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MY SUPERINTENDENT JOURNEY FROM EDUCATOR TO ACTIVIST:  
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ACROSS THREE DECADES

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Educational Leadership

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by  
Betty Thompson Bagley  
May 2023

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Accepted by:  
Dr. Jane Clark Lindle, Committee Chair  
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## ABSTRACT

National statistics show increasing turnover in the superintendency. Additionally, neither practicing nor former superintendents record experiences within that public role. Given a two-century historical gap in the literature of few accounts from superintendents' perspectives, my study described my journey through three superintendencies from 1993 to 2020. I used professional, self-identity as the lens for a reflexive autoethnography to answer the question: What do my professional artifacts, documents, archival notes, and perspectives from colleagues and state officials reveal about educational changes in the last 30 years that influenced the superintendent's office?

To find the answer, I used autoethnography, a reflective research method, which included systematic data analysis of a repository of personal artifacts combined with a confirmatory set of interviews from selected key informants involved with events connected to the artifacts or creating the artifacts.

These data sources, including 827 artifacts and two interviews, answered the question about educational change in my years in the superintendency with the following categories of trends: (a) curriculum development and management, (b) finance, and (c) accountability. More than half the artifacts (55%) and the interviews confirmed that the superintendent's role changed to curriculum leadership over those three decades. Finance artifacts (25%) and legislated accountability were intertwined with curriculum development and management.

This three-article dissertation makes a two-fold contribution to the need for superintendents' firsthand perspectives alongside specifying systematic methods for artifact analysis in autoethnography. The first article detailed instrument development for artifact

analysis with a confirmatory interview protocol. In the second article, I presented a curriculum leadership framework for practicing and aspiring superintendents. The final article calls for practicing superintendents to use their position and voice in advocacy and accountability for their students and communities.

Superintendents' silence about their experiences in their era of reforms, cultural changes, or daily confrontations and decisions left a void in knowledge about this important role in public education. My work contributed a set of instruments for artifact analysis as well as presented a framework for superintendents' curriculum leadership and offered practical insights into their daily obligation as advocates for the communities they serve.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. Only they know the time and effort spent studying, researching, and writing in pursuing a Ph.D. My husband, Sack, cheered me on with his love, support, and enthusiasm. Our daughter Ty would not permit me to give up. Thank you for your steadfast love and support during this journey. Our son Chad encouraged me to follow my dreams and stay the course. Our daughter-in-law Susie and my son-in-law Will cheered me to the finish line. Thank you, Aunt Peggy, and Aunt Christine, for believing in me and being constantly amazed at the length of time it took to pursue this degree. My parents, James and Elizabeth Thompson, and my grandmother, Eva, there is no doubt about the joy, happiness, and pride you would possess if only you knew.

I dedicate this work to my grandchildren, William, Andrew, and Anne. My motto to them has always been not to give up. I hope that completing this dissertation demonstrates to them the importance of pursuing your dreams and having a purpose in your life. I am so proud of each of you. You continue to bring honor to yourself and our family each day.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to past and present superintendents who can fill the gap in our literature about the day-to-day operations of the school superintendent. I urge you to share your stories and contribute to a needed body of work that can aid in developing future superintendents. This void will continue to deepen if we as superintendents do not lead the way.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Words cannot express my gratitude and most profound appreciation for Dr. Jane Clark Lindle's relentless efforts, guidance, and patience shown me during this Ph.D. pursuit. I would not have completed this degree without her constant belief in my skills and the importance of my research.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

In each of South Carolina's 78 school districts, the local school board employs a professional superintendent to serve the district's children, families, schools, and community at large (South Carolina Code §43-161). According to the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE, 2020), 51,780 educational professionals live in and provide their expertise to their communities with only 78 individuals serving as each school district's superintendent of education, the chief education officer (CEO). The state endows its CEO with responsibility and accountability for each of the 78 communities' children's education (South Carolina Code §59-13-60). Most citizens learn about their schools' CEO through media accounts that may give biographical information, summaries of events, and quotes alongside more informal channels such as rumors, gossip, or social media speculations and opinions. Perhaps as evidence of such incomplete and sketchy sources, Hodgkinson and Montenegro (1999) reported that stakeholders lack information or understanding about the local school superintendent's position or the role's importance. Who is this person who chose the profession of education and rose to its highest leadership level, assuming both school communities' trust and burdens of accountability?

I answer this question through autoethnography to describe my professional experiences over three superintendencies serving three South Carolina districts over a span of nearly three decades. I write this autoethnography inspired by a quote by an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century superintendent, Aaron Gove, which I initially found in Tyack's (1976) work on the superintendency. Gove made his remarks to the National Education Association proceedings in 1900 at Charleston, South Carolina as follows:

The deaths of great men in national and political history are commemorated by song, story, and memorial days, Aaron Gove told his fellow school superintendents in 1900.

Only in secluded family circles, and midst the personal friends, are the works and lives of heroic schoolmasters recorded and remembered. (Gove, 1900, p. 257)

Scholars of the superintendency (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Tyack, 1976) reported a loss in both educational and historical literature due to past superintendents' failure to share their memoirs. Potentially, practicing, and aspiring superintendents could learn from such superintendents' histories about professional experiences, personal thoughts, and reflective records of their tenures. If superintendents wrote accounts of notable events, political, cultural and/or economic eras, with associated reforms such accounts might reveal the fear, joy, and despair that these educational leaders experienced as they shaped the office of the superintendent (Callahan, 1962, 1966; Cuban, 1976; Eaton, 1990; Glass, 2000; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Tyack, 1976; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Stories about superintendents filled with purpose could help students who are candidates for leadership degrees or licenses figure out their mission and the legacies they face (Cuban, 1976; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). In addition, these specific accounts potentially offer an analysis of plans that turned into disappointments, misperceptions, or betrayals and overall lessons learned about communities, culture, and socio-economic challenges to public education (Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1976; Eaton, 1990; Spring, 2008, 2011; Tyack, 1976).

Families, friends, colleagues, communities, and institutions recall events and special occasions in an ancient practice, that of storytelling (Chang, 2008). Organizations, ethnic groups, and institutions recognize that acknowledging and studying history promotes appreciation of the present (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995, p. 3). Often, former colleagues get together and reminisce

about events, decisions, and special occasions, but writing about these memories rarely happens (Glass, 2000; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Tyack, 1976).

Despite the links between history and storytelling very few superintendents write such detailed histories or memoirs (Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1976; Cubberley, 1916; Garza, 2008; Janak, 2014; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Tyack, 1976; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Extremely few leave written memoirs, a frequent practice among corporate Chief Executive Officers (CEOs). Instead, superintendents offer a legacy of silence. If instead, they changed such a legacy, superintendents' stories could help others to understand how their experiences in the office of the superintendent formed the educational history of U. S. schooling (Björk et al., 2014; Glass, 2000; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Kowalski, 2006; Tyack, 1976; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Glass (2000) suggested, that “educational reforms and changes in regulations affect the superintendency”, and in turn, the ramifications shake the classroom door (p. 1).

Superintendents' rationale for decisions or lack of decisions made during their tenure could help present and future superintendents better understand their key role in the implementation process for policies, reforms, and practices. Local school superintendents carry responsibilities for instruction, school operations, and accountability; yet the communities that superintendents serve do not know them well (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999, p. 5). Hodgkinson and Montenegro (1999) argued that the nation's global ranking aligns closely with success in educating its public and that, in turn, implicates the school superintendent's successes or failures.

If superintendents supply the key leadership for student success, then those leaders' stories about their emotional strains, disappointments, and sacrifices could illuminate how superintendents contributed to shaping U.S. Education. Superintendents sharing their

personalized stories create an opportunity to motivate parents, teachers, and others to alter their views of school leaders as bureaucratic and out of touch (Carr, 2007). Stories of personal triumphs, achievements, disruptions, and disloyalties revealed by superintendents reinforce and guide future leaders to a deeper appreciation of relationships in the educational process (Carr, 2007; Tyack, 1976).

### **Background and Literature Review**

This thematic literature review includes a chronology of the U. S. school superintendent's position; an overview of federal laws that influenced the superintendency; significant South Carolina laws that changed education and the superintendency; and South Carolina history and the superintendency. I used several search engines to find/locate publications, which focused on school superintendents and education policies. I used the following eight bibliographic databases; Clemson University Dissertations and Theses; (b) EBSCO eBook collection; (c) Education Research Complete; (d) Educator's Reference Complete; (e) Education Resources Information Center (ERIC); (f) Clemson University Libraries subscription to Google Scholar; (g) Journal Storage (JSTOR), and the South Carolina Statehouse Code of Laws. I searched these resources for the following topics and keywords:

1. Performance and Accountability Standards for School Commission (PASS)
2. politics of accountability
3. school organization and legislation
4. special education laws
5. superintendency
6. superintendent
7. superintendent-scholar reform

### *National Chronology on the Superintendent Position*

Hodgkinson and Montenegro (1999) referred to school superintendents as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and commented that when compared to CEOs of other professions or organizations, the superintendency is little known or understood (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999, p. 8). Other historians and scholars of the superintendency (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Tyack, 1976), listed the problem of sporadically written accounts concerning superintendents and their administrative duties, social characteristics, career lines, and expectations, still, with scant information about their personal or professional experiences. These scholars and historians (Janak, 2014; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Kowalski, 2006; Petersen & Barnett, 2003, 2005; Tyack, 1976) complained that sketchy accounts dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century create a problem in interpreting the role of the school superintendent as it emerged. Accounts are limited to public records and dates but offer no insight into how the school leaders felt about their work and how they accommodated or led for their times and eras (Blount, 1999; Button, 1966; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Janak, 2014; Janak & Moran, 2010; Kowalski, 2005, 2006; McCarty & Ramsey, 1968; Spring, 2011; Thomas, 2001; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

In 1915, Cubberley predicted the school superintendent' position as a professional role, and he envisioned the prominence that this position would play in the development of U.S. communities. He declared that the school superintendent was unlike other municipal or county officials in terms of character demands and constant scrutiny (Cubberley, 1915, 1916, 1934). Other scholars and historians of the superintendency described the position as ranging from one of a "hired hand" (Cuban, 1976, p. 24) or more respectfully, as the "linchpin for the rise" and "decline of a nation" and hopefully, as "builders of the American dream" (Glass, 2000, p. 2).

Still, more scholars of the role have offered analogies with other positions such as secular clergy, role models, school inspectors, reporters, educational heroes, business managers, and janitors (Björk et al., 2014; Blount, 1999; Eaton, 1990; Glass, 2000; Ingle & Lindle, 2018; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Mattingly, 1975; Thomas, 2001; Tyack, 1976).

Scholars focused on the superintendency summarize the primary reasons for establishing the superintendent's position as due to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries' population explosion, particularly in the cities, because of immigration and industrialization (Björk et al., 2014; Callahan, 1966; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Cuban, 1976; Eaton, 1990; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Kowalski, 2006). These influences coincided with the Progressive social and educational movement (Button, 1966; Cubberley, 1934; Duffy, 2016; Kowalski, 2006; Spring, 2011; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). The agenda promoted by the Progressive Movement included the assertion that education had become too demanding for part-time public service volunteers; instead, requiring a professional expert, the superintendent (Björk et al., 2014; Callahan, 1966, Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Eaton, 1990; Kowalski, 2006). The new position mirrored the expanding image and power of the school board (Cuban, 1976). Ironically, as a "child of the school board, the superintendency would mature, struggle with its parent endlessly, and never escape that fact of ancestry" (Cuban, 1976, p. 11). Tyack (1974) delivered further insight into this conflict, and remarked, "Superintendents often found that they could examine teachers but not hire them, write a course of study but not purchase textbooks, compile reports on school architecture but not decide who would construct the building" (p. 79).

Superintendents' 19th-century job descriptions varied in expectations, as most school boards did not understand what the job entailed. Instead, boards advertised for candidates by using common terms such as the following: a man of strength, courage, personal force, general



knowledge, Christian character, missionary enterprise, Puritan stock, pure, humbleness, enthusiasm, and personal honor, and generally offering the position to White men (Cubberley, 1915, 1916; Tyack, 1976). These characteristics reflected how the 19<sup>th</sup> century linked this early era to religious virtues and secular learning to address the progressive image of common schools, or public education (Cubberley, 1934; Smith, 1967; Spring, 2011; Thomas, 2001; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). The Progressive Movement's drive to professionalize education as a career eventually included official licensing or certification, but initially, church membership or political party affiliation served as an employment criterion rather than professional training or state authorization (Mattingly, 1975; Petersen & Barnett, 2005; Reese, 2005; Tyack, 1976). The pay was another common characteristic among early superintendents which created a need for other employment in other professional disciplines, spending part of their time practicing law, serving in the ministry, operating a business, and participating in politics (Button, 1966; Duffy, 2016; Smith, 1967; Tyack, 1976).

Historians of the superintendency's 19<sup>th</sup>-century origins share a common understanding of its lofty social perch, which Tyack and Hansot (1982) called, "the remarkable consistency in the moral portrait of superintendents since 1899" (p. 168). Callahan (1962) noted the expected characteristics of clean living, humbleness, and morality remained constant even as the position became politicized through taxation, school board elections, and bond contests for funding (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Björk & Lindle, 2001; Hunter, 1997).

In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, scientific and business language began to influence educational leadership and structure (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2006; Thomas, 2001; Tyack, 1974, 1976; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). These influences required superintendents to balance their religious upbringing with becoming educational managers and efficiency experts (Callahan,

1966). School leaders began to enroll in training programs more like managers or business executives in a business or industrial setting (Björk et al., 2014; Callahan, 1966; Glass, 2000; Kowalski, 2006; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Such professionalization divided school governance responsibilities with boards becoming a policymaking, and presumably non-partisan, body that delegated daily operations to the superintendent (Björk et al., 2014; Callahan, 1966; Glass, 2000; McCarty & Ramsey, 1968; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

The professionalism movement led to the formation of professional organizations, including the National Education Association (NEA) (Urban, 2016). Within the NEA, a department was formed for the superintendency (Tienken, 2021; Urban, 2016). That department began the decennial surveys of superintendents in the early 1920s, and despite a pause during the 1930s and 40s, continues issuing surveys today (AASA, 2019; 2022). Typically, these reports provide a demographic description of current superintendents (AASA, 2022; Kowalski, 2011; Tienken, 2021). Until the 2010 decennial report, AASA, the School Superintendents Association, formerly the American Association of School Administrators, published most of the summaries among its members and “in other formats” (Tienken, 2021, p. 11). Both the 2010 and 2020 survey results appear in book form with descriptive statistics associated with aspects of superintendents’ social demographics and work (Kowalski, 2011; Tienken, 2021).

The 2020 demographically typical U.S. “superintendent was a married, white male with prior experience as a principal, [and] two – eight years of experience being a superintendent” (Tienken, 2021, p. xiii). The usual constraint of survey research applies to these demographic snapshots offered about every ten years. As Tienken wrote, “The difficulty in examining the complexity of the superintendency and those who occupy the position cannot be overstated” (p. 16). On one hand, these reports portray aspects of the individuals occupying the position of

superintendent at that moment in time. On the other hand, these momentary snapshots do not delve in any depth into the views of these men or women about their work and their understanding of that work or the communities they serve. Polling their opinions is different than hearing their voices or reading their memoirs (Acker-Hocevar et al., 2009; Cuban, 1976; Tyack, 1976).

The position of superintendent of schools follows the socio-economic changes in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the resulting Progressive Movement that promoted the schooling of children by an educated workforce led by professional school administrators (Button, 1966; Ingle & Lindle, 2018). Traditionally, the people occupying the position of superintendent reflect a masculine and White demographic that conforms to community expectations with very few recent changes (Callahan, 1962; Cubberley, 1915, 1934; Grogan & Miles Nash, 2021; Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022; Spring 2011; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, superintendents follow a trajectory from the classroom through the principalship to Chief Education Officer in the role of a superintendent with scant change (P.L. 86-158; Petersen & Title, 2021). Despite these descriptions, we have little insight into how these leaders approach their work, and very few explanations in their own words of how they deal with laws mandated policies, or community conflict (Gove, 1900; Tyack, 1976).

### ***Significant Federal Laws and Policies Influencing the Superintendency***

The laws of the U. S. nation and individual states affected schools and the superintendency. The Civil Rights era of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century offered an example of the tension between state and federal government over public schools (Bagwell, 1972; Brewer et al., 2015; Orfield, 1969). The U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v Board of Education* to desegregate schools represented a decade and a half of litigation that began in a small district in

South Carolina (Brewer et al., 2015; Edgar, 1998, 2006; Truitt, 2006, 2009; Williams, 2007).

Yet, the stories of the superintendents involved in this case are third-party reports, not their memoirs, and with few of their artifacts, which might have been helpful to other superintendents over time (e.g., Edgar, 1998; Truitt, 2006; Williams, 2007).

After the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, another sixteen years passed before schools in South Carolina were fully integrated (Bagwell, 1972; Orfield, 1969, Truitt, 2006). South Carolina's General Assembly approved a 3-cent sales tax to equalize Black and White schools (Edgar, 1998). At the time, White politicians and citizens believed by spending millions of dollars to upgrade Black students' facilities could support their argument of separate, but equal systems, would be enough to delay integration and in many areas, it did (Dobrasko, 2005).

At least one South Carolina former superintendent recognized the value of his memoirs over addressing the state's lingering two systems for schooling. Dr. Thomas F. Truitt, a superintendent in Florence County District One, wrote a book detailing how he led a district through a court-ordered integration plan (Truitt, 2006). His book, *Brick Walls*, chronicled an 11-year tenure beginning in 1987, three decades after the 1954 Brown decision. Dr. Truitt's story is one example of the value of superintendents sharing dialogues, reflections, mistakes, and triumphs. Integration is only one event that demonstrates how public leadership, including the superintendency, emerged simultaneously to multiple social and civic events and changes, but without concomitant narratives from school superintendents (Björk et al., 2014; Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1976; Cubberley, 1915, 1916; Eaton, 1990; Glass, 2000; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, (1999); Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Kowalski, 2005; Thomas, 2001; Tyack, 1976; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson's declarations about the Civil Rights movement as well as his War on Poverty created a controversial period in the history of the United States (Brauer, 1982). Nevertheless, these changes also became established in educational policies (Bailey & Danziger, 2013; Germany, 2007). The Civil Rights Act soon became a "pocketbook issue" (Bailey & Danziger, 2013, p. 3). For example, both political movements empowered President Johnson to use the power of the federal purse to foster integration and reduce racial inequities in schools and other public spaces (Bailey & Danziger, 2013; Hess, 2008).

