 'best buddy's student helpers. So out on the field were the athletes and six other students that would help them, like 'go get that ball' and telling them what to do. So the two teams would go play soccer. It was awesome. We built the whole thing. The kids came, everybody cried. It was phenomenal. The idea is this, you moved here to go to this school, so why wouldn't we provide you with a world-class education for the students with special needs. We created the soccer team. We created a theatre program. We've got all kinds of programs now. We redid half of the building down there and we're bringing back our special education programs. We've rebuilt rooms. If you're going to keep special education students here, then you can't put them in a corner. You have to have programs for them. So that's what we've been doing. It's been good. (Washington)

Some principals are adding after school programs....

We have teachers all summer that go up there [a housing project in the district] with a book mobile. They just take the kids food. They take the kids and they play kickball. You would never know that this neighborhood is a scary place because nobody is out. Why is nobody out? Because, it is a scary place. We've had homework centers out there in the past and we had to move away from that because it was dangerous after dark. But this year we are going to get them up and running again. We have gotten some support from the property managers. (Harrison)

We are lucky, we still have quite a few things that are free to students. We run afterschool sports, we run a homework club for 3rd – 5th graders, who are kind of targeted students who need a quiet place to work or are achieving at a low rate. We have chorus once a week. We have an art club for 5th graders. And then we have an activity bus that takes the kids home. And before school we are running a chess club. We started with just 4th and 5th graders, but we had a 2nd grader move in who was the chess wiz of the school, so I had to offer it all the way through 2nd grade. It tripled the population of the club as we have 50 kids just learning the game. We have done a lot of outreach. (Madison)

Most of the elementary teachers talked about adding programs that involve adding parent components. Principal Madison shared how her school also involves their dads. ...

You know, we have done a lot of outreach, even things like this Watch D.O.G.S. program with dads. It runs for half day, where the dad is coming and we set up a little schedule for them. They volunteer a little bit in their own child's classroom, but then we put them to work in other places in the building and they go to lunch and recess with their child. And, even if they are not with their child, we just have them, you know doing flash cards or reading to children, just really simple things. They love it! In fact, we just piloted it last year like between spring break and the end of the year. We had so many dads. I think there was peer pressure going on in the neighborhood. There is a security piece, [to the program] but we don't do that. We don't need it. (Madison)

The elementary principals all shared anecdotes about how the school is involving the community in the education setting. One school has a long history of community involvement and it's principal is its chief cheerleader. She explained some of the ways that community is involved year-round.

We have a huge, huge yard in our backyard, a huge garden and we were one of the pioneers in the school gardening movement nationally. We did some work with [a well-known chef] because we have this incredible volunteer, but she can't do it alone. So she works with a team of teachers and parents. So the kids get out there and have a lesson a couple of times a year. They plant, they harvest, they prepare, and they help shut it down for winter. There is an evening string and a summer string of families who come over and do weeding and take home produce. We have a grill out there, so families grill and have little picnics in the garden. It's all done organically through teachers and volunteers. I'm the cheerleader. And we have a huge wellness initiative here that done by teacher and parents. We've restructured our kindergarten snack program. We also do yoga next door as we have a senior center, not a nursing home, but a senior center next door. We're very blessed. They have made arrangements for us to go over there to do yoga. This is all teacher-driven. (Adams)

All of the principals shared that the changing student demographics has had a significant impact on the staff. They have implemented similar programs and strategies to meet these challenges including offering specific staff development on topics like poverty and working with minority students. Some have taken to counseling teachers to recognize the strengths and different skill sets that these students bring to school rather than concentrating on students' so-called deficits. One principal shared what drives her to educate her staff.

We have to get better about understanding what homeless students go through. We need to have a better understanding about situational poverty and generational poverty. We need to ask, and what does that mean? And what are the unique needs that kids have? You know, there is a difference. Kids who come from poverty learn in a different way. They're much more oral. They have different sense of humor. They have different coping skills. We have to get better about how we service the kids that don't come from the traditional family makeup. And so, I think that we have got to get better at understanding our kids so that they do feel a part of our community, so that they do love school, so it's not a place that their parents hate to come to. My mom hated going to school because she wasn't educated. We were poor. When she came in, the teachers talked down to her. We moved every other year. So, I know that we have to get better about welcoming. And that's why I am here. (Monroe)

Public education is changing to meet the needs of changing student demographics. Schools highlighted in this study are making adjustments. They are trying new programs, learning new skills, reallocating scarce resources, and confronting their own biases. Most notably, these school principals are highly aware of these changes and are determined to figure out the best combination of programs and services for their particular students.

Dispositions of the Principals: Hopes and Dreams...

It is entirely appropriate to understand the mindset of the principals, given that their leadership efforts have a tremendous influence upon their specific school's community. Their convictions affect what will be attended to and what will be ignored. The interviews pointed out those things that are important to principals. Principals voiced what they hoped for and what they believed was the purpose of education. For example, one principal asserted, "we're educating for when kids become 35 year-olds not just to get them to graduate high school" (Washington).

Another principal shared a story that illustrated her main interest: helping teachers and students.

"I saw an example of progressive education in my fourth grade dual language classroom this year. I was so proud of this teacher. She is young, and this is only her second year. She had been teaching before, but she was doing Spanish on a cart on the south side of Chicago, and had basically been doing behavior management. She has great classroom management and so there were no issues there. But she – she is an interesting teacher. When I went to observe her last year, and learned that learning is super important to her. When I observed her she showed me everything she knew about math, and it was great, but it was all about what the teacher knew. So I sat her down and said, 'I'm just going to tell you the story and then I will get into your questions.' So, I said, 'Sally, clearly you know a lot about fourth grade math, but what do the kids know? I want to see constructivist-learning going on. I want to see them constructing the knowledge, um, not you showing off what you know.'

So, obviously, I was a little gentler. But, she went away and she came back on a Friday afternoon, at like 5 O'clock, and she said, 'I didn't know what you meant, so I videotaped myself. Can we watch the video and you can show me where I'm doing what you don't want me to do?' And I was like, 'oh my god, sit down, and yes, we can do that right now, whatever I'm doing can wait.' So it was amazing. We went through her video and I said, 'right there, you showed off. You showed what you knew. How could you

frame it with the kids to show what they know, how they are putting together these pieces....like tease them, give them part of it and then have them figure it out.’

So she left and there has been an amazing transformation in her teaching. Now she is clearly really smart, right. So she did a lesson when I observed her this year, and it was part of a larger ELA (English Language Arts) unit, but about Edward Snowden, with the question ‘Was he a hero or a traitor?’ And, she went and found different leveled articles. She had the children – she found out that they did not know what the constitution was, so she had a quick talk with them about the constitution, and she had them vote before they read anything. She gave them a little bit of background. And then asked the question – Was he a hero or a traitor? Then the students had to go and build their arguments and have a debate, there was some writing, they had to use multiple sources to construct an argument, and then they voted at the end again and figured out mathematically how many people had changed their opinions.

So, it was really, really, really well done. And when I think about sitting with her a year ago, asking her to ‘stop telling us what you know, find out what the kids know.’ Well, it was a huge transformation in her teaching. And that’s the kind of stuff that is going to get us away from this rote learning [approach] that is just teaching to the test. (Adams)

That story is indicative, as might be expected, that most of the principals were primarily concerned that students receive instruction that will support their intellectual, social, and emotional growth. Where principals differ is the emphasis on what curriculum and instruction is valued, and its ultimate aim.

Four principals specified that students should be prepared to be economically self-supporting, in other words, able to get a job. Mr. Harrison summed it up,

“I feel like the driving force behind, and I mean I fully subscribe to the democratic ideal, but I think really what school is about is providing as many kids as possible with [literacy,] and the

reality is, we are preparing kids to be able to seek economic opportunity. With economic opportunity comes social capital. With social capital comes political abilities and connectivity.
(Harrison)

The other principals had definite ideas of those elements of schooling that would best prepare students to achieve success. Overwhelmingly, principals placed an emphasis on developing in students their thinking skills as a prerequisite to leading successful future lives and capable of contributing positively to society. They saw education, and being highly literate, as providing students with the tools and skills necessary to achieve what many named as the American dream. Five principals stated that students needed to learn to be good thinkers and they defined that as being able to look at information critically, to see what's going on, and then make good decisions. Ms. Jackson explained how this is a shift in thinking for students.

Because I think in a democracy you need to have kids who can think and reason and maybe a little comfortable with not knowing how to do things the right way, because they just want us to tell them how to do it, so that they can just do it and be done. So, I think we're shifting our focus with kids a little bit away from 'just being done and knowing how to do it' to 'you think it through and figure it out and come back to me and tell me what you think.' It's very hard for them. It's not their fault because, you know, our fourth and fifth graders have spent three to four years with us telling them 'Here's the procedure, follow the procedure. This is how you do it.' And then we say 'you come back and we'll tell you, yes you did it right or yes you followed the procedure right.' Now, we're asking them to think a little bit differently and I think its one of the best avenues we have to give everybody a fighting chance at the American Dream, or however we want to call that.
(Jackson)

Mrs. Van Buren added that this is a shift for parents too.

I think now we just need to make sure that we help parents really understand the way we teach now, because it is so very different from the way that most of our parents and certainly the way I was

in school...Now we need to teach kids thinking skills and research skills and all those things. And that's hard for parents to understand, ... there's just too much information to teach what we used to teach. And so now we have to teach kids how to learn, how to be learners, and how to be thinkers, so that they can learn on their own. And that's a really big shift for parents." (Van Buren)

Mrs. Monroe explained that she is working to shift the way that her teachers think about instruction.

When I think about kids and producing kids who are thinkers, ...they have to begin as students in our classrooms. That means the lecture style has to go away, the teacher has all the wisdom...needs to go away because we've got to get our kids to share their thinking. That is how we create humanitarians who can then go forth with their great ideas. (Monroe)

Harrison and Tyler, the two male elementary principals, added that a healthy skepticism is important to avoid being unduly influenced by propaganda or unscrupulous persons (including politicians).

Schooling used to be so much about information. And there was so, relatively speaking, so little information that was available to kids. Now, it is no longer about information. Everybody has all the information that they need, but it is constructing the ability to utilize the information, to make sound decisions, sound decisions based upon what you believe, what you know to be right. But the reality is, we ought to be equipped at least to be... critical thinking enough to be...discerning ... and to not fall into a trap of aimlessly following leaders who are going to take us on a path that does not preserve democracy, (Harrison).

And part of that is to be a contributing member to our democracy, and that is to be able to be skeptical in the truest sense of the word, to really look at the evidence, to weigh the evidence, to not be swayed by propaganda and by all the other things that, as human beings, you know, that we are bombarded by so much, (Tyler).

There were other ideas about preparing students to be successful citizens. Most of the principals also talked about developing in students the idea of being responsible for their own actions. A few added that students needed to be responsible also for others in their community and this took several forms. Two principals went a step further and suggested that students needed to become socially aware. Some suggested that students do community service by caring for others in the community who were in need. One believes that students should be taught to act as humanitarians and another specified that students needed to develop a strong personal identity as well as to build the understanding that they belong to something larger than their own identity. Her students, even when moving on to middle school, have one another's back. She summed it up as her hope that school will develop agency in the students.

I think we as adults can model it [Agency] in schools like I think my kids know that my teachers get along and they help each other out and that they are responsible for these initiatives and all of that. I think they know that, because we try to model. I mean I've certainly worked in places where you say to teachers, and it's come up here too... 'When you disagree in front of children, they're taking all of that in. So how you disagree is really – is more important than what you're disagreeing about, that you show kids that we do disagree sometimes and we do it respectfully and we do it thoughtfully. We think about that, and kids are also seeing all the positive stuff that we do and model as well. So I think that's how they're building agency and being comfortable to try, just try stuff, (Adams).

One principal articulated that students should understand that they have a choice. She went on to say that in a democracy, schools must provide students a place where they can safely share opinions and have discussions. Three principals concurred, adding that students needed to learn to speak well enough to advocate for themselves. The most radical idea, and just shy of

students becoming politically aware, was from two principals who posited that students have a right to an education, taught by well-prepared teachers, in a safe environment. And, should they not get such an education, student must take action.

I'm hoping that in our quest to make them good thinkers, that they also challenge sometimes, you know, and respectfully challenge authority, and maybe sometimes, disrespectfully. You need to be an advocate for yourself. And I think we have really talked about that and said, 'how do we get children who are engaged in their learning? How do we make sure the kids know that they have a right to be learning, to be challenged in the classroom, to make sure that a teacher is teaching up to them?' Then, they come away with a sense of connectedness to their learning. I'm hoping that by their sharing their confidence and if we're providing them opportunities to show that confidence in themselves, that its going to hopefully translate later on into being the learning, advocating on their own behalf. ... If something isn't making sense in the classroom, if it's not right for you, you need to let us know, (Taylor).

A number of principals, who believe that their schools do prepare democratic citizens, stated as evidence that students: have one another's backs, are getting into and through college, are respectful to teachers, help other students in afterschool programs, act responsibly by working as safety patrol team members, participate in band and orchestras, and enjoy performing neighborhood service projects. As noted above, one school has a neighborhood garden and families care for it during the summers. Some principals point out that their past graduates, even into adulthood, come back year after year to volunteer their services as mentors, after school club leaders, and activity directors.

Some of the principals were clearly concerned that schools may not be doing as much as they could and stated that while the school might be doing many of the things that are considered "right" by today's reform efforts, there are telltale signs that worry them. One principal talked

about how well behaved and polite students are in the building, and that there are very few discipline issues. But, he is concerned that students regularly cheat in response to the pressures to do well. Another principal voiced that she wasn't sure that the students' considerable and concerted efforts to be good citizens in the building actually transfers to good behavior outside in the neighborhood.

I think we really work hard in trying to teach responsibility and respect, but I think it's pretty isolated into inside the school. I don't know that we really spent any time teaching kids how to help in their community, how to help elsewhere. I mean, we've talked about it and we've talked about doing some community outreach. Some of our dual language classrooms did community outreach projects, one made scarves, sold them and donated the money, and another did a fundraiser for a food drive. I mean, we do a little bit with the standards on what government is, but I don't think citizenship really goes beyond our own walls too much. (Van Buren)

Principals each had thoughts about how schools could improve and providing opportunities might sum up one line of thought. According to most of the principals, students need to build skills through three types of opportunities: knowledge and personal responsibility, dialogue and discourse, or awareness of the world around them.

Several principals talked about the need for students to better manage their own learning and/or take ownership of their learning (Washington, Taylor, Monroe). One added that students needed to come away from schooling with a sense of connectedness to learning (Taylor).

Others shared that students need opportunities to work respectfully with one another when they disagree (Adams), teamwork (Jefferson), and to be inclusive. They need opportunities for inquiry based learning and critical thinking, to share their thinking with others, have academic conversations and know how to ask for help (Jackson), research skills, and we need

more time in school for this (Madison, Tyler). They need preparation for the technical world they will live in (Polk).

Three principals believe that students must become more aware of others around them so that they might be more respectful and responsible citizens. They need to have opportunities to act as humanitarians and have access to nature (Monroe). They need to have an environment that is more linguistically, socioeconomically, ethnically, and culturally diverse (Harrison) and to know that learning is a two-way street (Jackson). One principal stated that she believes students need to learn more than one language (Van Buren).

Principal Taylor suggested that we are not preparing teachers for the kinds of students that we are working with today.

“There is something that we have seen... we have wonderfully gifted people who know content, but don't make the connections with their students. And that's probably the most difficult thing. I think that the younger the student, the more connected you need to be. ...I think sometimes that there's such a disconnect between our teacher training programs and what actually goes on in the classroom. There is theory, and you need to know that, and you need to know good pedagogy, but you need to also know what really happens in schools. ... So if you look at the way I react, and maybe get a little glimpse of what I'm trying to do.”

One principal shared a story that might be an example of an opening for democracy.

I want every kid to have the opportunity to be the best that they can be, whether they be our gifted kids or are our exceptional needs kids who are so thrilled when they say a sentence. When I walk into their classroom, and they can say, 'hi', that's huge for them, because they can't speak. But, to get them to speak or to acknowledge you...” ‘I had a little boy, an autistic boy. I walked into the music room. He doesn't ever make eye contact, and he walked over and grabbed my hand, and looked me in the eye because he wanted me to dance with him. And he has never done that in the three years he's been here. And the teacher looked at me, and so I danced with him. And she said that this is the first

time she has ever seen him make eye contact. And that is such a good feeling. And the teacher is phenomenal, and she's just been working with him and trying to get him to look at people, and he did. And so it doesn't matter to me if you're that kid, or if you are the gifted kid who is learning to work with someone else to build a robot, or to create a computer program. Everybody's got to move up and move forward, and push forward. I want everybody to remember me as a principal that was able to get people to do that, to work together to do that. (Van Buren)

The principals in this study are unique individuals with hopes and aspirations for their students that certainly start with, but go beyond, academic preparation. What they believe in, they will attend to. They are models for students and teachers and their beliefs may shape the climate of the learning community.