During the years between 1954 and 1964, other significant federal laws dealt with the inclusion of all students in public education, expanding concerns about racial segregation to the civil rights of students with disabilities. The Education of Mentally Retarded Children Act of 1958 (U.S. Congress, 1958) and the Training of Professional Personnel Act of 1959 (P. L. 86-158), called for preparing teachers and leaders in proper pedagogy for exceptional children (Yell, 2006, p.79). Parents of special education children continued to seek equal opportunities for their disabled children and "were essential contributors to the legislative strategy that resulted in national reform" (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987, p. 369). Yell (2006) cites two important court cases, the "1971 *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth* and 1972 *Mills v. Board of Education* led to the enactment of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the 1975 PL. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act" (p. 79).

Among the omnibus federal legislation in the War on Poverty's Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965 (P.L. 89-10) that set up Head Start through Title 1 (sometimes known as Chapter 1 in authorizations and reauthorizations) of ESEA (U.S. Congress, 1965), compensatory education was enacted. Compensatory education was designed to improve the performance of underachieving children, "especially the poor and people of color" (Tyack, 1974,

p. 281). During this time there was “great social tension as the concepts of equal opportunity and civil rights were tested in society and applied to the schools” (Norton et al., 1996, p. 15). As schools served as “instruments of social policy,” the superintendency transformed, still, even in public and civil roles, superintendents continued to remain silent about their professional perspectives and their life stories (Norton et al., 1996, p. 15).

These laws affirmed that the expansion in who attended a single public school system implicated teachers and school leaders in accommodating the diversity among students (Kowalski, 2005). In Kowalski’s (2005) view, many of the policies “acknowledged the importance of strengthening teaching to enhance student learning, particularly with children viewed as being at risk” (p. 48) and such policies required school leadership to support teaching and learning.

Social changes and challenges brought by federal mandates and diverse interests changed the superintendency (Björk et al., 2014; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Kowalski, 2005; Norton et al., 1999; Superfine, 2005; Tyack, 1974; Tyack, 1974; Vinovskis, 2009; Wamba, 2008; Yell & Drasgow, 2005). While scholars recognize these influences on superintendents, rarely have superintendents narrated their reactions and strategies given the surrounding politics, policies, pressures, and financial conditions of schooling in local communities.

### ***South Carolina Laws Influencing Education and the Superintendency***

While national movements and federal laws affected South Carolina, state legislative actions also framed educational policy and practices. During the 1970s, South Carolina began to slowly emphasize the improvement of student achievement replacing efforts to stall integration (Bartels, 2004; Edgar, 1998). In 1970, Governor Robert McNair called for a penny sales tax for education and the establishment of a statewide kindergarten program (Truitt, 2009). The South

Carolina Education Finance Act (1977) and the Educator Improvement Act (1979) “laid the foundation for what would be one of the most important pieces of education legislation ever passed in South Carolina” (Edgar, 1998, p. 556).

The South Carolina Education Finance Act was a major educational reform passed in South Carolina at the end of the 1970s. In the mid-1980s, Peterson and Strasler (1986) argued that this law was “one of the few finance and equalization acts passed in the country which was not forced by litigation nor facilitated by huge state surpluses” (p. 4). The aim of this law was “to distribute state funds in a way that guarantees that each school district has enough funding to provide a basic foundation education program” (Jones, 1992, p. 30).

Reading, math, and writing were the basic skills included in the Basic Skills Assessment Act fully enacted in 1983 (Peterson & Strasler, 1986). The Education Improvement Act influenced standards used to fully certify and employ teachers in South Carolina (Peterson & Strasler, 1986). These state laws laid the foundation for greater reform in 1984.

In 1984, the South Carolina General Assembly enacted another significant law. Governor Richard Riley was instrumental in persuading business leaders, parents, teachers, and students to rally around a bill supplying more money for education while assessing classroom effectiveness (Edgar, 1998). South Carolina took part in an era in public education when public education’s stakeholders became so sufficiently displeased to trigger a nationwide reform movement (Glass, 2000). In 1987, a group of business leaders appointed by Governor Carroll Campbell developed a master plan for public education to carry into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Edgar, 1998). Known as South Carolina’s Target 2000, School Reform for the Next Decade Act, the goals were to “reduce the dropout rate, improve teacher training, and make arts education available in all schools” (Edgar, 1998, p. 556).

In 1997, Governor David Beasley convened a group of business leaders, civic leaders, and educators; Performance and Accountability Standards for the School Commission (PASS) to make recommendations to the state about standards-based education and accountability state (Exec. Order No. 97-05, 1997). The 1999 South Carolina Accountability Act ushered in state-level policy focused on student achievement. One year later, Congress passed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation under unprecedented circumstances. As did most states, South Carolina responded to the requirements of NCLB by collapsing the requirements of the 1999 Accountability Act into the state's NCLB plan (US Department of Education, 2006).

These state actions created a sense of urgency for the superintendency. South Carolina's educational policies and practices began to usher in accountability through finances, program changes, standards-based curriculum, and the improvement of student achievement for all students (Bartels, 2004; Edgar, 1998; Glass, 2000; Jones, 1992; Peterson & Strasler, 1986; Truitt, 2009). Superintendents struggled to understand, implement, and communicate these changes to stakeholders often acquired new skills during these struggles. Such changes to the superintendency went undocumented continuing to widen the historical gap (Björk et al., 2014; Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1976; Cubberley, 1915; Cubberley, 1916; Eaton, 1990; Glass, 2000; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995).

### *South Carolina Superintendency*

Records reveal few anecdotes and quotes about South Carolina superintendents. In 1924, the Board of Education in Ridgeville, South Carolina appointed Mary Gordon Ellis, as district superintendent of Jasper County (Spruill et al., 2012). During her tenure, "a school bus transportation system was instituted in the county to close a one-room rural school allowing students to have greater educational experiences in a larger setting" (Governor's Office



Commission on Women, 1995, p. 4). Superintendent Ellis offered opportunities for teachers to continue their educational growth (Governor's Office Commission on Women, 1995). She wanted teachers to be trained better and have sufficient school supplies and textbooks (Brockington, 2016). However, the popular opinion of local citizens shifted against her when she insisted on "school bus transportation for Black and White students" (Governor's Office Commission on Women, 1995, p. 4). The local district school board fired Ellis because she tried to serve the county's Black students with a plan to buy textbooks and hire an appropriately credentialed supervisor (Brockington, 2016).

In 1995, legislators enacted a bill commissioning a painting of Ms. Ellis because she was the South Carolina General Assembly's first woman to serve in its Senate (Brockington, 2016; Governor's Office on the Commission of Women, 1995). Her legacy consists of a portrait and three paragraphs in a pamphlet that briefly describes her compassion for students of all races. However, her voice stays unrecorded, and her insights as a school superintendent stay silenced. With Dr. Thomas F. Truitt's (2006) book about desegregation, Ellis' record is just one of two 20<sup>th</sup> Century accounts about practicing South Carolina superintendents and the sole self-report about being a superintendent. Otherwise, South Carolina superintendents remain silent refraining from telling their own stories. Stories help to clarify, describe, define, and explain but most importantly teach others. Aspiring school leaders seeking certification in administration need a glimpse into the day-to-day burdens and decisions made by superintendents, especially during challenging times in South Carolina.

### **Problem Statement**

Across two centuries of educational and national growth, multiple scholars of U.S. education history and the superintendency reported that few stories from superintendents exist

(Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Tyack, 1976) although survey reports provide periodic updates on the role's conditions and occupants. Tyack (1976) concluded that "the main problem the educational historian faces is to fit these disparate data, often presented snapshot style and limited to particular time and place, into an interpretive framework" (p. 257). Even the most recent editor of the AASA's decennial surveys of superintendents noted the inability of snapshot-survey research to capture the "complexity of the superintendency" (Tienken, 2021, p. 11) or represent the insights and reflections about their work among those position incumbents. Many of the existing descriptions of the superintendency or individual superintendents fall into categories such as historic events, news accounts, or policy analyses rather than developing from the day-to-day reflections of superintendents who managed and led the change (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Kowalski, 2005; Thomas, 2001).

Each superintendent potentially contributed to shaping the position of the superintendency. Superintendents create the day-to-day agenda that shapes the operation and direction of the school district, yet these everyday experiences have not been recorded by historians (Tyack, 1976). Kowalski (2005) wrote that since the creation of the office during the late 1830s, the role of the CEO grew more "extensive and challenging without a clear understanding of its evolving leadership role" (p. 1). Konnert and Augenstein, (1995) reasoned that the superintendency changed due to growth and shifting demands in public education (p. 3). The lack of superintendents' recorded perspectives or memoirs contributes to the problem of missing insights about the superintendent's role, which could be instructive to today's Chief Education Officers or those aspiring to that role. The need for superintendents to raise their voices and tell their own stories is important for capturing this public leadership role.

## **Research Question**

Given multiple sources that lament a failure to document superintendents' perspectives through biographies or other forms of memoirs, my research question focuses on my work as a superintendent. My research question is: What do my professional artifacts, documents, archival notes, and perspectives from colleagues and state officials reveal about educational changes in the last 30 years that influenced the superintendent's office?

To answer this question, I used methods associated with autoethnography. My story described three terms as superintendent in three districts in the same state over three decades of significant changes in South Carolina's educational system. My autoethnography contributes to reversing a widening gap in the literature due to a long-standing practice of superintendents not narrating their professional experiences, personal thoughts, and overall reflective conclusions about their tenures (Björk et al., 2014; Callahan, 1966; Carr, 1962; Cuban, 1976; Cubberley, 1915; 1916; Eaton, 1990; Glass, 2000; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995). My story may generate more stories from superintendents' reflections on their roles in educational policies and change among the towns, regions, and states where they lived and worked. I intend to contribute insights for practicing and aspiring superintendents about the role.

## **Method**

The methods of autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Chang et al., 2010); Horowitz, 2012; Jones et al., 2013; Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Vryan et al., 2003) provided a vehicle for telling my experiences as superintendent across three decades of fast-paced national and state school reforms that collided with a traditional culture embedded in the three regions of South Carolina that I served. Among the regions, one is known as an economic engine (the

Upstate), and the two others are known for intergenerational poverty (the Low Country and the Lakelands) (Edgar, 1998).

I chose autoethnography because I can illustrate the relationship between myself and others as we negotiated the different conditions that were present in three superintendencies expanding over the turn from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Chang and Hernandez (2010) explained the value of autoethnography as a design that allows the contribution of personal data as a tool for understanding connection with others in the context of our work (p. 1).

Autoethnography allows the use of professional artifacts, documents, and notes to explore and reflect on a wide range of occurrences that are both personal and in association with other individuals (Chang, 2008; Ngunjiri et al., 2010). When individuals create their autoethnographies, they depend on firsthand experiences to create descriptions of educational and cultural experiences for a deeper interpretation of those events (Jones et al., 2013). My records reflect three superintendencies to illustrate a specific culture, the education profession, and three communities in South Carolina (Chang, 2008; Jones et al., 2013; Ngunjiri et al., 2010).

During these three superintendencies and coinciding decades, I kept agendas, notes, minutes, newspaper articles, documents, letters, and various other artifacts detailing day-to-day operations, events, and experiences. These documents provide one source of data using another source of interviews with selected contemporaries involved in those events (Chang, 2008).

Potential interviewees included current and former state governors, current and former elected state superintendents of public education, current and former district-level superintendents, a variety of various stakeholders and policy task force members, as well as staff members among the districts in which I served. These interviews offered a validating or contradictory set of perspectives from key informants who could expand and challenge my reflections, recollections,

and analysis of my artifacts (Chang, 2008; Tracy, 2010). By moving through an account of my reflections, and bolstered by the insights of colleagues and contemporaries, my autoethnography can contribute a perspective about the superintendency which most historical records and common research methods about the superintendency omit or lack.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions apply to this study:

#### *Artifacts*

Physical mementos provide the artifacts for historiographies, ethnographies, and autoethnographies (Hodder, 2000; Huhn, 2018). For this autoethnography, a wide range of mementos served as artifacts. The primary data source consisted of memorabilia, such as documents, including memoranda, meeting agendas and minutes, and annotations on those documents, along with keepsakes, videos, print media, notes, and cards preserved in chronological order (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jones et al., 2013).

#### *Autoethnography*

“Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739).

#### *Professional Identity*

“Professional identity is a self-image, which permits feelings of personal adequacy and satisfaction in the performance of the expected role” (Ewan, 1988, p. 85).

#### *Reflexivity*

“Reflexivity is a thoughtful, self-aware analysis of the intersubjective dynamics between researcher and the researched” (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. ix).

### *Self-Identity*

“Self-identity refers to parts of a self-composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284).

### *Superintendent*

“The superintendent is the chief educational leader and spokesperson for the school district” (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 21).

## **Theoretical Framework**

Autoethnography places the writer in both roles of researcher and participant (Hoppes, 2014, p. 64). Due to my research approach, I chose an overarching theoretical framework of reflexivity and self-identity. Reflexivity allows for memories, discussions, and emotional recalls examined in ways that previously remained unreported or unexplained (Chang, 2008; Hoppes, 2014; Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2012). Even though my self-identity encompasses more than my professional experiences or roles, my autoethnography and research question focuses on my professional position as a superintendent in three places across three decades.

### ***Frameworks of Self and Identity***

Theorists (Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000) define the *self* as a mixture of different experiences from social and cultural settings that may be conscious or unconscious in origin. *Identity* is a facet of *self* that is mostly public and each person in action with others perceives and interprets *self* by their respective roles and in various locations (Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Vryan et al., 2003).

The workplace *self* forms from meanings attached to the distinct roles performed as boss, co-worker, acquaintance, and colleague (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Ewan (1988) defined

professional identity as a self-image that gains satisfaction in the role and particularly in achievements (p. 85). Self, self-identity, and professional identity intertwine but others interpret these according to their culture, perspective, or role (Ewan, 1988; Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Vryan et al., 2003).

Horowitz, (2012), described *self* and *identity* as two key concepts. According to Stryker and Burke (2000), “Self is not a singular description but is comprised of many descriptions determined by several individuals in a particular environment or place (p. 284). “Identity suggests a belief that one has in *self* is also believed by others” (Horowitz, 2012, p. 9). “Self-identity is also the aspect of self that is most public, as it is perceived and interpreted during interaction with others” (Vryan et al., 2003, p. 368). Also, a position requires expectations and behaviors associated with the job, thus, creating a belief about the role regardless of the individual’s disposition (Vryan et al., 2003, p. 368).

As the researcher, I am at the center of my story with the primary source of data being my past (Chang, 2008). During this process, I will confirm with other individuals to provide more perspective and contextual information to aid with subjectivity and trustworthiness (Chang, 2008; Fetterman, 2010; Tullis, 2013). The veracity of autoethnography hinges on openness, clarity, subjectivity, and trustworthiness, among other perspectives (Chang, 2008, p. 112).

My use of accumulated artifacts to stimulate my professional reflection may bring new revelations, perspectives, and meanings differing from how I interpreted past decisions or events (Freeman, 2015). I am aware that such systematic reflection could alter my professional identity as well as self-identity under scrutiny and analysis of archival data along with the ensuing interviews of contemporaries who could challenge or expand my memories and my

interpretations of them (Ewan, 1988; Finlay & Gough, 2003; Hoppes, 2014; Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Vryan et al., 2004).

While this research concentrates on my professional identity as a superintendent; self-identity is also involved and intertwined in the dissecting and analyzing of archival items (Ewan, 1988; Finlay & Gough, 2003; Hoppes, 2014; Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Vryan et al., 2003). My study, due to the use of autoethnography, “helps us see that everything changes and that identity is something one lives, not something one has” (Hoppes, 2014, p. 70).

In this study, I occupied a dual role as a researcher and as a participant as I made meaning of my artifacts and then sought insights from my colleagues and contemporaries (Birks et al., 2008; Birt et al., 2016). I approached my study by examining my understanding of my dual role in this research and began narrating my career path as a form of reflexivity (Freeman, 2015)

### ***Reflexivity***

My journey is beyond a personal account of my experiences and instead denotes a presentation of a changing professional role traveling through a series of cultural and public education policy changes. Reflexivity incorporates my awareness of how the method, autoethnography, and accompanying frameworks of self and identity combine in a dual role of researcher-participant (Anderson, 2006; Cho & Trent, 2006; Collinson, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Finlay & Gough, 2003). As I summarized my professional paths, I increased my awareness of both roles by my reflexivity concerning my researcher-participant stance.

My career in education began by accident and good fortune. I center my passion for learning around human behavior, interactions, and relationships. My first post-secondary degree was a B.A. in psychology with minors in education, Bible, and social studies. A job offer came from the principal of Pendleton High School in Anderson School District Four before my college



graduation. The principal offered me a contract to teach psychology, mathematics, and physical education, and coach the varsity girls' basketball team, which I accepted. I taught these classes with a major in psychology, without the benefit of student teaching, and absent a teaching certificate, but I soon remedied the latter.

I quickly enrolled at Southern Wesleyan University (formerly Central Wesleyan College) to work toward a teaching certificate as I was teaching under what was then known as a warrant teaching certificate and is now known as out-of-field teaching. In a year, I secured a permanent teaching certificate and enrolled at Clemson University to pursue an M.Ed. in school counseling. While I was in Anderson School District Four, I added special education certifications to my initial teaching certificate and finally added an advanced school counselor certificate upon completion of my M.Ed. Teaching duties took me to the middle school level where I taught social studies and finally to two elementary schools where I taught special education both resource and self-contained.

My husband's career moved us to Bamberg, South Carolina where the only teaching position available in the middle of the year was a kindergarten position, which I accepted. The year was 1977 and school districts and schools across the nation implemented Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (U.S. Congress, 1975). Since I had three certifications in special education and a Masters of Education in counseling, the then-superintendent and school board appointed me as Director of Student Services in Bamberg School District One. My duties were to implement laws, procedures, and regulations of Public Law 94-142 and South Carolina's newly adopted procedures and regulations for gifted and talented education. Soon I enrolled at South Carolina State University to begin certification in administration.

My job responsibilities grew as I took on professional development and secondary curriculum responsibilities. In addition to these district responsibilities, I worked closely with three of the five principals simulating a co-principal position. Eventually, several of us enrolled at The Citadel to pursue an administrative certificate and an Education Specialist (EdS) degree.

As the Director of Student Services, I found myself held hostage to findings, interpretations, and recommendations found in psychoeducational evaluations completed by a variety of school psychologists. I felt I was a hostage to their interpretations, and I wanted to be able to interpret the evaluations and understand whether other perspectives might be possible. I re-enrolled at The Citadel and pursued an EdS degree in school psychology. Upon completion of this degree, I became, in addition to my other duties, the school psychologist for our district. This opportunity led to coursework at the University of South Carolina where I took 30-plus hours in a variety of courses such as reading, curriculum management, attention deficit disorders, and autism.

The superintendent position became available in Bamberg School District One in 1993. I submitted my resume and application to the district office within the last hour of the due date for applications. I did so in hopes of conveying to the board the need to move progressively into a 20<sup>th</sup> Century education model. I saw the community and its teachers, administrators, and students as ready to embrace new ideas, strategies, and initiatives. The community described the school district as a good district, but I foresaw so much more if we moved to implement new programs that pushed students to higher expectations and achievement. I got the job as superintendent but kept my responsibilities as a school psychologist, professional development coordinator, curriculum coordinator, maintenance coordinator, and technology coordinator. For seven years, a fire burned in me that has been unmatched. I experienced these years as a wealth of opportunity

and growth for the district and me. We developed a district mission, vision, and logo that captured the essence of how our school and community traveled together. These discussions produced a blueprint for district purpose and guidance that showed our collective understanding of our direction. I led a wonderful, caring, and invested team that pushed Bamberg School District One into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In 1993, Bamberg School District One signed on to the *Abbeville County School District v. State of South Carolina* lawsuit (*Abbeville v. State of South Carolina*, 1999). On behalf of my daughter, I joined the lawsuit for equity and justice. The families and school districts involved in the case accused the state of inequitable funding (Truitt, 2009). My daughter was twelve and in the seventh grade with her classes held in 25-year-old portables and buildings built in 1946. As superintendent and as a mother, I felt morally compelled to stand for the district and my family in this lawsuit. This lawsuit's proceedings revealed the truth about this state's legal and social position that its children and youth in the public school system deserved only a minimally adequate education (*Abbeville v. State of South Carolina*, 1999; Truitt, 2009). The case dragged on through 2016 with a minor state investment in early childhood education limited to the plaintiff districts as the outcome (Black, 2017; Hawes et al., 2018).

In Bamberg, we could have been the mascot for zip code deprivation. To address school and student needs, we sold trees to buy paint for 25-year-old portables and new roofs. I bought the back end of a refrigerator truck for \$200 to make a room for speech classes. We sold thousands of donuts to buy basic equipment and materials. At one time, another school district adopted us and gave us desks, tables, chairs, filing cabinets, and other equipment. The community came together on behalf of the students.

From that experience in my first superintendency, I define loyalty to the district's mission as the best of a community accepting shared responsibility for the welfare of students. In contrast, other districts lack this kind of united mission for students, and instead, both educators and community members display loyalty to the person in the superintendent's office, or authority, or curry favors with high-status community members, rather than focusing on the greater educational good.

In 2000, the Anderson School District Five board tapped me to become their superintendent. The Anderson Five board of trustees charged me to do as much for their school and community as I had done in Bamberg One. I assembled a great team in Anderson Five to accomplish that goal and beyond. Several of our major accomplishments included magnet-themed schools throughout the district, specialized programs, and a standard-based curriculum that ultimately the South Carolina State Department of Education purchased and promoted statewide. The SC Department of Education bought our curriculum because we updated it, annually, and then we sold it along with professional development to 42 districts, nearly half of those in the state. We charged \$40,000 for four subjects (language arts, math, science, and social studies) with yearly updates. The fact that other districts used it, and we maintained its currency, established its legitimacy for the SC Department of Education as well as provided a resource that the state did not have.

Eventually, I moved to another position, but even so, I was aware of how Anderson Five changed after I left. Unfortunately, I saw the erosion of the district's achievements. In less than two years after I left, the curriculum updates and magnet/theme schools disappeared. These events led to my clarity about the meaning of loyalty as I saw individuals who aligned with the

superintendent's office or sought personal affiliation with role-holders rather than sustaining a focus on students and the vision and mission of the district.

In my next position for four years, I traveled across the state on behalf of TransformSC (South Carolina Council on Competitiveness, 2023). A non-partisan group of business leaders, educators, students, parents, and policymakers formed TransformSC to improve public education. The organization set up *The Profile of the SC Graduate* and then provided support to schools and districts so that every student met that profile (South Carolina Association of School Administrators, 2019; South Carolina Council on Competitiveness, 2023; § 59-18-100). I found schools and districts that were designing, launching, and promoting transformational practices in the classroom. This statewide experience prepared me for my last superintendency in McCormick County.

In McCormick County, I implemented programs with a research base of success and used external-to-the-district coaches. In addition, we restructured the district office, balanced the budget, updated the policy manual, and rebranded the district. McCormick County School District became the first district in South Carolina to implement a modified school calendar and a district-wide uniform dress code. The school board conducted a successful superintendent search, which means that the district continues to build upon these initiatives. This stretch of continuity in this district is an example of loyalty and commitment to the district's mission and vision rather than allegiance to the individual in the superintendent's office.

I have given a short synopsis of my career in education to show not only my pathway, but the importance of a district's goals, objectives, values, mission, and vision. The three districts' trajectories of success came through the alignment of every aspect of their educational organizations to their communities' educational vision and mission. Their missions and visions

served as a blueprint and justification for allocating money, purchasing supplies and equipment, hiring, and developing initiatives, and referenda, and improving and sustaining a culture of continuous growth. Each year, these three boards approved goals and objectives aligned with their missions and visions. Each year, I provided a superintendent's address outlining the state of the district in meeting these goals and objectives. In my view, the superintendent served the boards and their communities to achieve their lofty visions. I saw the superintendent's staff, those under my direct supervision as also serving, not me, but the boards and their communities' visions.

Of course, there were disappointing experiences in my years as superintendent, with the evidence of misplaced loyalty that still mystifies me. I have lived through that disappointment and know the depths of pain it caused more people than me. I define misplaced loyalty as an individual's desire to focus on pleasing the superintendent without regard for the ethical obligations to the children and youth's best interest in the school district, and an overall disregard for the district and community's vision and mission.

I also believe my education and training in psychology, school psychology, counseling, and special education led me to be detailed oriented, goal-oriented, attuned to individual needs, an explainer, a communicator, and responsible with a deep sense of accountability. My background enables my desire to strive to find the root cause of problems, dissect situations, and analyze for clarity. I also explore and seek other opinions for possible new viewpoints and revelations. In doing so, I brought these professional experiences to this study. Throughout the study I remained aware of the degree time has tempered my emotions to where I can ask, listen, and contemplate other perspectives.

Autoethnography facilitates my theoretical framework of exploring professional self-identity (Hoppes, 2014). Pelias (2003) indicated that “*Self*, always situated culturally, becomes an exploratory tool, an effective and cognitive opening for cultural and critical inquiry” through actions (p. 389). It is necessary to remember that *self* is observable by others and open to interpretation (Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013, p. 565). Autoethnographers reveal their identities through their personal and professional actions and experiences (Chang, 2013, p. 107). I proposed this method to clarify the leadership aspects of a longitudinal series of educational policy implementation in the nexus of schools and school district experiences at the superintendency.

### **Research Design Overview**

My professional autoethnography covering my three superintendencies may offer an insight into the role and take a step in filling a “blank spot” in knowledge (Wagner, 1993, p. 16). The blank spot to fill includes a call for more voices from practicing and former superintendents (Callahan, 1966; Cubberley, 1916; Tyack, 1976) as well as overcoming the dominant method of describing the superintendency through survey research (e.g., AASA, 2019). The result of this autoethnography may encourage other superintendents to record their stories so others may learn from their experiences and make a potential contribution to the public educational system.

### ***Data Sources***

My autoethnography included two data sources: (a) artifacts, my professional records, and (b) interviews with contemporaries, who can confirm or challenge my perspectives and memories. I sequentially used the data sources. First, I sorted artifacts to find trends and meaning among them. Then in composing the meaning, I sought selected individuals with direct

knowledge of the artifacts who could confirm or contradict or enhance my interpretation of the trends and artifacts. I established a systematic approach to each data source.

**Artifacts.** “Artifacts are material manifestations of culture that illuminate their historical contexts” (Chang, 2006, p 107). For an autoethnography, the collection of artifacts may be wide-ranging, such as the following: (a) recalling memories, (b) official records, (c) interviewing others, (d) photos, (e) memorabilia, (f) newspaper articles, and (g) personal journals. My artifacts consist of an archive including photographs, official and unofficial records in a set of physical notebooks, videos, and trinkets, all of which I interpreted for my attached memories about my three superintendency appointments within three distinct communities of a single state.

The largest part of my archive included thousands of pages of material from letters, agendas, minutes, and both official and unofficial documents as well as personal notes, and newspaper articles. When I became superintendent in 1993, most workplace communication included paper copies of agendas, memos, minutes, and newsletters which school staff typed, copied, and sent to schools through a courier each day. To keep my meetings, notes, letters, and other forms of communication organized, I began placing all such documentation of my day into three-ring notebooks. Each year, I added five to six more notebooks to my office bookcases. By the end of my last position as superintendent, I accumulated over 100 notebooks crammed with thousands of pages capturing the decades of my superintendent’s career on a daily, if not hourly basis. I organized each notebook entry by day, week, month, and school year, beginning in July 1993 through July 2020.

I used analysis memoing of the artifacts (Appendix A) to be checked in the other data source for this project, interviews. Analysis memoing is a research technique that aids in



clarifying thinking, retaining ideas, and abstracting meaning to record the decision-making process (Birks et al., 2008, p. 69-70).

Next, I synthesized my meaning-making among the artifacts using a structured reflection process (Appendix B). This process helped me connect my overall reactions to the artifacts. And those reactions supported my approach to my second source of data, the interviews.

**Interviews.** Because I lived the story that was collected through artifacts, and experienced events concomitantly with other leaders, I selected individuals with that set of experiences to ensure a level of understanding as well as a check on the trustworthiness of my memories and other emergent aspects of the autoethnographic method (Chang, 2006; Collinson, 2013). I conferred with other individuals to provide other perspectives and contextual information to aid with subjectivity and trustworthiness (Chang, 2008; Fetterman, 2010; Tullis, 2013). In addition, I implemented a member-check process for interviewees to fact-check their transcripts and make corrections or deletions (Birt et al., 2016; Tracy 2010). I set these safeguards to provide interviewees with a reasonable approach to engaging in a transparent and open dialogue.

### ***Instrumentation***

I developed three instruments to ensure the systematic nature of my autoethnography. I used a structured analytic approach to sorting artifacts (Appendix A). To capture my reflections and reactions to the classification of my artifacts, I composed a structured reflection (Appendix B). I developed a semi-structured interview protocol for participants selected in my artifact analysis (Appendix C). Each of these instruments enabled my consideration of the events of my journey as a superintendent.

**Artifacts Instruments.** To implement honest and transparent steps in my autoethnography, I developed a method to document self-reflections and data auditing (Birks et al., 2008; Cho & Trent, 2006; Ngulube, 2015; Tracy, 2010). My use of memoing details a rationale for decision-making involving artifacts that I discarded or added to a category. It is also a means of cross-referencing timelines, events, solutions, and patterns. See Appendix A where I laid out a matrix for sorting artifacts.

In addition, I developed a systematic self-reflection instrument (Appendix B) to support transparency about my rationale for artifacts to be included or excluded for initial coding and recoding. I designed this strategy to think through the process of eliminating, preserving, coding, categorizing, and re-categorizing artifacts. My structured self-reflection instrument helped me capture my first reaction, remember and record circumstances surrounding the artifact(s), recall an associated event or series of events, and consider the potential individuals who could serve as interviewees who might aid in legitimizing my understanding and recollection of the associated experiences. See Appendix B.

**Interview Protocol.** Because autoethnography is a self-study, a mistaken assumption might be that the method's data sources exclude interviews among contemporaries (Chang, 2008, p. 106). However, interviews may serve to "stimulate memories, fill in gaps, validate existing beliefs, and gain others' perspective on you" (Chang, 2008, p. 106). Typically, an open-ended question protocol allows a flow-through conversation punctuated with probing questions for clarification or elaboration on key ideas (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000; Kvale & Brinkman, 2010; Leech, 2002; Murchison, 2010). "Interviews frequently begin with grand tour questions that are usually general descriptive, and open-ended" (Chang, 2008, p. 105). My data collection

plan included probes and follow-up questions that could have arisen based on the participant's responses (Fetterman, 2010; Leech, 2002; Tullis, 2013).

There are two types of prompts that I used as shown in Appendix C. I offered a planned prompt to elicit more information for the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). That prompt, in Appendix C, reads as follows, "As I reviewed my notes and materials from my work as a superintendent, I noted this [insert event or policy] and recalled your participation in it. What are your memories about that [insert event or policy]?"

I followed that prompt with unscripted assurances or clarifying probes that ranged from reassuring noises to conversational interjections to show that I listened with interest to the answers when a pause arose that could open for further explanation of the individual's statement or recollection (Leech, 2002). After I reviewed each transcript, I offered participants the opportunity to change, expand, or redact their content.

### ***Participant Selection***

During my tenure as a superintendent, my colleagues often clarified our leadership options and offered support professionally. To verify or elicit contrasting views of my reflections, I set two criteria for selecting participants among those professional contacts to the following: (a) those who have more than 20 years of continuous service and (b) those who served during the same period as I did.

In addition, those who served as elected state superintendents of education during the decades in which I practiced could add valuable perspectives on reforms and initiatives implemented during their tenures. Table 3.1 shows the pool of state superintendents (Ballotpedia, 2018) who served during my career as superintendent.

Table 1.1

*A Pool State Superintendents for Interviews*

The pool of South Carolina State Superintendents of Education	Years Served as State Superintendent of Education
Barbara S. Nielsen	1991 - 1999
Inez M. Tenenbaum	1999 - 2007
Jim Rex	2007 - 2011
Mitchell M. Zais	2011 - 2015
Molly M. Spearman	2015 – 2022

Prior to proposing my research, I spoke to these elected state superintendents along with several colleagues about my writing an autoethnography reflecting my decades as a superintendent. At the time, all indicated an interest in participating in my work. Of course, based on my artifact analysis, not all met the emergent criteria that was necessary for participating in the interview process.

I submitted this research design to Clemson University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The artifacts analysis did not require IRB approval. Although in the interest of the protection of participants, my selection process and the interview protocol passed IRB requirements, and the IRB documentation for #IRB2021-0620 is found in Appendix D.

**Three Article Body of Work**

The intent of this autoethnography was to elicit a coherent and systematic narrative about my professional journey through three superintendencies encompassing educational changes from the 1990s to the 2020s. I hoped that my research filled an often-reported gap in knowledge

about the position of school superintendents, especially their point of view of the position and its practices.

I chose the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (IJQSE)* because of its aim “to enhance the practice and theory of qualitative research in education, with “education” defined in the broadest possible sense, including non-school settings” (Informa UK Ltd., 2023, para. 1). The manuscript I developed for this journal focused on the methods I used for a broad audience of educational researchers. I sought to add to the knowledge about autoethnography, particularly because I found little guidance about artifact analysis other than calls to be systematic and reflexive (Birt et al., 2016; Cho & Trent, 2006; Dussel, 2019; Huhn, 2019). I had to create both a process and instruments to guide that process to ensure a traceable system in how I attached meaning to my artifacts (Bourgoin et al., 2020; Dussel, 2019; Hughes et al., 2012; Tracy, 2010). Presumably, this purpose fits the aims and scope of IJQSE.

*Educational Administration Quarterly* presents “studies of educational leadership, organizations, leadership development, and policy as they relate to elementary and secondary levels of education” (University Council for Educational Administration-UCEA, 2023, para. 2). My study findings fit the needs of EAQ’s editors and readers because my autoethnography yielded findings about the superintendent’s role in curriculum leadership at the district level.

The South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA) publishes *The Palmetto Administrator (PA)* during each school year, in the spring and fall. SCASA publishes the PA to “provide in-depth and timely information about a wide range of school and district administrative topics” (SCASA, 2013, para. 1) This set of readers would be interested in learning the scope and viewpoint of my experiences across three South Carolina school districts as their superintendent. Among *The Palmetto Administrator* subscribers include current and aspiring

superintendents who would want a perspective of three recent decades of educational changes that affected the superintendency in their state. I used the findings of my study to share the importance of advocacy on behalf of the school district and its community. I responded to PA's call for articles for a theme about Courageous Leadership.

I organized my dissertation into three independent manuscripts to share both the process and findings of my autoethnography. As an emergent design, the processes share salience with the findings (Altheide & Johnson, 2011; Anderson, 2006; Hoppes, 2014; Toyosaki, S. & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013).

### **An Overview of Findings**

The purpose of this three-article dissertation was to address a “blind spot” (Wagner, 1993, p. 16) in the literature and research on the superintendency that historically, and nationally, provides few insights from practicing superintendents in research designs other than survey research. At the state level, I could find a record about only two 20<sup>th</sup> Century superintendents' roles, and only one of those published his perspectives about his daily work. To address the national and state gap, I used the methods of autoethnography to analyze three decades of artifacts from my career as superintendent in three communities and validated that analysis with a confirmatory set of interviews.

My research question was as follows:

What do my professional artifacts, documents, archival notes, and perspectives from colleagues and state officials reveal about educational changes in the last 30 years that influenced the superintendent's office?

The three articles I prepared for this dissertation show the steps of my autoethnography in specifying a systematic method for my primary dataset, my artifacts, and for the confirmatory

interviews, including a protocol based on the artifact analysis, the first manuscript article (Chapter 2). In addition, two articles also provide a set of answers to my research questions (Chapters 3 and 4).