Conclusion

I came away from these interviews with the feeling that schools are in a much better place than current school reformers will have us believe. The principals care deeply about students and staff and they know the needs of their constituents because they collaborate with each group. Principals are intent upon giving their teachers more of a voice through increased shared decision-making opportunities. They push for programs and strategies that they believe will help students and staff to acquire skills and knowledge that will serve them in the 21st century.

Principals are in a position where they have a balcony view. They hear all sides and see that things are not black and white. They work long hours educating themselves and their staffs in order make smarter choices when faced with competing information and shifting priorities. Frustration with the current emphasis on a single solution to every problem makes the job harder.

Tyler articulated it well saying,

“We live in...the part that frustrates me in education is that it’s always that we look through the lens of dichotomy. It’s either one thing or the other. And, it’s not one thing or the other. It can be both. And how do we make both work? You know? It is like right and wrong. How do we do with both?”

Not surprisingly, there was near silence regarding activism or dissent toward any of the educational policies that many voiced as tough to swallow. One principal spoke honestly about how conflicted he felt about raising his own children in an affluent area just so that they might have every advantage even though he works in a school where his students may have none of them. Yet, he doesn’t know what to do about his discomfort. All of the interviewees voiced ambivalence towards current educational reform, but they have no intention of giving up. They continue, day after day, to do their best for the children entrusted to their care.

Chapter VI. Analysis

Introduction

This study came about because as a principal I have become deeply concerned that our students are not afforded opportunities to practice being democratic citizens. Narrowed curriculum and instructional mandates have had an impact on what we are able to teach and has also promoted an attitude that our students are deficient, that they don't measure up to "standards." In an effort to get all students to "grade level," time is taken away from experiences, investigations, and activities that will help students learn what Meira Levinson calls "knowledge and skills to upend and reshape power relationships directly, through public, political, and civic action, not just private self-improvement" (2012, p. 13). In other words, we are not teaching kids to be engaged citizens. In this study, I have attempted to find out what other principals think of the public goal of educating citizens. Do they wrestle with the concerns of public thinkers that our democracy is being eroded because we are not teaching for democracy? Principals lead their individual schools, and their encouragement of students and staff does have influence over the types of persons students are to become (Gronn and Woods, 2009). And, though it might seem a small drop in the ocean, the influence that principals have over members of their particular school community may matter to the future of democracy.

In this study I interviewed eleven principals and will discuss, in the following chapter, two major conceptual understandings, one expected, and one cautiously affirming. First, the findings of this study illustrate the concerns of democracy scholars who argue that current education reforms threaten our democracy (Apple, 2012; Apple and Beane, 2007; Glass and Berliner, 2014; Furman and Starratt, 2002; Benninga and Quinn, 2011; Mathews, 2008). As suspected, but with hope against hope for the opposite, these principals, do not think about

schooling as educating for democracy. While that was discouraging, I did find that each of the schools in the study represented a counter message to the current narrative that our public schools are failing our students. I found elements within every principal's story that offer confidence that schools are not broken. Furthermore, there are practices that principals promote which could be considered hopeful signs that within some schools there exists some necessary building blocks for an education that promotes democratic citizenship.

In this Chapter I return to the research questions and offer some reflections in the context of the literature review. I begin the chapter with a review of the Westheimer and Kahne's 2004 concept of good citizens. Using their descriptions may help frame the discussion because it presents a continuum of democratic thinking that principals may espouse. The chapter has been organized by themes that surfaced during the analysis process. It concludes with a concern that surfaced during the study.

The Conception of a Good Citizen

I found that Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) three types of citizenship model helpful in analyzing the results and it may be useful to repeat here. Westheimer and Kahne (2004, 2008) have presented a model that is used quite often in research and academic conversations about teaching for democracy. They described three types of citizen: the Personally Responsible Citizen, the Participatory Citizen, and the Justice-Oriented Citizen. The Personally Responsible Citizen acts responsibly, contributes through volunteerism and compassion for those less fortunate, obeys laws, and generally lives by the Golden Rule. The Participatory Citizen is all of the above, but also takes an active role in civic affairs. He or she participates in collective action including planning and preparation of things that will be of benefit to the community. They have

strong ties to the community and understand how interconnected the members are. The third type, the Justice-Oriented citizen is again, all of the above, but doesn't stop at collective action, but works to analyze and correct the root cause of inequities, injustices, and other social ills. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) tell us that most people are the first type of citizen and most schools promote being personally responsible if they promote anything, intentionally or otherwise. There are a fair number of people who fall into the participatory category and many high schools teach civic responsibility. Westheimer and Kahne state that there are relatively few in the justice-oriented category of citizenship, and even fewer school based programs focused on Justice Oriented citizenship coursework.

Return to the Research Questions

Perception of Principals' Roles in Nurturing Democratic Citizens

The intent of this study was to understand, from the principals' perspectives how they support education for democracy or nurture young citizens. I expected that a discussion of their school experiences - priorities, goals and hopes for the future - might shed light on their views about a public education that supports democracy. None of the principals came right out and explicitly voiced a belief that the mission of public schooling included preparing students for their lives as democratic citizens, nor what a principal's role was in that mission. When I asked directly what they thought the purpose of public schooling was, and specifically what they saw as the public school's mandate to prepare democratic citizens, almost every principal hesitated and stopped to think before answering. Several principals told me that they honestly did not know what they thought, nor did they think about the purpose of schooling in that way. This sentiment echoed an absence of thinking about the school's role in teaching democracy found in

both the general public and the educational community (Benninga and Quinn, 2011; Goodlad, 2008; Youniss, 2011).

When pressed, all of the study participants shared their hopes for what school should do to prepare students to be good citizens in a democracy, and our conversations suggested to me that principals think they nurture democracy in two ways. First, principals work to create and/or sustain what they see, or are led to see, as the right environment, one conducive for high quality learning. Second, they strive to carry out the school's 'mission,' whatever that mission has been defined by school board and/or schools improvement committees. The following summarizes the findings of both.

The principals spent a lot of our conversation talking about assembling the right people. The right people were those who the principal felt were in the school for the right reasons; belief that all children can learn and achieve to the limits of their personal abilities, and belief in working collaboratively. They emphasized the importance of hiring, firing, coaching, training, retraining, and molding their staffs in accordance with their vision of an effective school. While this included any school personnel, principals were largely focused on the teachers.

Every principal stated that they hold their teachers in high esteem. They are proud of how well their staffs get along with each other and solve problems collectively. Several principals shared that they deliberately act to free teachers to do what they do best; build relationships with children and parents. All recounted examples of how the relationships that teachers built with students led to better outcomes, which they stressed were not limited to, but included tailoring instruction for individual students. All but one principal shared the anguish felt when they had to fire a teacher. And contrary to the myth that principals can't fire teachers, those interviewed do fire, or counsel out, or reassign teachers who don't meet prescribed, district

(and union) established standards and goals. Lastly, principals acknowledge that teachers are instructors, but were adamant that they are also role models for students. This is important because when discussing teaching for democracy, several principals suggested that the teacher, as a role model, is the primary way students learn how they (students) should act as citizens.

Principals also suggested that having the right support staff was key to an ideal school environment. Principals' stories touted office, support and custodial staff as integral to the building. These folks care for students' physical and mental well being. They also convey a spirit of welcome to parents – especially as many of the parents of these principals have verbalized a feeling of alienation and being unwanted in the schools. A welcome school atmosphere helps outsiders feel at home, invited, and valued, and principals stated that it was foundational to fostering community support. In two of the study schools, the school operates as the community center, which is sustained only through positive relationships with parent and neighborhood volunteers, business leaders, and social service agencies.

The second perception that principals have about their democracy-nurturing role was a finding that principals see themselves as the primary person to carry out the school's mission. They readily take responsibility for things that go wrong, while accepting very little, if any, credit for things that go well. Instead, they complimented their team, only taking credit for assembling the team. These findings also suggest that principals see themselves in the role that might be described as a chief operating officer. They have limited authority to set building goals and do not set the overarching educational agenda, but they make sure that their building's school improvement goals, and orders from superiors are carried out. The finding that every principal in this study insisted that they have a "place at the table" in district-wide committees is telling. They recognize how important to the success of their schools it is that they continue to

learn, develop networks and then disseminate to their school what they have learned about the overall organization. This practice illustrates the work of Gronn (2010), Bush (2009), Spillane, Healy, and Parise (2009), and Spillane and Hunt, (2010).