I prepared the manuscript found in Chapter 2, to describe the step-by-step iterative process I used to reduce the artifacts to trends and issues, the findings of my autoethnography. I designed that manuscript to specify the data analysis steps and to fill a gap in the methods literature about artifacts analysis. I created three instruments, which I described in the Chapter 2 manuscript: (a) a classification scheme (Appendix A) that included (b) analytic memos as I completed the Researcher's Analysis Memoing Instrument (Appendix B), and (c) annotating the Systematic Self-Reflection Instrument (Appendix C).

I derived findings from the artifact analysis and then selected the key informants who had contemporaneous knowledge of the trends and issues I classified among my artifacts. Those interview responses confirmed my findings. Table 1.2 provides a description of the analysis. Displayed are the trends I sorted among the artifacts. I moved the artifacts from three-ring notebooks to containers for each district, and then re-read and resorted them in groupings that provided trends in my career-long practices, memoing as I went along on each item's Researcher's Analysis Memoing Instrument (Appendix B). My iterative approach included using the Systematic Self-Reflection Instrument (Appendix C) to identify potential interviewees associated with the specific artifact. This iterative approach reduced over 800 artifacts to the following four trends and issues listed in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

*Issues and Trends Distribution among Artifacts*

Issues and Trends	Number of Artifacts
Curriculum Development and Management	453
Finance	205
Accountability	143
Legislative Acts	26
Total	827

Table 1.2 shows the distribution of artifacts as well as answers the research question about educational change during the three-decade span of my superintendencies. I found Curriculum Development and Management as the dominant issue among the trends in my artifacts as it included 55% of all artifacts and spanned all three districts with specific dates from 1993 through 2020. I presented my findings with an explanation of these categories in the manuscript I prepared for *Educational Administration Quarterly*. (See Chapter 3).

In that manuscript, I offered a process framework for the superintendent’s curriculum leadership in a dual development and management system for continuous improvement (See Appendix F). The process framework incorporates samples from these curriculum artifacts spanning 2000 through 2009 covering work in two of the three districts and eventually rising to statewide recognition and dissemination by the South Carolina Department of Education. The selected interviewees provided confirmatory insights about the work of district-level curriculum leadership as reported in the EAQ manuscript found in Chapter 3. Appendix F displays the framework for the superintendent’s curriculum leadership as designed for the manuscript in Chapter 3.



As I read my artifacts and noted the overlapping nature of all the trends and issues as displayed in Table 1.2, I recognized an overarching insight into the work of superintendents on behalf of the communities they serve, and this led to my third article found in Chapter 4. This insight offers a broad response to my research question about the educational changes I addressed in my superintendencies over three decades. Even though the communities spanned three geographic regions of the state, (the Low Country, the Lakelands, and the Upstate), those communities encompassed two kinds of economic status, intergeneration poverty, and declining population, as well as growing new wealth and accompanying increases in population. Accordingly, one common responsibility rests on the superintendent of any community, the role of advocating on behalf of students and their families and communities.

Why is advocacy a continuing and overarching obligation? As the distribution of my artifact analysis shows in Table 1.2, finance, accountability, and legislative acts often required that I explain the change to my communities. on the one hand, or on the other, to find innovative ways to better serve the community with the change that it needed, rather than merely following a mandate. This obligation for change leadership represents an important role for a superintendent, no matter the specific trend or task. I prepared and published a manuscript (Chapter 4) for the South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA), a state-affiliate of AASA, the School Administrator Association. The manuscript appeared in SCASA's professional magazine, *Palmetto Administrator*, in April 2022 (Bagley, 2022).

My research question was, what do my professional artifacts, documents, archival notes, and perspectives from colleagues and state officials reveal about educational changes in the last 30 years that influenced the superintendent's office? Accountability, finance, and legislative acts were intertwined closely with the development of the curriculum and management. Lastly,

boards went from being mainly the sole authority to adhering to the accountability measures of the state which mirrored the accountability of the nation.

My findings included three important contributions to the purpose of this research: (a) instruments and processes for artifact analysis, a methodological contribution, (b) a framework for the processes of district-level curriculum leadership in the superintendency, and (c) a statement about superintendents' obligation to advocate for the communities they serve. This dissertation strives to fill a gap in the superintendent's perspective in the literature and research about that role. My autoethnography provided evidence in multiple ways to fill that gap.

### **Significance of the Study**

This work offered a contribution in multiple ways as it filled a gap in the literature and scholarship about superintendents from the perspective of a long-term practicing superintendent. My work answered a need within the state in which I worked, for raising another superintendent's voice because only two had records of their work in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and my voice covers the turn to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. I intended to provide a practical perspective about the daily work of superintendents as they lead communities through the pressures of social and educational change, but as I followed the methods of autoethnography, I realized I had to cover a gap in knowledge about processes of artifact analysis, and I developed instruments to do so. Thus, the multiple contributions of my dissertation include practical aspects of both educational leadership and research methods.

### ***Implications for Practice***

These results fulfill my intent to fill a gap in the literature and research on the superintendency to benefit current and future superintendents. Two of my findings offer implications for practice. First, I found an overarching mission of advocacy on behalf of their

communities for the superintendency. Second, I saw a dominant theme of curriculum leadership in the work of the Chief Education Officer, the superintendent.

My findings about the role of the superintendent as an advocate for place fit among emerging work on the importance of place in schooling (Curran & Kitchin, 2019). Mandates and rigid fidelity fail to serve the unique aspects of local communities (Bryk et al., 2015). Superintendents need to advocate for adaptive change and to garner support and resources that fit their communities' ongoing needs (Bagley, 2022).

My findings about the dominant responsibilities for curriculum leadership in the superintendency are not new (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Petersen & Barnett, 2003, 2005; Ylimaki, 2011), but also, not well-recognized in favor of the more political aspects of tending to the school board and community sectors (Björk et al., 2014; Björk & Gurley, 2005; Björk & Lindle, 2011; Ylimaki, 2011, 2012). In the current era of a global pandemic, the salience of curriculum and local political culture certainly overlap (Anderson & Weiner, 2023; Fotheringham et al., 2020; Grooms & Childs, 2021; Harris & Jones, 2020; McLeod & Dulsky, 2021; Netolicky, 2020).

Beyond these two practical contributions for superintendents currently in the role, or those who aspire to it, my work contributed to instrumentation and methods. Autoethnography offers others a means to systematically describing their work and themselves, and I needed to create a replicable process to ensure my systematic use of the method.

### ***Implications for Research***

I was drawn to the use of autoethnography because the most used research method in the study of the superintendency has been survey research (AASA, 2022; Björk & Kowalski, 2005; Glass et al., 2005; Tienken, 2021). Very little research lifts the voices of superintendents (Acker-

Hocevar et al., 2009; Gove, 1900; Tyack, 1976). My career spanned three regions of one state, but accessible records focused on only two of its practicing 20<sup>th</sup> Century superintendents (Brockington, 2016; Governor's Office Commission on Women, 1995; Truitt, 2006). I used autoethnography to analyze my work throughout the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

I found the instruments and the steps I devised for my autoethnography helped me reduce notebooks, bins, and years of artifacts to the gist of my work as both advocate and curriculum leader. I recommend the approach of systematic autoethnography using step-by-step artifact analysis in conjunction with interviews among those contemporaries who either created or used the artifacts or were present at the events. Asking others to participate in my sense-making about my artifacts ensured that my analysis offered insights about my career useful to not only me but also current and future superintendents.

In conclusion, my story offered new contributions to practice and research about the superintendency and in the methods that perhaps more superintendents may be inspired to use in telling their stories. For more than two centuries, the school superintendent played an important role in education and in communities. Even today, we need more personal and professional perspectives from these individuals. Perhaps, my story can serve as an example for others who have served in that role to follow for the betterment of the role and as guidance for those aspiring to that role.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### **A SYSTEM FOR USING ARTIFACTS IN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: AN EXAMPLE FROM A LIFE IN THE SUPERINTENDENCY**

#### **Abstract**

While artifacts are essential in autoethnography, there is little information on systematically evaluating relics to extract their evocative power in building a person's life narrative. Therefore, I developed strategies and steps to clarify thinking, retain ideas, and abstract meaning from professional artifacts and interviews to fill this void. I use my autoethnography as a school superintendent across three school districts and three decades to demonstrate the applicability of my artifact analysis strategies. I used two documents to ground my process. These two documents include one, Researcher's Analysis Memoing, and another, Systematic Self-Reflection, which created a synthetic and systematic approach to capture personal reminiscences and situate those memories in narrative development for my autoethnography.

*Keywords:* artifacts analysis, artifacts in autoethnography, artifacts in the superintendency, artifacts elicitation for recall

Autoethnography has increased legitimacy as an acceptable and popular form of systematic inquiry (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008). Other research designs, such as phenomenology and ethnography, take "images and artifacts as their focus" (Dussel, 2019, p. 1). Cultivated by the traditions of ethnography, autoethnography encourages telling one's own story (Bourgoin et al., 2020; Hughes et al., 2012). For ethnography and autoethnography, artifacts serve multiple purposes in narrative development, primarily as historical instruments (Dussel, 2019; Huhn, 2018). For autoethnography, artifacts elicit memories expanding narratives while also embodying the history and meaning of the artifact (Dussel, 2019; Huhn, 2018).

While comparisons of data gathering for ethnography and autoethnography show correspondence, some differences distinguish between the two (Chang, 2008; Goodall, 2000). The chief difference lies in the researcher's self-awareness as the primary data source and data generator, which requires a different approach to increasing veracity and other forms of trustworthiness in the study (Chang, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Goodall, 2000; Tracy, 2010). Chang (2008) reasoned that autoethnography is not an analysis of self-alone due to culture being a web of *self* and others (p. 65). Thus, some veracity may be generated by including selected others in reflections about artifacts (Chang, 2008).

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Researchers use autoethnography as an interpretative research design that captures authenticity, engages multidimensional analysis, and generates a narrative even as the research relates to *self* (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang (2010) explained the value of autoethnography as a design that allows the contribution of personal data as a tool for understanding connections with others in the context of our work lives (p. 1). According to them,

the multidimensional forms of personal data include material artifacts and memories, reactions, and impressions. Each form elicits insights and interpretations requiring abductive and abstractive techniques (Pascale, 2011; Saldaña, 2013; 2015).

Artifacts require researchers to balance the evocative nature of autoethnography with systematic strategic analysis to ensure the final narrative's transparency, trustworthiness, and authenticity (Birt et al., 2016; Cho & Trent, 2006). However, the methods literature omits specific steps for systematic artifact analysis, a component for meeting standards of trustworthiness in research (Hughes et al., 2012; Tracy, 2010). A systematic approach enables insights into abstracting connotations and significance among the artifacts (Hughes et al., 2012; Reichertz, 2007; Saldaña, 2015). In addition, a systematic approach can balance an individual's reminiscences with the events of an era.

Anderson (2006) explained that autoethnography offers a unique approach and challenge to an investigation. Autoethnography requires an understanding derived from being a participant and researcher simultaneously while involved in the research (Anderson, 2006, p. 382). Autoethnography offers the autoethnographer, as a self-researcher, an opportunity to reflect, examine, expose, and accept beliefs and decisions that were deemed necessary and correct and face a new reality about those beliefs and decisions (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008, 2013; Collinson, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Fetterman, 2010; Goodall, 2000; Jones et al., 2013; Tracy, 2010; Tullis, 2013).

The purpose of this article is to introduce steps to analyze artifacts systematically. I used the methods of autoethnography to support my analysis of experiences as a superintendent in three school districts across three decades of fast-paced national and state school reforms. For the

purposes of this writing, I apply my autoethnography of my career as a school superintendent (Author, 2021) as an example of artifact curation and analysis.

### Review of the Literature

What does the literature about autoethnography cover concerning the variety of sources in telling a life story (Chang, 2008; Ngunjiri et al., 2010)? For the most part, the literature offers general instructions about telling one's own stories (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Goodall, 2000; Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Tracy, 2010) or listening to other's stories (Pascale, 2011; Saldaña, 2013; 2015). These methods use artifacts for multiple purposes (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Goodall, 2000; Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Pascale, 2011; Saldaña, 2013, 2015). Autoethnography offers a method for close contact with the subject matter but requires enough distance and reflective insight to analyze information openly and honestly (Bourgoin et al., 2020, p. 1139).

Artifacts are material manifestations of culture that illuminate their historical contexts (Chang, 2013, p. 107). Ethnographers describe artifacts as muted evidence found in cultural materials that cannot talk and require an interpretation (Hodder, 2000). Pratt and Rafaeli (2006) noted that sentient beings purposefully make or choose artifacts (p. 280), which each may interpret differently than initially intended. Ethnographers look at cultural meaning left in artifacts created by other people (Anderson-Levitt, 2006, p. 288). The ethnographers' intention appears in how the object materializes, not solely from the insight and purpose of the one that created the artifact (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Huhn, 2018). Interpretation of the artifact stems from the clues left in the artifacts (Bourgoin et al., 2020; Dussel, 2019; Hughes et al., 2012). This ethnographic approach differs from autoethnography as artifacts' meanings rest in an individual's recollections, as sometimes the artifacts are that individual's creation or due to the purpose the



individual attributed in selecting or saving the artifact (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Jones et al., 2013; Ngunjiri et al., 2010).

Autoethnographers recognize the countless ways personal experience influences the research process (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 274). Autoethnography follows the use of professional artifacts, documents, and notes to explore and reflect on various personal occurrences and associations with other individuals (Chang, 2008; Ngunjiri et al., 2010). For an autoethnography, the use of artifacts may be wide-ranging, including such purposes as the following: (a) eliciting memories, (b) culling official records for their cultural effects, (c) interviewing others in oral histories, (d) interpretation of photos in light of cultural influences, (e) recording the significance of memorabilia, (f) analysis of newspaper articles, and (g) documenting insights from personal journals (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jones et al., 2013).

Throughout an autoethnographic investigation, individuals tell their stories by systematic reflection and evaluation of their perspectives with others as they consider and reconsider their analysis and interpretations (Jones et al., 2013). Autoethnography creates narratives from insider knowledge that describe personal and professional involvement in all situations that evoke multidimensional layers of emotions and consciousness (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Freeman (2015) noted,

instead of concealing personal experience because it is resistant to notions of rational argument and systematic results, ideas are articulated through one's experiences, leading to a form of communication that is offered up as being at once heartfelt, honest, and authentic. (p. 925)

This design also allows researcher-participants to overcome silence as they voice an event, experience, or career (Jones et al., 2013). All events, experiences, and careers occur in

spaces with objects that serve as mementos and cultural markers (Dussel, 2019; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Huhn, 2018). However, such artifacts require interpretation and sense-making (Hughes et al., 2012).

Artifact analysis and interpretation require extracting meaning from thousands of pages or images such as handbooks, newspaper articles, photos, and official documents through a set of interpretive practices (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Fontana & Frey, 2000). Studying the artifactual amalgam of pages, photos, and instructional patterns allows one to generalize and make assumptions about the place, people, and circumstances (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Fontana & Frey, 2000). However, the literature is silent in providing steps and strategies for analyzing each artifact.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Autoethnographers need awareness that the "self is never a private entity" (Toyosaki et al., 2013, p. 565). Thus, an appropriate theoretical framework for autoethnographies may include exploring professional self-identity (Hoppe, 2014; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Autoethnographers place themselves in the role of a storyteller with a focus on public and professional experiences as primary sources for generating descriptions of their positionality within their thoughtful examination of their artifacts, locations, times, and memories (Chang, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jones et al., 2013; Patton, 2002). Autoethnographers may include others' perspectives set within temporal spaces of their memories of events and experiences (Collinson, 2013).

Theorists (Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000) define *self* as a mixture of different experiences from social and cultural settings that may be conscious or unconscious in origin. Identity is a facet of *self* that is primarily public. Each person in action with others perceives and

interprets *self* by their respective roles and in various locations and artifacts (Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke; 2000; Vryan et al., (2003).

*Self* may form from meanings an individual attaches to their distinct roles performed as boss, co-worker, acquaintance, and colleague, as interpreted from their artifacts (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Ewan (1988) defined professional identity as a self-image that gains satisfaction in the role, particularly in achievements recorded in artifacts (p. 85). *Self*, self-identity, and professional identity intertwine, but others interpret these according to their culture, perspective, role, or artifact presentations (Ewan, 1988; Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Vryan et al., 2003).

Horowitz (2012) distinguished *self* and *identity* as two key concepts. The concept, *Self* is not a singular description but combines perceptions among a person and other individuals and groups in a particular environment or place (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284). Self-identity is also the "aspect of self that is most public, as it is perceived and interpreted during interaction with others" (Vryan et al., 2003, p. 368).

Artifacts represent the salience of events and add a dimension to how people interpret each other's actions, thoughts, and decisions, which interact with definitions of professional identity (Ewan, 1988; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Hoppes, 2014; Huhn, 2018; Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013). Also, any professional position includes expectations and behaviors associated with the job, thus, creating a belief about the role regardless of the individual's status (Vryan et al., 2003, p. 368). Artifacts elicit interpretations of self and self-identity through representation and recall, and accumulated artifacts stimulate professional reflections, adding to interpretations of professional identity (Bourgoin et al., 2020; Ewan, 1988). Moreover, systematic examination of artifacts may alter professional identity and self-identity as the

scrutiny offers both tangible and symbolic insights (Dussel, 2019; Ewan, 1988; Finlay & Gough, 2003; Hoppes, 2014; Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Vryan et al., 2004).

### **Making Autoethnographic Meaning from Artifacts of the Superintendency**

With little guidance, besides a call for systematic standards to apply to autoethnography and its use of artifacts (Hughes et al., 2012), I faced the challenge of culling through my three tenures as a superintendent over three decades (Author, 2021). The purpose of my self-investigation was primarily as a professional-identity exercise, which could be instructive as the field of school leadership lacks memoirs and biographies of superintendents (Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1976; Cubberley, 1916; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Kowalski, 2005; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). I use samples from my efforts in analyzing my professional artifacts to demonstrate a step in addressing the gap in methodological literature.

While designing and conducting my autoethnography of my professional experiences as a school superintendent in two rural districts and one municipal district, I turned to an accumulation of thousands of documents alongside photos and objects (Author, 2021). Chronological order initially provided the sole organizational feature in this collection. Such a chronology shows how moments and days elide into years and decades, but a strict time-based order may obscure patterns and meanings that leap segments of time. Chang (2008) noted that autoethnographers might view the scaffolding of autoethnography as fragmented and overwhelming at first, but by moving systematically, a story emerges. Methodologists report that autoethnographers can view this type of self-analysis as stressful even as it results in finding clarity about such experiences (Freeman, 2015, p. 925). Without clear direction from the literature, I faced the challenge of scaffolding the meaning of my artifacts into a narrative (Chang, 2008; Freeman, 2015; Ngunjiri et al., 2010). The first step, the systematic process of

eliciting meaning from artifacts, proved the biggest hurdle to sense-making in assembling my narrative.

### Methods and Materials

Chang (2008) opined that the analysis process could link disjointed autoethnographic data, such as artifacts, into a coherent story while giving insight into the cultural understanding of that time. Artifactual data for my study encompassed thousands of pages documenting nearly 30 years of day-to-day operations, decision-making, challenges, and deliberations in the role of the superintendency. Specifically, these documents included decades of meeting agendas, my annotations of the meetings within the moment, official meeting minutes, newspaper articles, letters, memos, schedules, and calendar entries detailing day-to-day operations, events, and experiences. I placed such work documentation into three-ring notebooks weekly, if not daily, throughout each year. By the end of each year, I added five to six more notebooks to my office bookcases. When I left my last position as superintendent, I accumulated over 100 notebooks crammed with thousands of pages. I organized each notebook entry by day, week, month, and school year, from July 1993 to July 2013 and, after a break for doctoral studies, from May 2018 to July 2020. Despite the chronological order and as appealing as the notion of a deeper analysis of these artifacts seemed, the unknown steps for analysis seemed overwhelming.

I seized on the recommendations by Chang et al. (2012) that raw data be compressed into topics with an aim for categories that capture meaning in the research subject. The advice follows most methods literature offers about ethnographic data analysis, which currently provides little more than an insistence on an iterative, but seemingly generic process of coding and recoding in stages of abducting and deducing meaning (Chang, 2008; Reichertz, 2007;

Saldaña, 2013, 2015). While a consistent recommendation, the specific steps seemed elusive, and I needed a routine to help me conquer the stacks of notebooks.

My approach to artifact analysis included multiple readings of the pages and repeated handling of the associated objects and media, an iterative process resembling the first rounds of coding interviews (Saldaña, 2013) and like the analysis processes of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2011). Still, the number of artifacts coupled with each set of notebooks and years required some means of extracting orderly meaning throughout the iterations, and thus, I created instruments to record my initial understandings and the cumulative meanings I attributed to the mounds of notebooks spanning reams of documents and time.

Artifacts require critical questioning (Henry, 2006, p. 388). Therefore, I developed a method to document self-reflections and data auditing (Tracy, 2010). My memoing process details a recorded rationale for decision-making involving information that I discard or add to a category. It is also a means of cross-referencing timelines, events, solutions, and patterns. Analysis memoing is a research technique that aids in clarifying thinking, retaining ideas, and abstracting meaning to record the decision-making process (Birks et al., 2008, pp. 69-70).

### **Instruments for Artifact Analysis**

I created two instruments to help me sort through the 100 notebooks piled in my garage. The two instruments included (a) *Researcher Analysis Memoing* and (b) *Systematic Self-Reflection*. The first instrument, Research Analysis Memoing, represented a two-step sequence focused first on the artifact, *Artifact Classification*, then a record about the artifact completing the initial instrument. The second instrument, Systematic Self-Reflection, focused on my interpretations of the artifact. Because all those notebooks needed thoughtful analysis, I had to reduce those piles to the essence of my autoethnographic narrative. So, I created a classification

scheme and focused on the individual artifact in the instrument I called, Researcher's Analysis Memoing.

*A First Step - Artifact Classification.* For the first step of artifact analysis memoing, I concluded that I needed to capture the eras, locations, artifact formats, and topical sources. Table 1 shows my initial review classification system. These ten artifact classifications often spanned years and districts; thus, the classification scheme offered flexibility and potential overlap for further synthesis.

Table 1

*Classification of Artifacts*

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Time (Days, Months, Years)

Location (School District 1,2,3, or all, SC/Nation)

Format (Document, Media, Interview, Video)

District Issue(s)

Gender Issue(s)

Curriculum Management Implementation

National Legislative Actions

State Legislative Actions

Supreme Court or Fourth Circuit Court Actions

Other

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I used the *Time* classification to capture the life of the artifact and whether it represented events and associated deliberations or recurrences. For example, did this event, activity, discussion, or movement last a day or multiple years?

The *Location* classification served as another marker of the artifact and helped me situation the artifact's meaning by association with any of the three school districts I had served. I gave pseudonym names to the three districts for privacy purposes. Therefore, I named school district one's District Adventure. I dubbed the second school district, District Create, and the third school district, District Resolve. The artifact classifications spanned all three districts. And I recorded in this classification answers to such questions as: Did information from the artifacts pertain to only one of the three districts I served or just two, or was it present in all three communities I served?

I used the *Format* classification to track the type of artifact. Even though the artifacts were mostly on paper and fit into the three-ring notebooks, I had video and audio recordings, also. As I sorted the artifacts, I recorded whether each was a document (such as a memo, handwritten note, or agenda) or if the document was a copy of a news item from the media, such as an interview or press announcement.

My classification scheme also included two a priori topics: (a) *District Issues* and (b) *Gender Issues*. I assumed from my career span that I would have some repetitious operational issues that recurred from district-to-district. That assumption stemmed from the way that school leaders prepared for state licensing which includes operational, management topics such as law, personnel, and finance. Before I started my artifact review, I expected that many of them would fall into these day-to-day moments of my superintendent's career which I categorized as *District Issues*. On the other hand, because I started my superintendencies during an era where the majority in that role, not merely in my state, were men, then my other a priori assumption focused on my experiences as one of the few female superintendents. I expected that the



category of *Gender Issues* might fill as I reviewed artifacts where I may have noted the questioning of my legitimacy in leading any of the three school districts.

*Curriculum Management Implementation* originated in my memories about the condition of teaching and learning in all the districts. For example, this category of artifacts included such events, discussions, and meetings that ranged from establishing lesson planning requirements to developing and implementing a standards-based curriculum. During all of my experiences as a superintendent, my role included transforming instruction textbook driven to standards based. That shift demanded significant changes in the areas of professional development, knowledge of standards, clustering of curriculum standards into units, common planning times, grade-level and district-level assessments, state assessment, national assessment, observations, vertical alignment, report cards, and state and federal policies. All these areas defined how I categorized artifacts into *Curriculum Management Implementation*.

*National Legislative Actions* artifacts dealt with issues related to Congressional legislation in the early 2000s known as the *No Child Left Behind Act*. That act expanded how districts grappled with curriculum and instruction and expanded into assessment concerns about meeting the federally required, but state-defined mandate of *Adequate Yearly Progress*.

I created and defined the classification of *State Legislative Actions* as the state-based legislation and regulations that impact school districts' operations, finance, administrative and teacher evaluations, accountability, school start dates, and curriculum offerings, just to name a few.

From my memories as a superintendent, I recalled mandates which arose through legal citations for the United States Supreme Court and the Fourth Circuit Court. Therefore, in my initial composition of classifications, I assumed artifacts might include those judicial actions.

*An Instrument for Researcher Analysis Memoing.* After delineating these classifications, I combined them with a memoing format, the final version of my Researcher Analysis Memoing instrument. In Table 2, I placed the classification scheme, and modified it, at the top of Table 2.

Table 2

*Researcher's Analysis Memoing*

Memo Points & Reminders	Location (Circle) >	SDA	SDC	SDR	All Districts	State or Federal	Notes for Venue & Contact
	Format (Check) >	Document Internal? External?	Media	Interview	Video	Other	
Date of Artifact:				Date of Review:			
District Issue(s) What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Blue Recode: Y N							
Gender Issue(s) What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Yellow Recode: Y N							

Memo Points & Reminders	Location (Circle) >	SDA	SDC	SDR	All Districts	State or Federal	Notes for Venue & Contact
	Format (Check) >	Document Internal? External?	Media	Interview	Video	Other	
Curriculum What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Purple Recode: Y N							
National Actions What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Green Recode: Y N							
State Actions What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Orange Recode: Y N							
Supreme Court or Fourth Circuit Court Actions What?							

Memo Points & Reminders	Location (Circle) >	SDA	SDC	SDR	All Districts	State or Federal	Notes for Venue & Contact
	Format (Check) >	Document Internal? External?	Media	Interview	Video	Other	
Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Red Recode: Y N							
Other Topic What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Pink Recode: Y N							

The classification modifications included a coding rule for each district’s pseudonym. So, District Adventure became SDA. I coded District Create as SDC, with the third school district, District Resolve coded, SDR. Then I added potential combinations of those locations in the top matrix. The next row focused on a quick note about format. And I created the last column as a reminder to write a memo about both venue and the participants, who might be candidates for my follow-up interviews about the artifact.

I used the remaining seven rows for my memos about the artifact. In each row, I included one of the classifications (District Issues, Gender Issues, Curriculum, National Actions, State Actions, Court Actions, and any other unique classification). For each of the classifications, I made a note to answer all the following questions:

- What? – meaning a description of the artifact

- Keep or discard? – requiring a judgement about the value of the artifact
- & Why? – reminding me to memo about my judgement’s justification
- Color code – which depended on this plan: (a) district-level issues, blue; (b) gender issues, yellow; (c) curriculum issues, purple; (d) national policy, green, (e) state-level policy, orange, (f) court actions, red, and (g) pink indicated other notable and specified issues.
- Recode: Y? or N? – requiring my review of the artifact in my iterative analysis.

As I read each artifact, I coded it according to the ten categories found in Table 2. After reading and coding, I placed that artifact in a container indicating the district where it originated. After reading thousands of pages, each coded artifact moved from the notebook into a district container. Next, I reread each artifact and began assigning additional codes such as a district, state, or national issue. The problem originated through local, federal, or state actions. Finally, I removed each artifact from the originating district’s container placing each into a holding container for artifacts that moved across district lines. Defined by me, each relic continued to collect indicators from the Researcher's Analytical Memoing process. As I continued the process, these artifacts began to demonstrate a one-time event or one that crossed the district's boundaries, became a state issue, and indicated the type of format the artifact represented. As each artifact emerged into a major category and the self-reflection and data auditing continued, I made another decision to discard or maintain each relic. The Researcher's Analysis Memoing, captured my reflections so that I had a record of the meaning I attributed to the artifact. Making sense of the work using my classification scheme (Table 1) and my Researcher's Analysis Memoing (Table 2) included my reflections and insights tying my professional connections and understandings of the more significant influences of education policy initiatives, whether from

federal and state legislatures or agencies, state and federal courts, and a variety of education organizations.

*Systematic Self-Reflection Instrument.* The next step involved a memoing process for analytic meaning and sense-making (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Saldaña, 2015). Tables 1 and 2 represent one instrument, the Researcher's Analysis of Memoing. Table 3 illustrates the second instrument I created: The Systematic Self-Reflection Instrument, which shows the degree of reflection I used for this process.

Table 3

*Systematic Self-Reflection*

<b>District</b>	SDA	SDC	SDR	SDA & SDC	All Districts	State or National	Venue/Contact
<b>Source</b>	Document	Agenda	Video	Print Media	Letter		
<b>Issue</b>	District	Gender	Curriculum	Federal	State	Court(s)	Other
<b>Code</b>	Blue	Yellow	Purple	Green	Orange	Red	Pink

Date of Artifact:

Date of Review:

1. The artifact that I found today which surprised me was:
2. It surprised me because:
3. What were the circumstances that created this artifact?
4. Who was the audience?
5. The emotion it provoked was:
6. Why was this emotion provoked?
7. This artifact reminded me of:
8. Today, after looking at artifacts, the most important thing I learned was:
9. Today, after looking at artifacts, a question I have is:
10. I will follow-up by contacting:

I used the Systematic Self-Reflection instrument (Table 3) to further my insights about how I made meaning of each artifact. I sought to elicit aspects of my professional self-identity

from these questions and in a compilation of these responses across artifacts. Over time and as accomplishments grow, memories about specific moments of struggle and joy may have waned in the aftermath. This set of questions helped me form what Saldaña (2015) termed a monologue and what others deemed a form of reflexivity (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Finlay & Gough, 2003).

Furthermore, as a step toward checking my memories and insights, this second instrument (Table 3) supported my process of selecting individuals with direct knowledge about the events and eras attached to the artifacts. Finally, by identifying whom to contact to confirm or contradict my interpretations, I added another dimension of veracity to my autoethnography (Tracy, 2010).

The two instruments I developed for artifact analysis, Researcher Analysis Memoing Instrument and Systematic Self Reflection Instrument, provided a systematic approach including strategies to clarify my recall of professional moments so that I could abstract meaning from my artifacts (Birks et al., 2008). I applied the theoretical framework of surrounding self and professional identity germane to the purposes of autoethnography, which enables the depiction of a life (Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke; 2000; Vryan et al., 2003). In my case, my autoethnography is a retrospective of my career as a superintendent. The creation of these instruments documented the painstaking efforts used in self-reflections and data auditing (Tracy, 2010). By applying these two instruments, I demonstrated a means of analyzing artifacts for autoethnographic methods. To illustrate this instrumental process, I supply an example of how an artifact takes on both practical and symbolic meaning from my autoethnography in the superintendency.

### **Instrument Application: An Example**

From the artifacts among all three school communities, I constructed a central theme. Beyond that central theme, I noted educational trends that occurred throughout my professional life. From the bins in which I sorted the Researcher Analysis memoing of each artifact, I counted 1175 forms of those artifacts I kept and applied my Systematic Self-Reflection Instrument. Among those forms, I classified these three education patterns: (a) 453 standards-based curriculum artifacts, (b) 348 state legislative artifacts that emphasized 206 financial artifacts, (c) 142 state accountability artifacts, and (d) 26 national accountability artifacts.

Eight hundred and twenty-seven artifacts presented a pattern that persisted throughout the three districts I served. Forty-two percent of my artifacts consisted of actions of the South Carolina General Assembly, the South Carolina State Board of Education, and the South Carolina Department of Education. The 348 artifacts, which I classified under state legislative actions, dealt with finance (59%), and accountability (41%). Twenty-six artifacts contributed to 3% of national legislative acts. Among the districts, their issues included these trends: (a) curriculum, (b) combined district-and-state financial issues, and (c) district-and-state combined accountability issues. These issues were a constant during my entire superintendency. Among the other common district issues, I noted the following list of concerns and events rezoning, closing a school, opting for a referendum, naming schools as well other topics; some connected to school personnel issues.

For the purposes of this article, I chose a dominant educational trend, curriculum issues, to illustrate how my artifact analysis instruments worked. Fifty-five percent of my artifact analysis dealt with curriculum management for the twenty-two years I spent as a superintendent. Because this issue spanned 453 artifacts, the variety of artifacts' formats ranged from newspaper



articles, minutes, agendas, letters, and assorted notes spanning my professional timeline from my first year in the first district I served in the superintendency to the last year and final district.

I present my analysis example using one of the curriculum theme's artifacts. The artifact represented an achievement that crossed two districts and 15 years of development. My example is a news artifact from local print media, "State department of education to offer access to [District Create's - SDC's] Curriculum" (Wilson, 2009). The print artifact replicated the state department of education's press announcement about SDC's curriculum documents, designed to support state assessment standards mapped across subject matter, grade levels, and with weekly guidance for classroom use.

First, I applied the Researcher's Analysis Memoing instrument. I used only the headers and one row of my instrument for this artifact. Table 4 displays my excerpt of the artifact's form.

Table 4

*Example Excerpt of Research's Analysis Memoing*

Memo Points & Reminders	Location (Circle >)	SDA	SDC	SDR	All Districts	State or Federal	Notes for Venue & Contact
	Format (Check ) >	Document Internal? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> External?	Media <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Interview <input type="checkbox"/>	Video <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Date of Artifact:</b> November 2009				<b>Date of Review:</b> July 2021			
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<b>Curriculum Issue(s) What? Keep or Discard? &amp; Why? Code Color: Purple Recode: Y N</b>	Standards-based Curriculum Design, Maps, and Pacing Guides, Press announcement from state's department of education  Keep as a culminating artifact of multi-district, and cross-district achievement  Purple  N [no recode]						[No notes]

<b>Memo Points &amp; Reminders</b>	<b>Location (Circle)</b>	<b>SDA</b>	<b>SDC</b>	<b>SDR</b>	<b>All Districts</b>	<b>State or Federal</b>	<b>Notes for Venue &amp; Contact</b>
	<b>Format (Check )&gt;</b>	<b>Document Internal? ✓ External?</b>	<b>✓ Media</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Video</b>	<b>Other</b>	
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This single newsprint artifact stemmed from a press release by the state department of education. While I led District Create, teachers and school leaders collaborated on aligning their instruction, including curriculum materials with the state’s assessment standards. Although the state department’s recognition of this work as worthy of distribution to the other public school districts was important then and now, this curriculum development achievement expanded work begun in the other two school districts. By the time, this newspaper article appeared, it captured an achievement that spanned almost a decade. and that its effects had spread to 43 of 81 school districts by the time the department of education sought to make it available to the rest of the state.

Table 5 shows how I used my structured self-reflection instrument to deepen my understanding of the influence and symbolism of the print-news item. (Wilson, 2009).