The principals in this study take their role as leader of a learning community seriously though all voiced that work is very demanding and that dealing with competing priorities is often frustrating. But, they persevere, and will not play the blame game. They want to act. And act they do. They are crazy busy as they implement what they believe is right for their students to become successful adults. John Goodlad (2008) reminds us that American education does not share a common democratic mission for our public schools. The principals I interviewed also did not articulate a common perception of their role in nurturing democracy. However, an indication of their perceptions might be found in the similarities they have about their role as building leader; focused on creating the right environment and in their willingness to take responsibility for carrying out the educational mission of their buildings.

How do principals nurture democracy in elementary schools?

Jane Roland Martin (2008) wrote,

When, overcoming all obstacles, school becomes a site of democratic culture, two long neglected aspects of education for democratic citizenship writ small will make themselves felt. One is that this education is not a mere matter of addition. Discussions of citizenship education often leave the impression that school only has to give children a bit of knowledge about democracy, a few democratic skills, and some new democratic behavioral patterns. Add these up and voilà, democracy will have new citizens. (Roland Martin, 2008, quoted in Goodlad, Soder, & McDaniel)

In the elementary schools of this study I found no required or articulated curriculum or pedagogy that provides practice or training instilling a democratic identity. Only the high school

has curriculum to teach for democratic thinking, though only for students enrolled in government or American history courses. John Dewey's vision that democracy is a mode of living with others in community, "of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 1916, p. 32) reminds us to look beyond the enacted curriculum to the school environment, led by adults that foster community. Schools, by their very nature, are communities within communities with shared experiences. And, I found that principals do concern themselves quite a lot with creating a school community. They have significant influence on the culture of their school community (Seashore Louis and Wahlstrom, 2011).

Every school has a culture, consciously created or not, and as Roland Martin termed it, a democratic culture too. Principals in this study were silent about explicitly preparing students to act as democratic citizens. None mentioned anything about "cultivating spaces for students to practice democracy" (Biesta, 2011, p. 33) although a handful have student councils. They do concentrate their energies and resources on a number of things that affect the school's culture and findings indicate that they are attempting to cultivate in children virtues that are considered essential to a healthy democratic life. I found that these principals largely concentrated on four areas that also contribute to a democratic culture: building a caring community, developing voice and shared decision-making, improving student outcomes, and responding to changing demographics. The following four sections discuss ways principals promote democratic practices while along side pressures that they encounter while doing so.

Community and Care

As leaders of a school community, principals must embody a passion for children and learning (Moller, 2012), see themselves as influential in student growth (Gronn, 2010), and

accept fiduciary responsibility to safeguard the public's trust in education (Frick and Gutierrez, 2008). I found many examples that affirmed this. Heartwarming stories of day-to-day encounters with their students suggest that they truly care about the children as people. They recognize the importance of building relationships with children as individuals so they know children's names, they know their families, and they know a child's personality traits. Principals have an accurate sense of the basic needs of their students and are often scheming to make sure that basic health and welfare needs are met. Parents and other community members are considered partners as they provide supplemental support for individual children when the school resources are exhausted. These principals advocate for special needs, and consider context and circumstance before making disciplinary decisions. They have formed attachments to their students and many shared that interactions with children are the reason they remain in their very stressful jobs. Students see their principals as caring and as 'their principal'. Ben-Porath (2012) suggested that this way of thinking, this commitment to the emotional and psychological well being of students, is key to developing the skills and habits of mind required in citizenship education.

Findings indicate that principals are sensitive to the unique needs of their parent community. Many principals, when they have the opportunity to hire new staff members, intentionally seek out individuals who have specific skills and personality traits needed to support parents. This includes speaking a second language, nursing skills, and soft skills such as flexibility and an open mind for non-traditional students and parents. The principals are looking for school personnel who will help them foster or sustain a school atmosphere where anyone who enters the building feels welcomed and cared for. Most of the principals want their buildings to be places where people feel that they can get help, especially those typically

disenfranchised in the schools system. This finding is supported in the literature as a more effective way for schools that serve minority communities to be successful, and to support democratic practices (Rodriguez and Alanis, 2011).

Principals recognize that attending to the social and emotional needs of staff is important (Ramalho, Garza, and Merchant, 2010). They do things to create a caring atmosphere for all, but stated that they see that their support of teachers as the key to meeting student needs. I perceived that principals take the time to know the teachers' personal lives, strengths, weaknesses, and career goals. Their care translates into helping teachers achieve personal career goals, coaching them to deliver instruction more effectively, and sometimes counseling them out of the profession altogether. At times, principals hold up the rest of the staff when one of them is sick or faced with a life-changing situation. Important to note, though not a major theme here, at least two principals shield teachers from the excess stresses of a political or bureaucratic nature so that teachers may concentrate on their students, illustrating Nodding's admonishment that leaders "balance the objectives of higher authority with those of their staff" (2006, p. 344).

The findings from the principals in this study are consistent with other school leadership studies that suggest that they are the culture builders of the school (Frick and Gutierrez (2008). They work on all fronts to create an environment supportive of students, teachers and family members. I found that these principals deeply care about their school community. Reitzug (2010) reminds us that it is vital that school principals create and nurture positive personal relationships with and between all of the members of our school communities. He also adds that while these are important qualities, they are only a start for those who want to be leaders of schools that teach for democracy (p. 321).

Shared Decision-making, Voice, and Expanding Participation

Shared leadership, shared decision-making and giving all constituents a voice are vital aspects of democracy. These qualities have been shown to lead to more focused instruction, commitment to the job, greater staff cohesion, and – of course – increased student achievement (Price, 2012, Tschannen and Tschannen, 2011). Of all of the findings, I think that the closest principals come to nurturing democracy is in the area of shared decision-making and expanding participation. They have recognized that giving constituents voice and some power to choose is better for the school. However, the findings from the interviews indicate that principals have varied conceptions of shared decision-making and allowing everyone to voice-in.

On one end of the spectrum, principals give teachers and students cursory, mostly ceremonial roles in decision-making. They listen to concerns, but ultimately they make decisions. They have no student government, but might have a club that does good deeds for the school and these club members may share information with the principal. Teachers serve on committees that advise the principal of what is happening in the building and they bring back to the others the decisions of the principal. Committee members are likely to be handpicked, not voluntary. There is no mistaking the concern that these principals voiced, that because the buck stops with them, they must be the final decider. One explanation for this might be that these principals are accountable to boards of education and superintendents to make sure that decisions are in line with standards and other accountability measures.

On the opposite end of the continuum are three principals who see themselves essentially as cheerleaders because they have given staff permission to make day-to-day school decisions, not them. These teachers make decisions as a group because, the principals had said, teachers are in the best position to make decisions on teaching and learning. These principals are not

absent from the conversations, far from it. They attend to overall building functions but act simply as an advisor in matters of academics or behaviors. They promote team meetings, send teachers to district leadership committees, and find ways for teachers to have collaboration time. This lets teachers figure out what is needed, bring it to the group for a vote, and then implement the change. Teachers volunteer to be on these teams and committees, although in some cases, they are paid through stipends for their extra duties.

Most of the principals in this study can be found somewhere in the middle of the continuum. These are the principals who recognize, as cited in the research of Spillane and Hunt, (2010), that co-performing instructional activities yields greater results than leading the activities themselves. These principals stated that they believe in a currently much touted strategy called PLC (Professional learning communities) (Appendix C). They see this as a solid approach for teachers to learn best practices and disseminate that knowledge throughout the school community. PLCs can be powerful collaboration mechanisms, and recent research suggests they are vital to greater professionalism (Seashore Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011, p. 54). However, belief in the concept of the PLC does not necessarily insure that they give teachers voice or decision-making power.

Principals share power primarily with teams of teachers and related staff. Most are happy to give teachers decision-making power over their building's professional development programs and activities. Most explained that their schools make team decisions regarding individual students, program materials, and behavior systems. Most principals value the work done by curriculum committees and seek recommendations. But, principals delay handing over the reins to the group. Whether wary of making a mistake, or simply unsure of how to let go, most principals disclosed that they stop short of allowing teachers to make final decisions on matters

affecting programming, curriculum, and other more far reaching school issues.

Surprisingly, all principals of this study, even those who are less likely to share power, voiced concern over a perceived difficulty in getting teachers to take responsibility for decisions or to take on leadership roles. One principal shared that the hardest thing about his job is getting all of the staff to voice in. This is a perplexing problem for principals who want to flatten hierarchies and open up decision-making, but may not be surprising. Principals may be afraid to relinquish control of day-to-day decisions due to the high stakes accountability measures they too labor under. Additionally, Levinson (2011) reminds us that teachers may feel less likely to add their voice to the discussion as a result of the lack of control; they have lots the power to choose the curriculum, often the delivery methods, and the legitimacy of their teacher created assessments. Teachers become apathetic if they believe that their opinions are to be ignored. That sentiment might explain the silence of principals too. Those in this study acknowledged that the decisions on standardization and accountability have been taken out of their hands, further disempowering them (Levinson, 2011).