Table 5

*Example Systematic Self-Reflection*

<b>District</b>	<b>SDA</b>	<b>SDC</b>	<b>SDR</b>	<b>SDA &amp; SDC</b>	<b>All Districts</b>	<b>State or National</b>	<b>Venue/ Contact</b>
<b>Source</b>	Document	Agenda	Video	✓ Print Media	Letter	state	Former State Superintendents from 2009 to 2022
<b>Issue</b>	District	Gender	✓ Curriculum	Federal	State	Court(s)	Other

Code	Blue	Yellow	✓ Purple	Green	Orange	Red	Pink
<b>Date of Artifact:</b> November 2009							
<b>Date of Review:</b> July 2021							
1. The artifact that I found today which surprised me was: <i>the degree of continued satisfaction and pride I felt as I reread this [state] Department of Education press release picked up by the [print news] in the local area for my final superintendency.</i>							
2. It surprised me because: <i>twelve years passed since the [state] Department of Education purchased the [District Create] approved curriculum for the entire state. One might think that the excitement of this event faded with time, but it had not. Instead, this was a tremendous validation for two districts whose teachers and administrators believed in the curriculum vision.</i>							
3. What were the circumstances that created this artifact? <i>First, the [state] Department of Education purchased the [District Create (SDC)] approved curriculum for all districts to use in their classrooms, to become members of the writing team, and to make suggestions for improvement.</i>							
4. Who was the audience? <i>The audience for the press release covered the whole state, specifically public-school districts. However, my reactions stemmed from memories the artifact elicited about those colleagues who believed in the project starting in the first district, [District Adventure or SDA]. Then, the intellectual and financial capacity of [District Create or SDC] made the concept a reality. Finally, I served [District Resolve or SDR] as a former creator of the approved curriculum and the SDR school board approved the purchase from SDC as SDR's curriculum lagged the state's requirements.</i>							
5. The emotion it provoked was: <i>The feeling it prompted was pride and gratefulness for a team of professionals that believed in the vision beginning in [District Adventure (SDA)], the first district I served. I also felt vindicated and validated, as this was a paradigm shift for many stakeholders. I was vindicated because in the beginning many teachers and parents had resisted the concept of standards-based curriculum design because they sincerely believed that teaching was telling students facts that students memorized for tests. Those stakeholders were angry that the shift in curriculum meant teaching and learning changed and instead of testing memorization, the expectations were that students could apply learning. My validation came from the state-level recognition of how the curriculum changes supported the state's requirements, and that recognition justified the years I steadily encouraged, cajoled, and supported a change to standards-based teaching and learning.</i>							
6. Why was this emotion provoked? <i>This project was a long, hard-fought battle across two districts to get professional educators and the community on board for a written K-8 standards-based curriculum.</i>							
7. This artifact reminded me of: <i>I remembered vividly the pride and excitement that I experienced when this announcement was made official. The board of trustees and senior staff knew about the state and district contractual agreement. With this announcement came a sense of oneness and acknowledgment of the tremendous teamwork from teachers, administrators, board of</i>							

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*trustees, parents, newspaper editors, community leaders, and the community supporting this challenging endeavor.*

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8. Today, after looking at artifacts, the most important thing I learned was:  
*That my intuition about keeping all of these artifacts that accumulated in thousands of pages and hundreds of notebooks became worth the effort had value. Reading and touching important papers and recorded events I created long ago became real, and I relived all the emotions. I felt relieved to see this artifact as evidence that the other artifacts held meaning in the event of this press announcement.*

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9. Today, after looking at artifacts, a question I have is:  
*This curriculum project was not always met with excitement or understanding but with anger and disdain. Many professionals believed that this curriculum would stifle creativity and spontaneous teaching. My question is how the state superintendent persuaded state-department staff to plant a state seal of approval on it?*

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10. I will follow-up by contacting:  
*the two-state superintendents who were involved with the beginning of the project while I was in the first district [District Raiders], and then the announcement came during my service in the second district [District Artie].*

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In this example, I demonstrated how I used two instruments for the systematic analysis of artifacts. My example represented an artifact from the largest classification among all artifacts used in my autoethnography of my career as a public-school superintendent. The process using these two instruments exposes a rationale in the decision-making steps and interpretations of an artifact using the Researcher Analysis Memoing instrument. That instrument provided a means of cross-referencing timelines, events, solutions, and patterns. Using the Systematic Self-Reflection instrument provoked my memories and gave me insights into who could inform my understanding and recall. Based on that instrument, I generated a list of interviewees who knew to confirm, expand, or contradict my autoethnography.

This analysis was a time-consuming task but going through the steps outlined helped to identify the artifacts that emerged as the dominant artifacts that could demonstrate the life, significance, and stages of an event that had significant consequences not only for one district but for a state. I constructed my story from the patterns scaffolded with the two instruments, making sense of overwhelming fragments among the thousands of artifacts (Chang, 2008). This

set of cycles in the analysis process demonstrated how an artifact could weave a theme over multiple years that eventually gives insight into a particular time in educational history (Chang et al., 2012)

In addition, this process gave me confidence, transparency, and a targeted purpose for negotiating 22 years of accumulated relics (Birt et al., 2016; Cho & Trent, 2006). With these elements, artifact analysis can offer a process that can link disjointed data to express a coherent story while giving insight into the time that impacted education (Chang, 2008).

### Conclusion

Autoethnography is an emergent and immersive research method that uses personal artifacts and experiences to tell an explanatory story; in this case, my artifacts illustrated a professional journey (Chang, 2008; Chang et al., 2012; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Patton, 2002). During this qualitative research process, I tell stories through systematic reflection, evaluate my perspectives with others, and consider and reconsider my analysis and interpretations (Jones et al., 2013). While preparing for my autoethnography, I realized the gap in the methods literature about the specific strategies and steps to organize, test, and retest accuracy and meaning from professional and career artifacts. As a result, I created these two documents, Researcher's Analysis Memoing and Self-Structured Reflection Form, to help make a systematic approach that balanced and confirmed my personal and others' reminiscences and memories into a narrative.

The Researcher's Analysis Memoing document aims to detail a matrix for sorting artifacts. The instrument recorded the rationale for making decisions involving information that I discarded or added to a category. Also, I used it as a means of cross-referencing timelines, events, solutions, and patterns.

The Structured Self-Reflection form helped capture my first reaction and memory for recording circumstances surrounding the artifact(s), remembering the event or series of events, and considering the selected individuals who can serve as interviewees. These interviewees are critical to legitimizing my understanding and recollection of the associated experiences. Another purpose was to document my recall of the events and the degree to which I remembered the cognitive and emotional reactions or insights surrounding these memories. In addition, this form helped to establish where such memories may reveal missing information about the events of being a superintendent in the context of a particular school district, time in educational policy history, and evolving educational practices.

Utilizing these strategies and steps adds confidence for the researcher in examining artifacts, historical documents, archival notes, and interviews through confirmation and transparent lenses. One can become a storyteller that can capture and analyze a personal journey that is inclusive and in harmony with others' recollections.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### A SUPERINTENDENT'S CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP:

#### FINDINGS FROM AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

##### Abstract

**Purpose:** Given gaps in the literature about first-hand perspectives from the chief executive officer of a school district, I conducted an autoethnography of my three terms as school superintendent across three decades and generated a framework from artifacts that focused on district-level curriculum leadership. **Research Approach:** Autoethnography includes systematic data management of artifacts, which include documents, notes, and other media. For this study, I included affirmative or contrasting perspectives from two selected colleagues, who hold knowledge and insight connected to my artifacts and the associated events and era. **Findings:** I culled 827 artifacts and sorted them into four recurring trends: (a) federal and state education statutes and regulations (26 artifacts), (b) accountability policies (143), (c) school finance (205), and (d) curriculum development and management (453). Given the dominance of the curriculum theme, I further refined that analysis into a framework for district-level curriculum leadership. **Implications:** Besides addressing the gap in the literature on the superintendency that lacks first-hand perspectives from superintendents about their feelings and practices, aspiring and practicing superintendents may find the framework for curriculum leadership helpful in their daily work.

*Keywords:* artifacts, autoethnography, curriculum development and management, district-level curriculum leadership, superintendents' curriculum leadership

For more than two centuries, the educational leadership literature has lacked perspectives from practicing or retired superintendents about their experiences in day-to-day operations as the chief educational leaders of their school districts. Other than survey-based snapshots, numerous scholars of the school superintendency lament the paucity of superintendents' memoirs or any other direct accounts from their point of view (Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1976; Eaton, 1990; Glass, 2000; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Thomas, 2001; Tyack, 1976; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

The literature on educational change frequently focuses on school-level strategies or more macro-level descriptions and impacts due to state and federal policies but only rarely acknowledges the roles of school districts and their leaders (Andero, 2000; Björk et al., 2018; Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Honig, 2003, 2013; Honig et al., 2014; Waters & Marzano 2007). The decades-long lack of documentation from superintendents' perspectives about their daily responsibilities leaves what Wagner (1993) termed a "blank spot" (p. 16) in the literature about the superintendency. The *blank spot* deepens regarding the scant reports about superintendents' insights as to their approaches to change, particularly their methods of enabling communities' capacity for change (Andero, 2000; Honig, 2003, 2013; Honig et al., 2014).

International scholarship and historical records (Björk et al., 2014; Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1976; Cubberley, 1915, 1916; Glass, 2000; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Janak, 2014; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Kowalski, 2006; Tyack, 1976) address the evolution of the superintendent's office through periods of public education development. States responded to national policies, laws, and reform movements in the

design and refinement of each state's system for schooling (Ingle & Lindle, 2018). Federal and state governments passed significant regulations and implemented numerous education policies to establish the superintendent's office (Björk et al., 2014; Björk & Gurley, 2005; Callahan, 1966; Cuban, 1976; Cubberley, 1915, 1916; Glass, 2000; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Janak, 2014; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Kowalski, 2006; Tyack, 1976; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). The chronology of how the position developed offers one depiction of the way that educational leadership advanced. Nevertheless, the insights of those individuals who inhabited the superintendent's job remain missing. Moreover, the voices directly linked to practicing superintendents rarely add to the leadership preparation knowledge base. Their explanations and records about operating schools or implementing change are primarily absent (Björk et al., 2014; Björk & Gurley, 2005; Honig, 2004; Khalifa et al., 2019; Szolowicz & Aaron Wisman, 2021).

### **Purpose**

Across two centuries of educational and national growth, multiple scholars of U.S. education history and the superintendency reported sparse records from practicing or former superintendents (Tyack, 1976). "The main problem the educational historian faces is to fit these disparate data, often presented snapshot style and limited to particular time and place, into an interpretive framework" (Tyack, 1976, p. 257). Even though AASA, the School Superintendents Association, (once the American Association of School Administrators), since 1923, conducted reports on the superintendency, including decennial surveys, nearly all of these reports consisted of survey-based descriptions about current role-holders (AASA, 2022; Björk & Kowalski, 2005; Glass et al., 2005; Tienken,

2021). The snapshot nature of such inquiries delivers momentary insights rather than profound reflections from the role-holders (Acker-Hocevar et al., 2009; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981; Waters & Marzano, 2007).

More reflective research approaches, such as autobiographies and memoirs (Author, 2021), could offer a more holistic view of the superintendency to overcome the predominant survey method that shows only glimpses of the superintendency. After a career in the superintendency that crossed three decades, three superintendencies, and a term as a public school board member, I chose a systematic autoethnography approach to capture my reflections about the nature of my professional work as a school superintendent (Button, 1966; Chang, 2008; 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Goodall, 2000; Jones et al., 2013; Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Tracy, 2010). I used the following research question: What do my professional artifacts, documents, archival notes, and perspectives from colleagues and state officials reveal about educational changes in the last 30 years that influenced the superintendent's office?

### **Research Methods**

Autoethnography highlights firsthand experiences as a contribution to research investigations about human lives and occupations (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2013, 2008; Collinson, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Fetterman, 2010; Goodall, 2000; Jones et al., 2013; Tracy, 2010; Tullis, 2013). Autoethnography is an interpretive research design with suitable methods for validly collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to the self (Chang et al., 2012). Autoethnography produces a self-narrative involving multiple layers of consciousness to promote an individual's description and reaction to the environment

(Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography supports a theoretical framework of reflexivity and self-identity (Chang, 2008, 2013; Hoppes, 2014; Ngunjiri et al., 2010).

With autoethnographic techniques, individuals tell their stories through systematic reflection, evaluate their perspectives with others, and consider and reconsider their life events through systematic analysis and interpretations (Jones et al., 2013).

Autoethnographers use professional artifacts, documents, and notes to explore and reflect on various occurrences in association with other individuals (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2013; Chang et al., 2012; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jones et al., 2013). Autoethnographers elicit insights into their experiences by analyzing their artifacts and sometimes conferring with others who have knowledge of the events or meanings associated with those memorabilia (Birt et al., 2016; Cho & Trent, 2006). In an autoethnography, an individual inhabits a dual perspective as both participant and researcher (Anderson, 2006; Hoppes, 2014).

### **Data Collection**

I used two primary data sources: (a) artifacts and (b) interviews with contemporaries, such as colleagues and state officials, who had the experiences and knowledge to confirm or challenge my perspectives and memories (Ewan, 1988; Hoppes, 2014; Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Vryan et al., 2003). For this study, I defined artifacts as a comprehensive collection of (a) official records, (b) photos, (c) memorabilia, (d) newspaper articles, and (e) personal journals (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jones et al., 2013).

I established the following criteria for selecting participants to interview: (a) current and former superintendents with more than 20 years of service and who served

during the same period as I did, and (b) elected state officials who served during the decades in which I served. I then further narrowed the pool of potential interviewees based on another criterion as I sought individuals who had direct association with the creation of the artifacts or presence at the events associated with the artifacts. All these criteria ensured my interviewing those individuals who could provide further insights about the mementos, events, and their associated memories by confirming or disputing my interpretation or recall. As designed, I could only apply these requirements after analysis of all the artifacts, and thus the artifact analysis required my systematically identifying potential interviewees during the artifact sort.

### ***Instrumentation***

Data in this study included hundreds of papers and other physical mementos, which document decades of work from day-to-day operations and decision-making to deliberations and actions. As noted by Chang (2008), autoethnographers may view the scaffolding of these patterns as fragmented and overwhelming at first, but by moving systematically, a story emerges. Chang (2008) opined that the process could link disjointed data to express a coherent story while giving insight into the cultural understanding of that time. I needed mechanisms to enable my systematic review and reflections.

While artifacts are essential to autoethnography, scholars provide few details about systematically evaluating relics or capturing their evocative power for a person's life narrative (Chang, 2008; Hughes et al., 2012). Therefore, I created three instruments to document self-reflections and data auditing through interviews with selected individuals with the knowledge to confirm or offer further insights into the events or the

artifacts' meanings (Tracy, 2010). I set up these three instruments: (a) Researcher's Analysis Memoing, (b) Systematic Self-Reflection, and (c) Semi-structured Interview instruments. I used two forms (Researcher's Analysis Memoing and Systematic Self-Reflection) with the data source of artifacts. The third instrument supported my interview data source.

***Researcher's Analysis Memoing Instrument.*** I used a two-level process to sort and code my artifacts with these two instruments: (a) Researcher's Analysis Memoing and (b) Systematic Self-Reflection. The first level of my approach to the artifacts required analysis memoing. Memoing during data analysis is a research technique that aids in clarifying thinking, retaining ideas, and abstracting meaning to record the decision-making process (Birt et al., 2008). I created the Researcher's Analysis Memoing Instrument as my system for documenting knowledge of my artifact. This instrument helped me categorize nearly a thousand artifacts across three decades and three superintendencies. This form has two sections. (Table 1, Classification of Artifacts, and Table 2, Researcher's Analysis Memoing Form).

Table 1

*Classification of Artifacts*

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Time (Days, Months, Years)
Location (School District 1,2,3, or all, state/nation)
Format (Document, Media, Interview, Video)
District Issue(s)
Gender Issue(s)
Curriculum Management Implementation



National Legislative Actions

State Legislative Actions

Supreme Court or Fourth Circuit Court Actions

Other

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Table 1, *Classification of Artifacts*, displays my initial conceptualization of the artifacts I collected. Over the years, I had arranged the artifacts chronologically, filling three-ring notebooks with mostly documents. I inserted other memorabilia and media in chronological order as well. Given the arrangement, I created Table 1's Classification of Artifacts list to begin a systematic sorting process. The table shows my initial thinking about how to classify the artifacts.

I used the *Time* classification to capture the artifact's span in dates and whether it represented events and associated deliberations or recurrences. For example, did this event, activity, discussion, or movement last a day or multiple years?

The *Location* classification served as another marker of the artifact and helped place the artifact's meaning by association with any of the three school districts in which I worked. I gave pseudonyms names to the three districts for privacy purposes. Therefore, I named the first district, District Adventure. I chose the pseudonyms District Create and District Resolve for the second and third districts. I classified artifacts by location as I answered such questions as whether the information from the artifacts pertained to only one of the three districts I served or just two, or was it present in all three communities I served.

I used the *Format* classification to track the type of artifact. Even though most artifacts were paper-based documents inserted in three-ring notebooks, I had video and

audio recordings, too. While sorting the document artifacts, I recorded whether each was a memo, handwritten note, or agenda or whether the document was a copy of a news item from the media, such as an interview or press announcement.

My classification scheme also included two a priori topics: (a) *District Issues* and (b) *Gender Issues*. I assumed from my career span that I would have repetitious operational issues that recurred from district to district. That assumption stemmed from how school leaders prepared for state licensing, which includes operating and management topics such as law, personnel, and finance. Before I started my artifact review, I expected that memos, agenda, and my notes would fall into these day-to-day moments of my superintendent's career, which I classified as *District Issues*. On the other hand, because I started my superintendency during an era where the majority in that role, not merely in my state, were men, my other a priori assumption focused on my experiences as one of only a few female superintendents. I expected that the category of *Gender Issues* might fill as I reviewed artifacts where I may have noted questions and inferences about my legitimacy in leading any of the three school districts.

*Curriculum Management Implementation* originated in my memories of the teaching and learning conditions in all the districts I served as well as ongoing concerns from other superintendents. For example, this category of artifacts included events, discussions, and meetings ranging from set-up of lesson plan requirements to the development and implementation of a standards-based curriculum. During my experiences as a superintendent, my role included transforming instruction from textbook scripts and units to standards-based performance and achievement. That shift demanded significant changes in professional development, knowledge of standards, clustering of

curriculum standards into units, common planning times, grade-level and district-level assessments, state assessment, national assessment, observations, vertical alignment, report cards, and state and federal policies. All these areas defined how I classified artifacts into *Curriculum Management Implementation*.

The classification of *State or Federal Laws* among artifacts dealt with issues related to US Congressional legislation in the early 2000s, known as the *No Child Left Behind Act*. That act expanded how districts grappled with curriculum and instruction and expanded into assessment concerns about meeting the federally required, and state-defined, mandate of *Adequate Yearly Progress*. While that example alone showed the overlap of federal and state policies for district leadership, other state-based legislation and regulations impact school districts' operations, including finance, administrator and teacher evaluations, accountability, school start dates, and curriculum, just to name a few.

Another potential classification, *Court Actions*, stemmed from my memories as a superintendent. I recalled my work in interpreting and following mandates which arose through decisions rendered by the United States Supreme Court or, in some cases, the Fourth Circuit Court. Therefore, in my initial composition of classifications, I assumed artifacts might include those judicial actions.

After delineating these classifications in the first section, I combined them with a memoing format, the final version of the instrument, Researcher Analysis Memoing Form (Table 2). I placed the classification scheme and modified it at the top of the form.

Table 2

*Researcher's Analysis Memoing Form*

Memo Points & Reminders	Location (Circle) >	SDA	SDC	SDR	All Districts	State or Federal	Notes for Venue & Contact
	Format (Check) >	Document Internal? External?	Media	Interview	Video	Other	
Date of Artifact:				Date of Review:			
District Issue(s) What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Blue Recode: Y N							
Gender Issue(s) What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Yellow Recode: Y N							
Curriculum What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Purple Recode: Y N							
National Actions What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Green Recode: Y N							
State Actions What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Orange Recode: Y N							
Supreme Court or Fourth Circuit Court Actions What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Red Recode: Y N							
Other Topic What? Keep or Discard? & Why?							

Memo Points & Reminders	Location (Circle) >	SDA	SDC	SDR	All Districts	State or Federal	Notes for Venue & Contact
	Format (Check) >	Document Internal? External?	Media	Interview	Video	Other	
Code Color: Pink							
Recode: Y N							

The classification modifications included a coding rule for each district's pseudonym. So, District Adventure became SDA. Next, I coded District Create as SDC, with the third school district, District Resolve, coded as SDR. Then I added potential combinations of those locations in the top matrix. The next row focused on a quick note about the format. And I created the last column as a reminder to write a memo about both venue and the participants, who might be candidates for my follow-up interviews about the artifact.

I used the remaining seven rows for my memos about the artifact. In each row, I included one of the classifications (District Issues, Gender Issues, Curriculum, National Actions, State Actions, Court Actions, and any other unique classification). For each of the classifications, I made a note to answer all the following questions:

- What? – meaning a description of the artifact
- Keep or discard? – requiring a judgment about the value of the artifact
- & Why? – reminding me to memo about my judgment's justification
- Color code – which depended on this plan: (a) district-level issues, blue; (b) gender issues, yellow; (c) curriculum issues, purple; (d) national policy, green, (e) state-level policy, orange, (f) court actions, red, and (g) pink indicated other notable and specified issues.

- Recode: Y? or N? – requiring my review of the artifact in my iterative analysis.

As I read each artifact, I coded it according to the categories found in the *Researcher's Analysis Memoing Form*. After reading and coding, I placed that artifact in a container indicating the district where it originated as noted in the top row of the form. Next, I reread each artifact and began assigning additional codes, such as a district, state or national issue or whether problem originated through local actions. Finally, I removed each artifact from the district container in which I originally deposited them and moved into a holding container for artifacts that crossed district lines. As I defined and sorted each relic iteratively, that artifact collected indicators as I recorded them on the *Researcher's Analytical Memoing Form* process. As I continued the process, I recalled these artifacts as either a one-time event or one that crossed district boundaries or stemmed from or toward a state issue, and as I went through the process, I indicated the type of format the artifact represented.

As I moved the artifacts through the *Researcher's Analytic Memoing* notes, and physically shifted the artifacts and mementos among bins, I saw collections and trends and I made another decision to discard or maintain each relic. The *Researcher's Analysis Memoing* captured my reflections so that I had a record of the meaning I attributed to the artifact. Making sense of the work using my classification scheme (Table 1) and my *Researcher's Analysis Memoing Form* (Table 2) included my reflections and insights tying my professional connections and understandings among my many mementos of the superintendency.

### ***Systematic Self-Reflection Instrument.***

The next step involved a memoing process for insights into my sense-making of artifacts' meanings beyond their categorical sorting (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Saldaña, 2015). Appendices A and B represent one instrument, the Researcher's Analytic Memoing. Table 3 illustrates the second instrument I created: The Systematic Self-Reflection Instrument, which shows the degree of reflection I used for this process.

I used the *Systematic Self-Reflection Instrument* (Table 3) to further my insights about each artifact. I sought to elicit aspects of my professional self-identity (Change 2008, 2013; Hoppes, 2014; Horowitz, 2012) from these questions and in a compilation of these responses across artifacts. In the moments of my professional life, as my accomplishments grew over time, my memories of specific moments of struggle and joy waned in the aftermath. Thus, I created the *Systematic Self-Reflection Instrument* (Table 3) to trigger more specific memories about how I felt as I recalled the artifact, and possibly, stimulate my memory about how I felt at the time in which the artifact originated. The instrument included a set of questions that helped me form what Saldaña (2015) termed a monologue and what others deem a form of reflexivity (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Finlay & Gough, 2003).

Table 3

*Systematic Self Reflection Instrument*

<b>District</b>	SDA	SDC	SDR	SDA & SDC	All Districts	State or National	Venue/ Contact
<b>Source</b>	Document	Agenda	Video	Print Media	Letter		
<b>Issue</b>	District	Gender	Curriculum	Federal	State	Court(s)	Other
<b>Code</b>	Blue	Yellow	Purple	Green	Orange	Red	Pink

Date of Artifact: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Review: \_\_\_\_\_

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1. The artifact that I found today which surprised me was: \_\_\_\_\_
2. It surprised me because: \_\_\_\_\_
3. What were the circumstances that created this artifact? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Who was the audience? \_\_\_\_\_
5. The emotion it provoked was: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Why was this emotion provoked? \_\_\_\_\_
7. This artifact reminded me of the following: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Today, after looking at artifacts, the most important thing I learned was: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Today, after looking at artifacts, a question I have is: \_\_\_\_\_
10. I will follow up by contacting the following: \_\_\_\_\_

Furthermore, as a step toward checking my memories and insights, this second instrument (Table 3) supported my process of selecting individuals with direct knowledge about the events and eras attached to the artifacts. That is, the first instrument, Research Analysis Memoing helped me make generic notes about the artifacts’ existence, and this second instrument helped me be more specific about the involvement of others surrounding the artifacts, as well as narrow the potential interviewees to those with more direct involvement.



The two instruments I developed for artifact analysis, Researcher Analysis Memoing and Systematic Self Reflection, provided a systematic approach, including strategies to clarify my recall of professional moments so that I could abstract meaning from my artifacts (Birks et al., 2008). With those initial impressions of my artifacts, I turned to a selection of key individuals who could help with my memories and interpretations. I used a semi-structured interview protocol based on my process of artifact analysis and enlistment of those individuals with knowledge associated with the artifacts' meanings.

### ***Semi-Structured Interviews.***

Interviews offered a check on my memories and meanings of the artifacts I used for my autoethnography (Chang, 2008). Because autoethnography is a self-study, a mistaken assumption might be that the method's data sources exclude interviews among contemporaries (Chang, 2008, p. 106). However, interviews may “stimulate memories, fill in gaps, validate existing beliefs, and gain others' perspective on you” (Chang, 2008, p. 106).

After, my review of more than two decades and thousands of pages of artifacts, I concluded that the majority (55%) dealt with curriculum issues. Although the artifacts about curriculum development and management originated inside the districts I served, they were associated with state-level policies. Among those artifacts associated with district-to-state communication, and vice versa, two state superintendents played significant roles in acknowledging the curriculum work that emerged between 1993 and 2007.

Given these individuals' roles, I developed questions for them based on the analysis of the artifacts. That is, I had to complete my review of artifacts to fully interrogate both my memories and theirs about the dominant proportion of artifacts. The questions I developed prior to full analysis scaffolded a semi-structured interview to elicit their perceptions rather than imposing mine. My scaffolding interview protocol included the following:

As I reviewed my notes and materials from my work as a superintendent, I noted this [insert event or policy] and recalled your participation in it. What are your memories about that [insert event or policy]?

Potential probes [use only if appropriate]

- a. Do you remember any particular points of controversy about [insert event or policy] and how those points were resolved (or not)?
- b. What did you see as the biggest changes associated with [insert event or policy]?
- c. How did you think [insert event or policy] turned out after all?
- d. What other changes did [insert event or policy] bring eventually?

These scaffolding questions formed the basis of my semi-structured interview protocol, the third instrument which I developed for this autoethnography. The interview process from selection of participants through the open-ended protocol was approved by Clemson University's Institutional Review Board (IRB2021- 0620).

For the design of data collection in this autoethnography, I applied the theoretical framework of self and professional identity germane to the depiction of my professional life as a school district superintendent (Horowitz, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Vryan et

al., 2003). I created three instruments to guide my primary data source of analysis of artifacts collected over three school districts and more than two decades with a confirmatory set of interviews with selected key informants. The instruments included the following documents: (a) Researcher's Analysis Memoing, (b) Systematic Self-Reflection, and (c) Semi-structured Interview. These instruments served to combine self-reflections with systematic verification (Tracy, 2010). Through these instruments, I sought to increase the veracity of my autoethnography.

### **Analysis**

The data for this study consisted primarily of artifacts and the meanings I associated with them from my years in the superintendency. Also, I used a confirmatory data source, interviews with selected knowledgeable professionals, who could provide further insights about the events and meanings associated with my artifacts. Given two data sources, I performed analyses for each.

My approach to coding my artifacts included multiple readings of documents that included memos, agendas, and minutes, my annotations on such documents, and memorabilia such as photos or other media. I used two instruments, the Researcher Analysis Memoing, and the Systematic Self-Reflection, in guiding my sorting as I read and reread and sorted. I stacked the instruments and artifacts into bins and then re-read and resorted as I physically reduced the piles of paper. As the process continued, I determined how the remaining stacks might represent an overarching trend across the years. I used the multi-year collections as themes that informed my descriptions and interpretation of the superintendencies I experienced across multiple decades and school districts.

As the sorting stabilized, and as I completed and read my memoing on both instruments, I started generating the list of potential interviewees. Alongside this list, I clarified the scaffolding in my Semi-structured Interview protocol. The simultaneous use of all three instruments in multiple rounds of coding led me to interview two individuals, each of whom had served as state-level Superintendents of Public Education during different phases of my tenure as a district-level superintendent in two of the three districts I served.

Interviewees were asked to participate in member checking, “also known as a participant or respondent validation, a technique for exploring the credibility of results” (Birt et al., 2016, p.1802). Therefore, after each interview, I transcribed the recordings and electronically sent the transcription in a word-processed document to the interviewees to mark clarifications and to check for the accuracy of their reflections and experiences (Birt et al., 1016). This technique allowed the interviewee to be a valued participant in the research while seeking truth and transparency (Cho & Trent, 2006).

Data analysis from the two data sources in this study, required my integration of a massive volume of artifacts that I scrutinized, evaluated, and categorized, and led to confirmatory interviews with key informants. The analysis process involved moving between the data sources of artifacts and interviews in steps that added veracity to my systematic autoethnography. Because this is an autoethnography, each source and analysis step required my reflections about meanings and confirmation of how the sources intertwined. Trustworthiness, transparency, and validity are the centerpieces of high-quality research, especially among descriptive and exploratory designs (Birt et al., 2016; Cho & Trent, 2006).

## Findings

The results of this study represent my interpretation of trends in nearly 1000 artifacts, which were confirmed in interviews with selected contemporaries, and education professionals, who had knowledge of the events associated with these trends. Even though the sequence in my analyses required the sorting of artifacts before conducting the interviews, these dual sources combined in a dominant theme, which I finalized as a framework.

Using the two memoing instruments I created, the Researcher Analysis Memoing Form, and the Systematic Self-Reflection Instrument, I reduced my artifacts and reviewed 827 to find a pattern of four issues and trends that persisted throughout the three districts I served. Table 4 displays the four issues and trends.

Table 4

### *Issues and Trends Distribution among Artifacts*

Issues and Trends	Number of Artifacts
Curriculum Development and Management	453
Finance	205
Accountability	143
Legislative Acts	26
Total	827

Arguably, the 26 artifacts that represented legislative acts heavily influence the topics and trends among state and district issues with finance, accountability, and curriculum. Furthermore, these issues and trends stemmed from actions of the South Carolina General Assembly, the South Carolina State Board of Education, and the South

Carolina Department of Education or some combination of the state government's education policies and regulations.

Public financing of education, a classification which included 205 of my artifacts, reflects legislative policies attached to accountability (143 artifacts). During my decades as superintendent, both state and national education accountability policies heavily influenced curriculum through assessment standards. So, the dominance of the Curriculum and Development trend may be due to the underlying trends in legislation, accountability policy, and the financing attached to those trends.

My artifacts indicated that the development and management of the curriculum within the district transpired at the same time. Of the 453 curriculum artifacts, 295 or 65% showed simultaneous meetings, memos, and notes covering both curriculum development and management processes. Speeches, presentations, newspaper articles, editorials, board agendas, and staff agendas were among the artifacts demonstrating the coexistence of both process charts.

For example, five artifacts from 2000, 2001, 2002, 2006, and 2009 show a progression in the curriculum development and management trend I deduced from among the hundreds of curriculum mementos. In August 2000, an agenda for the elementary and middle school principals and their leadership teams outlined the process, resources, and discussion on rewriting examples and activities to improve curriculum and instructional practices. A July 2001 editorial from a regional newspaper came from a formal discussion with its editorial board. During the discussion, I spoke at length about the process and outcomes of the district's curriculum. I brought and shared samples of the curriculum, highlighting the benefits for students in particular, as well as for teachers. In

August 2002, I sent a letter to the district's parents answering the question of why change the curriculum, including a statement of purpose and explaining the continuous process of curriculum improvement. The fourth trending artifact came from July 2006 of a presentation to the district's new teachers as part of their orientation to their positions in the district, and that artifact demonstrated how the management and development of the district's curriculum simultaneously progressed. Finally, in 2009, the state department of education issued a press release, which announced the availability of our school district's curriculum guides for other school districts to purchase. The near decade-long span of these documents with the culminating press release tells the story of curriculum leadership at the district level from my perspective. My methods required the next step of confirmatory interviews with those individuals most directly involved in this dominant trend of curriculum development and management.

Among these artifacts, using both of my instruments, I noted the individuals most likely to recall associated meanings for this curriculum trend. I selected two state-level colleagues to offer their insights, either confirmatory or challenging. These individuals served different and non-consecutive terms as the elected state superintendent of education. These two individuals' responses essentially confirmed the trend from the span of years, and across the state's school districts, even more districts than the three I had served.

As an example of the confirmatory statements about the curriculum development and management processes, I include the following quotes from the two-state superintendents' interviews. The first quote shows a reflection from the state superintendent, Polly Gratis (a pseudonym), who served during the state's introduction of

standards. Ms. Gratis recalled the state's predicament in establishing standards while lacking state guidance for the alignment of those standards with classroom curriculum and instruction.

In the back of my mind, I was always thinking, okay, read these standards. If I was a teacher ... What would I do with this standard? It was just a very broad statement of what a child should learn in that particular grade. Well, you would look at the textbooks, which you hope would be aligned to that standard, and then you would go on the internet. You could come up with your own curriculum. But I always asked people internally, why don't we [the state] have a curriculum?

Ms. Gratis's statement confirms the work that districts or schools had to do to address the differences between textbook-based instruction, and the student performance standards established by the state and measured by a high-stakes, statewide assessment. The other interviewee, former state superintendent, Henry King (also a pseudonym), served later than Ms. Gratis, during a time when the state reformulated its assessment and accountability policies. Mr. King affirmed the role of the districts in addressing curriculum.

Some [districts] had some pretty good curricula. Some ... had some people who could help them develop it. Some had resources where they could go out and hire people to help them if they did not have people internally. But in many cases, the districts that needed it the most [were] least equipped [or] capable of improving their curriculum and learner outcomes. So we were, as a [state] department, [were] looking for ways to help. ... Your curriculum and your school district were having such success, which was well documented, and you personally had such



credibility that, you know, the people who were working in that area on a couple of different occasions came to me and said, “This is something that is available. It is ‘homegrown’, quote-unquote, and this is something that we should make available to the school districts.”

These two state superintendents’ terms as elected officials spanned 12, non-consecutive, years in that popularly elected, non-partisan office. They confirmed continuous challenges to districts and schools in the implementation of state-mandated, standards-based curriculum. They particularly noted the burden that fell to districts to develop and manage classroom-level standards-based instruction and learning. Both recognized that teachers and their districts often lacked the resources for their own curriculum design, implementation, and maintenance. They affirmed the need for state support of district-level curriculum development and management, but they also noted resistance at both the state and district levels to a statewide curriculum. The predicament stemmed from the uneven distribution of resources and district-level capacity for curriculum leadership.

Former Superintendent Polly Gratis remarked:

And then you came forward, and you had an example of an excellent curriculum where a teacher could take it, read the standard, choose the curriculum, and then not have to have developed curricula for all four subject areas if she was a self-contained classroom teacher. ... I pushed ... internally for the [state] department to adopt those standards. And the pushback was 'we could not just tell the teachers everything they should do. They have to have the freedom to develop their own curriculum.' But that was not the point. So, then what you did, you started

showing it to the school districts, and they started purchasing it from you. So, I thought, well, you know, that is a compromise that if they want to purchase it, it is their choice. ... but it would have been easier had we at the state department purchased it and had it available. ... it would have been nice if we had just endorsed the curriculum as the curriculum that was aligned with the standards and could be used throughout [the state].

Former State Superintendent Henry King also confirmed the controversy over a statewide curriculum, particularly as it surrounded my district's curriculum and its sales to other school districts. When prompted to recall any objections or uncertainty about the state's endorsement for purchasing one district's curriculum, he said, "I'd forgotten that there were people in the [state] department who disagreed with the decision to purchase it. That is a pretty small-minded objection, frankly, in my mind."

Given the affirmations from these former state superintendents about the ongoing demand for district superintendents' curriculum leadership, I concluded my analysis with the development of a framework. The purpose of the framework goes beyond summarizing the day-to-day operations of district-level curriculum leadership to also provide practicing and aspiring superintendents a cognitive map of this work.