As for children, only a handful of schools have a mechanism for student decision-making. Some give students a voice through student councils, but their power is generally like that of a PTA - fun and fundraising. As noted in the findings, one school allows the students to meet with the principal and to solve problems that are happening in the school, to the students. This is an example, albeit small, of Lawy and Biesta's 'citizenship as practice' giving students opportunity and space in which to experience for themselves democratic practices and to build agency. Interesting to me about this situations was that the principal who gave these students some space to enact dialogue and collective action, was herself very reluctant to give her staff real decision-making authority and their voice was advisory only.

Parents have even less voice in decision-making, except through the PTA. Every principal stated that they value parent volunteerism and consider it very important to the strength of a school/home connection, which has been shown to raise student achievement. They act as an intermediary between parents and school. However, only one school actually has parent involvement that runs and sustains auxiliary curriculum. In that school, parents run a community garden and after school programs and their support or the lack of it affects decisions that the school makes on matters such as inclusion and communication.

To conclude this section, I think that it is fair to say that schools are toying with democratic shared decision-making and voice. Principals shared that they see the value of giving others voice, and offered a handful of examples where decisions are made together by members of the community. Overall, though, principals are hesitant to give up all of their power and thus, are unable to realize the full effects possible with greater shared leadership, including better students achievement (Printy & Marks, 2006).

The principals in this study do appear to be making room for greater amounts of shared decision-making, voices, and participation. Parker (2012) argues these are core strategies for schools that teach for democracy. While nascent in these schools, they are steps forward. Study participants shared positive experiences with giving students some voice, teams taking on some decision authority, and the power realized with participation from all staff. They were proud of their teachers and students for assuming some responsibility.

Improving Student Outcomes

The principals of this study perceive that their primary function as school leader is to improve instruction, which is understandable because it's the heart of their state-mandated job

description. As expected, the principals in this study have made it their mission to promote the acquisition of knowledge as the core purpose of the school, and each articulated that they act as *the* instructional leaders. As stated in the literature review, schools that serve democracy well teach students to become critical thinkers, to have discourse, to know their rights, and to make sound decisions based upon evidence (Apple and Beane, 2007; Westheimer, 2010). Findings indicate that the principals of this study agree with democracy scholars. It was their expressed hope that their schools teach students to have intellectual conversations that are also a respectful exchange of ideas with people who see things from a different perspective. The participants shared that they hope that rigorous instruction will instill in their students an idea that solid thinking and collaborative problem solving can make the world a better place for everyone. Three principals emphasized that their school's diverse population has given rise to richer dialogue and resulted in improved relations between subgroups of students. However, as predicted by Frick (2011, 2009, 2008) and Gerstl-Pepin and Aiken (2009), I also found that these principals, in their quest to achieve high academic excellence, have bought into the narrative that high stakes testing, and a reliance upon test data to drive programs and instruction, is proof that they are doing what is best for children. While almost all participants voiced discomfort with the amount of testing: all pushed that aside. Every principal was keenly interested in their students' test results and were seeking means to raise them. Similarly, every principal has directed teachers to align their instruction to the newly adopted common core state standards (CCSS). Most see CCSS as an important, even huge step forward for education in general, because it is advertised as infusing into curriculum and instruction the big ideas of higher order thinking, using evidence to support arguments, and just plain more rigor. None question CCSS and the assessment system of PARCC that is attached to it. None interrogate the purpose of a

standardized curriculum that not only does not fit the needs of their minority students, but also further categorizes and separates them. (In the case of the elementary buildings of this study, the minority is the majority so most of their student populations are subjected to the one-size-fits all mentality.) No counter solutions were offered to replace tests that the participants acknowledged as unfair to their language-learning students. None heed the warning of Meira Levinson (2011) that standards and standardized assessments should not be a “centerpiece of educational reform” (p. 127).

Principals have also bought into the college and career readiness frenzy. Nel Noddings (2008) worried about a country that goads, or perhaps guilts, every child to an aspiration for college. But that has not stopped nearly every building principal in this study to have instituted programs and activities that promote going to college. Every building has directed funds toward teacher professional development that promotes the elements of CCSS that emphasize college readiness. Many of the schools in this study have college pep rallies, college regalia displayed around the school, college readiness activities for parents, and the weekly singing of college songs. I agree with Noddings (2011) who finds it problematic that we stress going to college, to the exclusion of offering any other options, for those of our students who may have different interests, talents, or inclinations and that may not require a university degree.

For students that don't meet academic expectations, every school has the answer – a program known as RtI (Response to Intervention) (Appendix C). RtI provides a system of tiered interventions for students who test below grade level on standardized tests. Test scores designate the intervention, its frequency and duration. It is not within the scope of this paper to explain RtI in much depth. It is important to note that the intention of the program is to support every learner, potentially tailoring instruction to fit the student's specific needs, to get them to grade

level. Students receive support in the form of interventions that may be delivered by teachers, instructional assistants, or computer programs. One consequence of these interventions is that students receiving them are likely to be pulled out of their regular classrooms and that opens up a host of inequities and disparagements. The principals of this study almost universally supported RtI and touted its advantages. Only one principal has suggested using RtI in a way that is democratic in nature. That school uses RtI as a mechanism to involve students in taking charge of their own learning. They hoped that students assume responsibility for assessing what they know against rubrics, and then will seek help for only those targets that they have not yet mastered. Of concern, principals described how their students come to school with very different degrees of school readiness. While that was not allowed to be an excuse for not meeting grade-level assessment benchmarks, RtI interventions were initiated for students almost immediately upon entering. Many of these students come from backgrounds different from those for whom the tests were designed. Rodriguez and Alanis (2011) remind us that such thinking perpetuates the idea that students come in with deficits and difference. It further classifies and marginalizes students. If it is true that students start school at different places, why is it also true that they should all end at the same place?

Principals are also quite reliant on using another standardized tool to teach some of the non-academic skills. Every elementary school in this study is using a behavior management system that instructs students to be respectful, responsible and safe. On the surface, this sounds fairly innocuous, even a good idea. And, it may well help the school to use a program to explicitly teach behavior skills. Of concern is that fact that not one principal has questioned whether this program has implications for language learners, minority students, and students from low income families.

Some aspects of the common core standards and standardized behavior management systems promote those skills and values necessary to support a democratic society. Perhaps that is particularly confounding to principals. Principals in this study strive to close the academic gaps that affect their students. It is alarming that principals don't question, nor understand how the imposition of these programs and strategies is antidemocratic and responsible for further marginalization of many students. Not one principal seemed concerned that there is danger in pursuing a standardized path to excellence (Levin, 2009). This adds weight to Martha Nussbaum's (2010) statement, "education systems all over the world are moving closer and closer to the growth model without much thought about how ill-suited it is to the goals of democracy (p. 24).

Responding to Changing Demographics

James Banks (2008) stated, "A transformative citizenship education also helps students to interact and deliberate with their peers from diverse racial and ethnic groups." Every principal in this study has either watched or been told that his or her school community has undergone an enormous demographic shift in the past 5-10 years. This has been particularly challenging in the past three years, as they shared that during this timeframe the number of students living in poverty skyrocketed. Principals respond to these changes in two main ways: addressing students and addressing teachers.

First, schools are attempting to implement programs that will serve minority groups more effectively. Some programs focus on academic progress while others look to provide those basic necessities, when absent, may hamper student success. One academic program that was frequently mentioned by the elementary principals of this study is called dual language. Most of

the schools have instituted dual language programs to help their Spanish-speaking students to learn on a more level playing field, similar to their white counterparts. Dual Language for native Spanish speakers is a way to instruct students in core subjects the home language, building a strong foundation in the student's first language before expecting proficiency in the new language. Dual language takes different forms, the participants shared that their dual language classes are a mix of native English and native Spanish speakers. They reported that such a mix has shown to be positive in both student growth and reducing tensions between students. Principals who have bilingual programs other than dual language are mindful that students are being culled and grouped by language in the early school years. To mitigate this, they have taken steps to integrate students with their peers for at least part of their academic school day in fine arts, physical education or both.

The second area where principals respond to change is in educating staff members, primarily white, middle class women, to better understand how students from different cultures, races, and income groups see the world differently. Principals run book study groups, bring in speakers, and send teachers to workshops in an effort to open the eyes and minds of their teachers to the different ways that students learn and the different skills that these students bring to the school. Many of the principals champion these students because they know that they learn differently, not deficiently. Of concern are those principals who are buying into the work of some popular consultants whose work is not grounded in solid research, but whose work strikes a chord for principals. They recognize that they need to address a need, but perhaps they are looking for a quick fix. A truly democratic fix would not be so top-down.

In my analysis I found that principals are trying many things to address their diverse and changing student demographics. In some ways, they have been forced to find programs and

services because none were in place to begin with. They are also forced to bring students' test scores up and so are looking for whatever will help that. I found that principals, who are respectful of their minority populations, are less concerned with a silver bullet than in deepening the relationships than they have with individuals and families. This concurs with the research of Rodriguez and Alanis (2011) who noted that those principals who work with minority populations built strong relationships with all of their students, and then advocated for unique programs that served their particular needs best.

In this section I found that study participants deeply care about their community of learners, are making attempts to share decision-making, continue their laser focus on student learning, and are responding to changing student demographics. They are not deliberating and debating the purpose of or merits of some of these standardized, popular programs and services. Using Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) models of citizenship, I suggest that principals are playing it safe by primarily promoting a culture of personally responsible citizens.

School Principals' Shared Idea of a Democratic Ethos

In perhaps one of the most central points from the analysis of research findings is that principals do not have a shared idea of a democratic ethos. The interviews with the eleven principals were representative of the confusion that can be found in the general public over the meaning of democracy and the conflicted concepts of schooling as a private asset or public good (Apple, 2011, p. 29; Abowitz, 2008, p. 361; Barber, 2013; Biesta, 2007, p. 742; Giroux, 2009, p. 9; Parker, 2012; Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). Most of the interviewed principals embraced the view of Darling-Hammond (2010) that schools should prepare students to be critical thinkers, in charge of their own learning, and in possession of skills that will position them to be

independent, self-sufficient and self-supporting adults. Most expressed the assumption that when given a rigorous, standardized curriculum, students can become successful adults who are able to choose their own future because everyone has a shot at the American dream. On the other hand, they almost completely ignored evidence to the contrary that especially for their students of minority subgroups; the standardized curriculum that is devoid of diverse cultural, linguistic, and ethnic perspectives is ineffective (Banks, 2008).

There was also a lack of agreement about what it means to be contributing members of society. Some believe it means helping students to be self-sufficient and avoid becoming a burden to others. Others agree with Fazzaro's (2006) position that students advocate for themselves by learning to ask questions and develop informed judgments. Two principals were clear in their beliefs that students should be prepared to see themselves as interdependent with their community, and part of a larger world. A couple of their examples, a community garden and a playground anti-bully campaign, illustrated ideas similar to those mentioned by Feinberg (2012) who suggested that schools help children engage with others through shared interests in public spaces. Only the high school principal suggested that a contributing member of society required civic engagement of the kind that changes the status quo. His examples celebrated a successful student led effort to change state voting laws and the school's success in creating extra curricular programs for special education students that were commensurate with those available to other students but that had previously been either unavailable or inferior.

Using Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) concept of the good citizen, findings indicated that principal's perceptions fall along predictable lines. Although each principal had stories that suggested isolated elements from the other categories, most principals espouse a personally responsible citizen type viewpoint. For example, they have student councils, but those groups

have no decision-making power. Teachers serve on curriculum committees, but only to develop implementation strategies for district adopted policies. These principals generally see schooling as an individual's right and ticket to the lottery of the American dream. The responsibility placed upon school personnel is to follow current best practices, model the golden rule, and obey accountability measures.

Of the eleven interviewees, three, possibly four principals might be considered in the participatory citizen category. They encouraged greater participation in their schools, mostly on the part of teachers who have some decision-making authority. They emphasized that shared learning and collaboration had provided leadership and parent trust and support that would not have been realized with top-down decision-making. Some of these principals have participated in changing rules and regulations in their school districts.

My analysis of the eleven participants suggests that no principal in this study embodied what Westheimer & Kahne (2004) suggest as a justice-oriented citizen. Along with all of the positive, wholesome, and even heartwarming findings, there was uncertainty and apprehension about how educational priorities have changed, how students have changed, and how the world of public education has gotten increasingly harder and is less and less respected. Every principal voiced unease, frustration, and even anger over policies that are negatively affecting their current student body. Every principal refused to blame outside influences for not meeting expectations. Yet there was a lack of counter action. There was no talk of opposition to the policies and programs that they recognized as reducing freedoms and perpetuating inequality. What principals shared was that they each try their best to comply with rules and regulations while causing the least amount of disruption to their staff and students. They are caught in the middle.

A reflection about whether or not principals have a shared democratic ethos is important

to this study. At the school level, the principal's beliefs and views influence what the rest of the staff will attend to. On a larger scale, the silence of principals is paramount to a complete acquiescence to a neoliberal narrative and the corporate elite who are taking over educational policy.

School Leaders and Outside Pressures

In my study analysis, I concluded that there are at least three ways that principals seem to respond to the pressures of outside influence over school policy, curriculum, and assessments. Some principals adhere to the "current reform efforts" closely, earnestly believing that rigorous instruction will lead to better thinking overall and better scores, which promises to give students better opportunities, ultimately. This group believes that the use of student scores on tests is a valid measure of the effectiveness of their school. They also assume that the new reforms must be good for kids because those who are considered proven experts point to evidence that these programs have successfully driven up student test scores. These principals' efforts are directed towards getting teachers to 'see the light' so that they will adopt and be in lock step with the new reforms. They offer professional development, coaching, and persuasion to help teachers learn these new reform strategies. These principals are like evangelists and have added as many programs to their school as possible and as fast as they can be implemented. They earnestly believe that doing all of this should help students catch up, as these principals expressed dismay that currently, their students' test scores aren't what they should be.

A second group of principals is wrestling with the same concerns as the first group, but they seem less satisfied with the notion that implementing all these reforms will actually achieve the desired results. They see their teachers already working hard and in compliance with the new

reform efforts, but see that their students aren't 'getting there.' They are questioning, but haven't yet come up with a solution that feels right for their kids. Their efforts, for now, are directed towards implementing well only those reform efforts that they see helping their particular population. They are skeptical, but carry out the orders. They also seem to carry worry on their shoulders and are ever mindful that they need to do more for their students.

A third group of principals recognize that more is needed from the school than compliance with the new reform edicts. They expressed concern for inequities experienced by their particular students. Their efforts are directed to meeting district mandates in such a way as to meet the 'spirit' of them, but also getting students what they need. They work with teachers in a more gentle guiding nature, more like side-by-side collaboration. Some expressed that they are building in their staff the capacity for compassion. They are creating a school to be a welcome place for the community. Acting as part of a community, they can provide opportunities for students and families that other schools, other agencies even, do not. These principals are working a crazy amount of hours, yet seem more relaxed and appeared to be just as focused on teacher career growth as student academic and social-emotional growth.

The overbearing pressures caused by a neoliberal narrative and the corporate takeover of public schooling might explain these three leadership responses. In the absence of transformative leadership, Gross (2014) reminds us that school leaders have become silent and compliant. Each of the eleven principal participants talked about dealing with very difficult times in their chosen field of education. School policy is disrespectful to their students and their fellow educators alike. It is left to the principals to maintain a calm atmosphere and forward motion. They are in a very uneasy position. Principals in this study are responding to the pressures of the day in different ways but they are united in their perseverance as they care for

their students.

Conclusion

It is important to know what principals think about democracy because they have a significant influence on their community of learners (Gutmann, 2012; Furman and Starratt, 2002; Furman and Shields, 2005). Public school principals interviewed for this study are in a unique and challenging position. They are acutely focused on improving student learning and fulfilling the educational objectives of parents, school staff members, school district administrators and school board members, state and federal government mandates and regulations, and of course, society in general. They are thoroughly occupied with the complicated job of running a safe, rigorous, and transparent learning environment. They abide a seemingly endless stream of accountability measures to prove that they are leading schools towards ‘excellence’.

A synthesis of the interviews revealed what each of the principals, in their role as school leader, perceives as important to promote in public schooling. Each was optimistic, full of hope, and surprising energy. Every principal, to a person, shared stories that illustrated a deep compassion and affection for the children in their care as well as the adults who work with them. Each participant consciously works to create a caring school community. They find multiple ways to have a collaborative working environment that attends to student growth. It is their express intention to promote only those programs and services that they see as ‘good for children’, diligently and studiously seeking the best ways to prepare students for careers, college, and life. They are flexible and responsive to changing student demographics.

To my mind, principals are steering a ship of precious cargo along rocky shores without a clearly defined map and some uncertainty regarding how they will know when they’ll reach the

final destination. Or in the words of one of the principals, “we are flying the plane as we are building it” (Harrison, 2014). Principals have many building blocks to work with that would support and nurture schooling for democracy. They lack pedagogy, curriculum, and a clearly articulated commitment to a critical component of public education. One way to start would be for principals to figure out their own beliefs and ideological leanings about democracy and their own rights and their responsibilities as citizens of a democracy. They may then feel compelled to address the needs of the young people who need to learn how to be democratic citizens.

Chapter VII. Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to explore how public school principals conceptualized democratic citizenship. Further, I hoped to investigate what these school leaders perceived as their responsibility in educating students to become engaged and capable democratic citizens. The voice of the school principal is needed in current conversations about school reform. Yet rarely is the principal's voice heard except in research about school leadership. In this study, I listened to eleven public school principals who wrestle daily with a myriad of challenges that impact American's future – its youngest citizens. I started with a firm belief that democracy is a preferred way of living, that citizens must continually examine, enact, and contest democracy, that citizens must be given space and time to practice democratic citizenship, and that schools are such places to provide that time and space. In this section I offer some final words about the results of my research student.. I follow with limitations of this study, implications for practice, and possible future research.

Most Americans agree that Democracy is preferable to its alternatives (Gutmann, 1999a). Democracy is more than a form a government; it is a way of life, and a way of being within a community (Dewey, 1916). Furthermore, democracy will only last if citizens continually and continuously enact it (Dewey, 1916; Biesta, 2011; Diamond, 1997). That enactment requires that citizens have an understanding of their particular democracy's fundamentals; how they got it, why they have it still, and how it has changed over time. Citizens must possess and use skills to be fully engaged. Those skills include understanding how to live in a community, how to participate with voice, decision-making, and safeguarding for all members the rights that had been won. These skills and dispositions are learned and must be intentionally passed on to future generations (Barber, 2001; Goodlad, 2004). Amy Gutmann (2012) argues that schools have a

legitimate and imperative role in teaching children to be discerning democratic citizens. She adds that,

A democratic state must aid children in developing the capacity to understand and to evaluate competing conceptions of the good life and the good society. The value of critical deliberation among good lives and good societies would be neglected by a society that inculcated in children uncritical acceptance of any particular way or ways of personal and political life. (Gutmann, 2012, p. 8)

Most of us agree that public school education must include teachings that develop in children the capacity to become fully engaged democratic citizens (Youniss & Levine, 2009; Furman and Shields, 2006; Furman and Starratt, 2002). In fact, public schools do teach citizenship in a variety of ways that are formal, arbitrary, and even accidental (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). It is also true that educational decisions that school personnel make every day are influenced by their personal knowledge and concept of democracy, as well as their values, political and ideological beliefs. That in turn influences what will be taught about democracy, which suggests that it is important for educators to reflect critically upon the ways that they promote or ignore teaching students about democracy. Their decisions, deliberate or not, affect how students “understand the strengths and weaknesses of our society, and the ways that they should act as a citizen in a democratic society” (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004, p. 2). It is equally important that those of us, who have a vested interest in what children are learning, examine what educators are doing, or not doing to promote teaching for democracy. It matters what principals in public schools think about democracy.

I believe, as Benjamin Franklin insisted, that students must come from all demographics, in a safe and purposeful environment, and practice working together to solve the problems of the day (Harkavy and Hartley, 2008). I undertook this study hoping that I would find schools teaching our young people to be doing exactly that, learning to be engaged and informed

democratic citizens. I have struggled in my own school with finding ways to provide opportunities for my students to practice democracy. I sought examples for fighting against the status quo that has led to disrespectful and antidemocratic schooling for my students. I found that other principals face similar pressures to adhere to current educational policy measures. I did not find the perspective that school leaders should push back. I found an alarming lack of thinking about how to counter current practices that the principals acknowledged to be unfair to students and penalizing to educators.

The principals of this study diligently and compassionately strive to provide an excellent education for their particular students. They are guided by a moral and ethical imperative to serve their students to the best of their ability. They know their students personally and understand their unique needs. This study may provide evidence that public schools are vibrant and healthy places. Children are cared for and they are growing in every sense. The participants' stories illustrate a counter narrative to the current myth that public schools are broken.

The study principals are well-meaning school leaders who have been implementing many practices that are seeds for democratic thinking. These practices include providing greater voice to all constituents, sharing the leadership roles, increasing opportunities for collaboration and shared decision-making, and building stronger interpersonal relationships with all school stakeholders. While finding these democratic practices is promising, it is also true that they are unevenly scattered throughout the eleven study schools. I also found, as did Frick (2011) that these seeds are sown in service to the hegemonic mission to raise student academic achievement scores through the implementation of rigorous academic standards and upholding current accountability schemes.

As I listened to the reflections proffered by each principal, I noticed that they celebrate the benefits of those practices considered democratic and appear poised to perpetuate, even grow them. That said, and hopeful as that might be, there was little reflection about whether or not current educational policy works towards meeting the goals of public education, in a democratic society, beyond better test scores. Without deliberate critique of our educational priorities and knowledge privileging, our students and teachers are at the mercy of neoliberalism and runaway market capitalism (Barber, 2013; Apple, 2012). Where is the space to debate the twin virtues of individual freedoms and concern for the common good if not provided by public schools?

My research points out that I might be in a minority of those public school practitioners concerned about teaching for democracy. This discovery greatly concerns me because unless principal understand their role as nurturing democratic citizens, how will this become a priority in our public schools? So, I look forward to future investigations and conversations with principals about how we might change this reality. I have taken to heart Maxine Greene's admonishment that "we need to think again about overcoming our and other's peculiar silences where our commitments are concerned" (1995, p. 197).

Limitations of Study

The results presented in this study must be considered in context, as there were several limitations. I interviewed only eleven principals who work in schools located in and within a fifty-mile radius of a large urban area. This geographic area has a very diverse student population and each of these schools serves a large number of low income and minority students. These schools also have very similar programs and services, which could be due to their close proximity to one another and similar community contexts. This nearness may have an influence

on professional development opportunities and in the networking that principals engage. I do not know if any of the participants know one another, but it is possible that they partake of the same professional opportunities, hear the same speakers, and respond to regional stresses. Most certainly, the participants are obligated to adhere to the same state requirements and messages from the state superintendent and state board of education. The experiences of these principals may be different than those of principals who work in either more rural areas or in schools that have more homogeneous student populations. Their experiences may also have compelled them to respond to my requests for participation, creating a more alike group than anticipated.

Another limitation of this study is that there was only one interview with each participant that lasted approximately an hour in duration. Our conversations are representative of a point in time and principals had no opportunity to reflect upon their responses. Due to difficulties in scheduling time away from their professional responsibilities, it was a challenge to speak to the principals at all. Respondents to my request for participation were limited to those who had time over the summer to speak with me. That also may have limited the pool of respondents to a type of principal who felt obliged to, or particularly interested in, support someone in my position. Two principals had recently finished their own dissertation, two more are currently in a doctoral program, and a third principal hopes to start a program this year. Still others mentioned that they aspire to earn doctorate degrees.

A further limitation was with me, the interviewer. I was highly conscious of the time I was taking from these principals. In an effort not to ask leading questions, I found it difficult to get the participants to discuss their thoughts and perceptions about schooling for democracy. I may not have been able to draw out enough information from these participants to form a fuller assessment of their perceptions. I found that I got more proficient with each subsequent

interview and thus, later interviews may have yielded richer results.

Implications

The results of this study suggest that principals do foster caring relationships between students and adults and strive to provide a rich and thoughtful learning environment. These are necessary in any successful school. However, as Goodman (1992) reminds us, the missing ingredient for schools that serve democratic citizens is a democratic pedagogy (p. 178). This study has implications for practice. It points out that all eleven participating principals are either unaware or silent regarding their responsibility to lead schools that teach for democracy. Though a small sample, it seems that schools today lack a clearly articulated curriculum that would explicitly teach students about their democracy. Students have few enough experiences in which to practice acting as democratic citizens without the many mandates forced upon schools that are diametrically opposed to teaching for democracy. It is also true that the public school as an institution is inherently undemocratic. All of this suggests that the school leaders role is potentially pivotal.

Disappointingly, the study principals lack a clear sense of the responsibility given to public schools to teach children how to be engaged citizens. They seem unaware of competing democracy ideologies and the affect those ideologies have in shaping today's school policies and priorities. They mount no opposition to programs and polices they find overbearing and disrespectful to their particular students and the teachers who they care for and champion. This plays into the hands of neoliberals and what Steven Gross (2014) calls Venture Philanthropists. Without public opposition to corporate takeover, public schools have a dim future (p. 1111). It doesn't have to be this way. The educational research on teaching for democracy is rich and

growing (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004; Shields, 2010).

Principals, who are knowledgeable about what is required of democratic citizens and who are aware of the inherent tensions, might do things differently. They are likely to do things that transcend current educational policies, at least on a small scale. They can provide opportunities for students to practice democracy and help secure the blessings of democracy.

Future Directions

Principals could make this can happen if they were to change in two ways. Trevor Gale (2010) posits that there are two important requirements for school leaders who work in a democracy; being a researcher and fostering inquiry into practices that interrogate democratic action. The seeds of such are lying on the ground. Principals know that action research leads to better classroom instruction. On another front, Shields and Furman (2005) have written a framework for evaluating a school's commitment to teaching for democracy. But for this to happen, the debate must come to the forefront of principals' consciousness. In my limited study, each principal that participated expressed that my topic opened their eyes to something they had not thought about, but should have. Each school administrator that has asked me about my research has agreed that this is an important topic that requires our attention. This speaks to me. It suggests that principals use the power of their networking to talk about teaching for democracy. One avenue of further study is to find a way to open up this discourse among school leaders.

Concluding Thoughts

I learned much from this study. I was very heartened, even uplifted that the

public school principals, as I had hoped, are genuinely working as hard as they can to deliver the best instruction that they can for their students. However, the most important take-away for me is that school practitioners and education researchers, academics if you will, need to work together much more than they currently do. Democracy must be practiced. People need the capabilities to be engaged in the creation and continual maintenance of democracy. Schools, while not the only places that can foster the values, skills, and dispositions that are needed capabilities for democratic citizenship, are currently in the best position to do so. But, public schools today are hard pressed to devote time to cultivating citizens, and seem to have forgotten that to do so is one of their primary functions. Public school principals may need to be reminded of this essential and foundational purpose. I believe that they also need to dialogue with educational theorists and researchers so that both might learn from each other. Then, together, they might raise their voices in the national discourse on school reform and be heard.

My concern is to find out what we can do to open such spaces where persons speaking together and being together can discover what it signifies to incarnate and act upon values far too often taken for granted. We well know that defining this society in terms of the American Dream or in light of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness means nothing if the people in this society do not feel called upon to act upon such ideals and so realize them. We must intensify attentiveness to the concrete world around us in all its ambiguity, with its dead ends, and its open possibilities. And attending, as Dewey and Freire have helped us see, is not merely contemplating. It is to come to know in ways that might bring about change. (Maxine Greene, 1995, p. 68)

Appendix A: IRB Approval

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY



Office of Research Services
Institutional Review Board
1 East Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60604-2201
312-362-7593
Fax: 312-362-7574

Research Involving Human Subjects
NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

To: Judith M. McCann Floeter, Graduate Student, College of Education

Date: June 3, 2014

Re: Research Protocol # JM051414EDU
"Securing the Blessings: Principals' Perspectives of Public Education"

Please review the following important information about the review of your proposed research activity.

Review Details

This submission is an initial submission. Your research project meets the criteria for Expedited review under 45 CFR 45 CFR 46.110 under the following category(ies):

"(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes."

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

Approval Details

Your research was originally reviewed on May 21, 2014 and revisions were requested. The revisions you submitted on May 23, 2014 were reviewed and approved on June 2, 2014.

Approval Period: June 2, 2014 – June 1, 2015

Approved Consent, Parent/Guardian Permission, or Assent Materials:

1) Adult Consent, version May 22, 2014 (attached)

Other approved study documents:

1) Recruitment emails, version May 22, 2014 (attached)

Number of approved participants: 20 Total

You should not exceed this total number of subjects without prospectively submitting an amendment to the IRB requesting an increase in subject number.

Funding Source: 1) PI – Self Funded

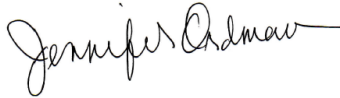
Approved Performance sites: 1) DePaul University

Reminders

- Only the most recent IRB-approved versions of consent, parent/guardian permission, or assent forms may be used in association with this project.
- Any changes to the funding source or funding status must be sent to the IRB as an amendment.
- Prior to implementing revisions to project materials or procedures, you must submit an amendment application detailing the changes to the IRB for review and receive notification of approval.
- You must promptly report any problems that have occurred involving research participants to the IRB in writing.
- If your project will continue beyond the approval period indicated above, you are responsible for submitting a continuing review report at least 3 weeks prior to the expiration date. The continuing review form can be downloaded from the IRB web page.
- **Once the research is completed, you must send a final closure report for the research to the IRB.**

The Board would like to thank you for your efforts and cooperation and wishes you the best of luck on your research. If you have any questions, please contact me by telephone at (312) 362-7497 or by email at jordman@depaul.edu

For the Board,



Jennifer Ordman, B.S.
Assistant Director of Research Compliance
Office of Research Services

Cc: Karen Monkman, Ph.D., Faculty Sponsor, College of Education
Barbara Rieckhoff, Ph.D., LRB Co-Chair, College of Education

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Professional Background Information

- To begin, tell me about your professional background, why you became a principal, and how you came to be principal of this school,
 - How long in education?
 - What keeps you here?
 - What are professional goals?

2. Personal Background Information

- Tell me about your personal background, where you grew up, where you went to school, and to what you attribute your desire to be an educator.
 - What are some personal interests?
 - To whom do you look for inspiration?

3. School Background Information

- Take me on a tour of your school. Tell me about the things that are really important to this school.
 - What things are sacred?
 - How did they come to be sacred?
 - What might be an embarrassment to you about this school or something you wish would be different?
 - Tradition?
 - Motto, school pledge, ?
 - Mascot?
 - School song?

- Books or poems written by, for, about the school?
- Special events at the beginning or end of the year? Or another time?
- What milestones have happened on your watch that you are particularly proud of?

4. School Demographics

- Tell about the students, staff and a bit about the community.
 - What are the economic concerns of your students?
 - What are the social/emotional concerns of your students?
 - What are some things that your school does to help students meet these challenges?

5. Democratic Community Information

- I'm interested in finding out more about the inner workings of your school and your role. Can you tell me story about a time when the school faced a particularly difficult challenge that affected the entire school, and describe what happened?
 - What are the stated values of the school, how these were determined, and who is responsible for keeping them alive?
 - What are some unstated values?
- Can you elaborate on how are decisions made about things that are important to the staff and students and how do you feel about how decisions are made?
 - Curriculum
 - Behavior rules
 - Safety
- Can you describe what typically happens when an issue comes up that is brought up by a staff, by parent, by student? (Example...parent angered about a textbook, or a graffiti

problem with students on the way to/from school, teachers loss of plan time due to special event?)

- What is your favorite story to tell about how things get done at this school?
- Can you describe your collaborations and interactions with teachers and how you feel things are going?
- What is something your non-certified staff are particularly proud of at this school?
- What is your favorite parent/student story?
- How do you feel about changes that have occurred in the school or education in general during your tenure?
- What are changes that you wish you could make at this school? Internal, external? And what keeps you from making those changes?
- What is the funniest thing that has happened to you at this school?
- What is the most difficult decision you have had to make, and why?
- After you retire, or move on, what will people remember about you? Say about you?
- How do you see your school having prepared students to assume their future role as an active democratic citizen?
- What role do you think schools should play in preparing children to be more engaged in civic activities?

Appendix C: Glossary of Terms

This is a list of frequently used terms used by principals in the interviews.

AP – Advanced Placement Courses (in high schools)

BD/ED – Behavior Disorders / Emotional Disorders

ELA – English Language Arts

CCSS – Common Core State Standards

IEP – Individualized Education Plan – A legal document creating a plan and goals for students in special education.

ISAT – Illinois State Achievement Tests – State achievement tests in math and language art and given to all students in public schools of grades 3-8 and 11. Additionally, science tests are given to students in grades 4 and 7.

PARCC – Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

PBIS – Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports

PD – Professional Development

PERA – Performance Evaluation Reform Act (Illinois law reforming teacher and principal evaluations. Beginning 2016 teachers and principals, student test results will be included in individual employee evaluations.

PLC – Professional Learning Communities

PTA, PTG, PTO, PTC – Parent Teachers Association or Group, or Organization, or Club. There is a distinction in their bylaws, but essentially, these are Parent-Teachers groups that support fundraising and fun activities for students in elementary schools.

RtI – Response to Intervention

RTTT – Race to the Top

SES – Socio-Economic Status

SIP – School Improvement Plan

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