### **A Curriculum Leadership Framework**

The two data sources, artifacts with confirmatory selected interviews, affirmed my memories and reflective analysis about the dominant role curriculum development and management played throughout my career as a school district superintendent.

Among the reasons for conducting this autoethnography, I intended to fill a gap in the literature that showed few insights from practicing superintendents (Björk et al., 2014;

Cuban, 1976; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Kowalski, 2006; Tyack, 1976; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). I believed that my contribution could also offer aspiring and practicing superintendents a framework for their practice as district leaders. The dominant trend in curriculum leadership led to a framework for the superintendent's curriculum leadership displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Curriculum Management and Development Processes Framework*

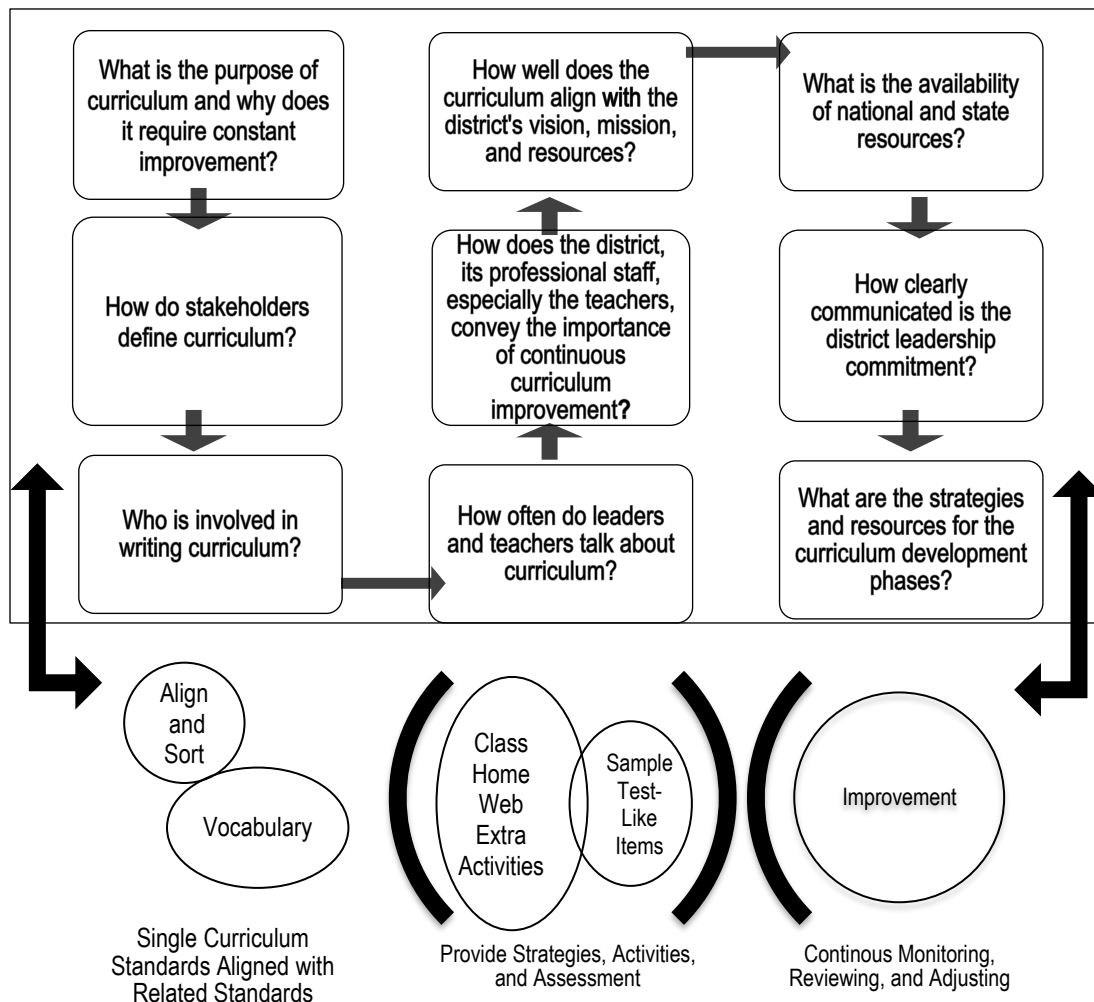


Figure 1, *Curriculum Management and Development Processes Framework*, shows the combination and simultaneous nature of curriculum development and management through two process cycles. These two cycles coexist as curriculum leadership interconnects continuously as well as simultaneously. The management process illustrates the ongoing inquiry, or nine questions, associated with curriculum management. The process in the second portion of the chart illustrates three phases associated with development and implementation in a continuous cycle of improvement.

District leadership needs to consider nine steps for the managing curriculum process. These steps are associated with finding answers to the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of curriculum and why does it require constant improvement?
2. How do you define curriculum?
3. Who is involved in curriculum writing and revisions?
4. How well does the curriculum align with the district's vision, mission, and resource allocation?
5. How does the district, its professional staff, especially the teachers, convey the importance of continuous curriculum improvement?
6. How often do leaders and teachers talk about curriculum?
7. What is the availability of national and state resources?
8. How clearly communicated is the district leadership commitment?
9. What are the strategies and resources for the components of curriculum development implementation.

The first step requires clarifying how curriculum represents the core purposes of schooling and then engaging with teachers, administrators, parents, the school board, and

the community at large. These purposes break across each grade level and all stakeholders need to share their expectations. In the situation of federal and state-mandated assessments, the discussion must include opportunities for stakeholders to find common ground about grade-level and subject standards for instruction as well as for meeting assessment mandates. Given the results of this conversation producing an alignment of expectations and mandates, those who write the curriculum must understand these shared purposes, that is, the *why*, before the curriculum writing process begins. The diversity of participants, teachers, school leaders, and sometimes parents and school board members lead to long discussions about the *why*. Nevertheless, omitting this vital step jeopardizes the opportunity to develop a comprehensive curriculum.

The second step, the definition of curriculum, requires agreement among the teachers and other education professionals who write the curriculum. Depending on their era of preparation and certification, educators may have different understandings about what a curriculum is. During my superintendencies, the teachers I worked with often mistook textbook objectives and units or state-level curriculum or assessment standards for the curriculum. They needed support to understand how to convert a set of state or national standards to grade-by-grade, and classroom-by-classroom curriculum guidelines. They needed to convert from covering textbook contents to understanding the points at which textbooks failed to support subject and grade level standards, and where to turn for resources that did support curriculum standards.

The third curriculum management question overlaps both prior questions in establishing who takes part in curriculum writing. Which stakeholders can take part in writing the curriculum? Arguably, parents and more mature students have large stakes in

curriculum standards, and those community members with subject or grade level expertise have the knowledge useful to detailing the curriculum standards. The primary authors of the curriculum tends to be teachers. Teachers involved in curriculum writing also show commitment to the simultaneous process of curriculum implementation. Teachers hold the key to writing curricula because they must decipher individual standards' meanings and anticipate diversity among their students' readiness to learn at the level of the standard. Teachers use their prior knowledge expand or collapse new or revised grade-level standards into the related instructional strategies and resources. District curriculum leaders face the project of assembling teachers in English Language Arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, across all grade levels, to take part in curriculum writing. If superintendents took the first step of grounding buy-in with a well-defined approach to the *Why*, they will find the teachers committed to writing curriculum.

Sometimes, as superintendent, I encountered a district where the curriculum writing was an event, rather than a continuous process. Thus, the fourth question spurs district curriculum leadership to engage a daily monitoring of curriculum improvement. The first three questions and their answers can be a means of sparking these daily conversations.

Beyond those internal discussions, the fifth question draws attention to constant communication with stakeholders. District leaders need to find a good answer for the question, How does the district, its professional staff, especially the teachers, convey the importance of continuous curriculum improvement? While district and school leaders can set up events that showcase student work and the results of the curriculum, teachers have

the most direct route to explaining the curriculum to students and their parents. District and school leaders amplify messages about the curriculum to the community.

District leaders provide a constant monitoring of whether the curriculum aligns with communities' vision, mission, and resources, the sixth question of curriculum management processes. As the writing and revisions take place, the discussions must return to the initial questions about the curriculum purposes, and the values expressed by stakeholders. This question centers the curriculum management process on continuous attention to student success, as aligned with the community's expectations. The district's visions, mission, and resources must be allocated to align with the curriculum, and the curriculum also has to align with the district and community's beliefs and expectations.

With the introduction of grade-level standards, a district's curriculum, teaching, and assessment changed which in turn required resources, the seventh step for curriculum management. Such resources included professional development, purchasing of materials and equipment, revised schedules, changes in personnel evaluation and employment decisions. During my career, national and state resources developed slowly. Nevertheless, some of the national resources helpful to teachers included conferences from subject-based organizations which had materials for standards-based education. As superintendent, I developed resource lists and sought support from state colleagues such as other district superintendents as well as engaged with national professional organizations. These contacts provided support for both leaders and teachers.

The superintendent's commitment is essential for curriculum development and management success. Thus, the eighth question focuses on clarity about district curriculum leadership and commitment. The message must be concise, clearly

communicated, and articulated for all audiences’ continuous exposure and understanding of the *why*, process, benefits, challenges, and opportunities in embedding grade-level standards in all grades for the subjects of English-Language Arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

The ninth question connects to the curriculum development and implementation process found in the bottom section of the image in Figure 1, *Curriculum Management and Development Processes Framework*. The question asks, what are the strategies and resources for the curriculum development phases? The answer to this question fits the curriculum management processes as it requires curriculum leaders to coordinate the curriculum development and implementation phases.

Figure 1 also illustrates the three phases of the development process. The three phases include the mechanisms of curriculum development and implementation.

The first phase sets up specific standards for each grade and each subject in a curriculum notebook or guide. Table 5 shows all the components for these notebooks. They were organized with eight features to help every teacher. Each teacher, no matter the grade (from kindergarten through secondary levels) or the subject, (English-Language Arts, mathematics, science, or social studies) received a curriculum notebook. On the curriculum notebook pages, each teacher used the individual grade-level standards for the school year. Beyond phase one’s *alignment and sorting of standards*, each teacher found an example of instructional ideas for clarity about the standard. In turn, that standard’s terms became a vocabulary list for teaching students.

The curriculum guide components (Table 5) included instructional examples that teachers expanded in the second phase of the curriculum development and



implementation process to *provide strategies, activities, and assessment*. These notebooks often contain three to five activities or strategies of how to teach these standards. Along with such ideas, each example can include resources such as internet sites and streaming programs, supplemental books, and kits with hands-on materials. These curriculum notebooks can include suggestions for at-home learning and homework practice. Such aspects of a curriculum notebook provide a comprehensive document to give a teacher clarity in teaching and confidence and support in their work.

Teachers may add or strike information in these notebooks to ensure the third phase, *continuous monitoring, reviewing and adjustment*. Ideally, these teacher-inserted notes and redactions lead to a revised curriculum ready for each new school year.

Finally, depicted in Figure 1, is an illustration of the constant review and continuous improvement for developing and managing the curriculum.. As teacher make changes or recommendations, the top process of the Framework in Figure1 activates to communicate these changes and continue to rally support for the curriculum and those who are writing it. Curriculum development is the foundation of our core business in educating children. This framework emerged from my autoethnography as a superintendent, and as such, fills a gap in the literature from a practicing superintendent's perspective about the superintendent's curriculum leadership role.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

I asked the research question:

What do my professional artifacts, documents, archival notes, and perspectives from colleagues and state officials reveal about educational changes in the last 30 years that influenced the superintendent's office?

My findings, through the analysis of artifacts and interviews, showed trends during my superintendencies in the areas of curriculum development and management, finance, and accountability. The trends showed a combination of federal and state policies, legislation, and some court actions influenced each other and especially ended up influencing school district-level leadership. These agencies clearly delineated expected outcomes for districts through legislation, mandates, and regulations. Throughout my three different superintendencies, I led how each district responded to the influences of these actions.

My sorting of the artifacts from more than two decades, from 1993 through the 2010s, primarily fell into a set where nearly 55% of these mementos included aspects of curriculum leadership. These artifacts represented the process for development, implementation, and management of curriculum as a constant process. As superintendent, my curriculum leadership role required a continuous cycle of blending each district's vision, mission, resources, needs, and practice to align curriculum standards with community expectations and instructional practices.

The arc of my superintendent's role in curriculum leadership started with a commitment to engage community and staff support for ensuring student success in moving from textbooks to a standards-based approach. As I moved through superintendencies and the national and state policies surrounding standards-based curriculum strengthened, I maintained and strengthened community and teacher support for curriculum involvement. After a decade and a half, my curriculum leadership prompted two outcomes: (a) the curriculum standards became teacher-led curriculum notebooks, or guides, for all grades and subject areas, and (b) the state endorsed these

curriculum guides for districts to use, particularly among districts lacking the resources and staff to produce their own curriculum guidelines.

The transformation from teacher to teacher-leader in curriculum development demonstrates how school leaders can facilitate the capacity to grow, learn and lead by giving opportunities, sharing responsibilities, and creating a culture of partnership for student success (Huggins et al., 2016). However, recent literature about curriculum leadership lays the obligation for teacher transformation as well as shared community responsibility surrounding student success at the feet of school principals, rather than school district superintendents (Sorenson et al., 2016; Ylimaki, 2011; 2012). Generally, principals are viewed as most directly connected to classrooms serving in a role between the superintendent and the classroom. That is, superintendents have more direct effects on principals' engagement with the curriculum (Danna & Spatt, 2013) than on teachers' work. Yet, very little work on superintendents or districts in the curriculum leadership role exists since Honig (2003, 2004, 2013) and colleagues' (Honig et al., 2014) investigations focused on district capacity for policy implementation and change. If the experience of one school superintendent suggests a potent role in curriculum, then that lone example requires further investigation especially since little current work exists about such district-level roles. Perhaps the instructional shifts due to the COVID-19 pandemic raised deeper curriculum roles for superintendents (Roff, 2021), and certainly, the pandemic-associated social challenges implicated district offices in questions about the purposes and goals of curriculum (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022; Starr, 2021).

Other studies show how professional development builds capacity. Klar and colleagues (2015) found that teachers involved in the writing of the district curriculum

received support and partook in speaking and leadership opportunities not only for their district but for other districts (Klar et al., 2015). Such teachers brought a unique understanding of grade-level standards and a set of skills to help others understand the intent of each standard thus creating a vision of success (Fusarelli et al., 2011). These studies align with the framework of curriculum processes based on my autoethnography. Because teachers were a major force in curriculum development the resulting curriculum notebooks found footing throughout the state, even endorsed by the state. The curriculum found legitimacy as the work of teachers.

I began my autoethnography as a means to fill the gap and even waning focus on school superintendents. I used artifacts and confirmatory interviews to cull through years of memories and professional experiences to uncover the driving trend of my practice. I offered my voice where the voices of practicing superintendents were nearly silent. My perspective is that fittingly, my dominant contribution in practice was curriculum work, the core of educational leadership. As a result of this autoethnography, I created a framework for the superintendent's curriculum leadership, and I also call for further research using the superintendent's voices to enhance the framework for curriculum leadership at the school district level.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### **COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP: ADVOCATING FOR PLACE**

Now more than ever is the time to lose the restrained mannerisms of an educator and find a voice to advocate for the needs of this profession, pedagogy, culture, and the *place* served. Educators earn the title of a leader through influence, encouragement, knowledge, and modeling not only for our children but parents, colleagues, and members of our communities. Although an educator's voice reverberates with authority, compassion, knowledge, and advocacy, it flourishes with a sense of humbleness. Humility listens to the voices of students, families, and communities and lifts those voices. If South Carolina develops a meaningful change in educating its children, then courage is required from all of us.

Educators will need the courage to question why the same districts struggle decade after decade regardless of the accountability system, models, mandates, laws, and threats? Courage will be needed to resist and not accept the usual blame-shifting to those living and working in these *places*. Advocating for a different approach to our accountability system for these districts needs to be our focus.

Children come into our schools carrying a book bag full of societal issues tied to where they live and learn. In South Carolina, demographics, zip code, and geographical location are synonymous with *the place*. Each *place* potentially holds the tools for addressing these issues and demands. *Place* matters to the quality and excellence of education in South Carolina, as built-in by the state's accountability system.

Even though federal and state educational systems results are tied to *place*, these policies rarely acknowledge the diversity among *places*. For example, school districts

comply with laws, regulations, and demands of our federal and state educational systems regardless of the place's conditions, such as losing population, non-existing or degrading infrastructure, lack of industry and job opportunities, and the inability to attract and sustain quality teachers and administrators. These critical issues are consequences of being geographically isolated (Curran & Kitchin, 2019). In our state and nation, the geographical isolation of schools varies in their circumstances, perspectives, and environments (Curran & Kitchin, 2019). Even with this acknowledgment of varied differences, our country and state policies are generalized and don't address actual community issues.

School administrators in these isolated geographical districts are so busy with national and state policy compliance that the real problems daunting their schools and communities are often not listened to or addressed. Geographically isolated schools and districts attempting to implement generalized reform, accountability models, and testing mandates are set to fail. These districts balance their *place* issues while complying with a one-size-fits-all system amid moving data points. Administrators simply cannot "mechanically implement processes designed by others" in a complex organizational system that reflects the issues of an isolated geographical district (Bryk et al., 2015, p.9).

Spending time analyzing a school or district vision statement can reveal challenges and glaring truths. Comparing and contrasting data, surveys, reports, and observations to vision statements may reveal the lack of alignment to the district's educational system. Is there a match between reality and the school's or district's generalized vision statement? Frequently, vision statements are written in lofty terms to capture all the current times that one would expect in an acceptable idea. A community

would not wish for ridicule for a vision statement that suggested that their children would move from 25% to 80% reading on grade level. To have a needful and realistic vision statement would be embarrassing to many because others would sneer and demean the lack of progressive views. In other words, the lack of correct verbiage is another indicator of why you are failing.

To make this type of change, it is essential "to see the system" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 58). By clearly identifying and clarifying the root causes of a school district, one can understand how "local conditions shape the take-up and use of a set of change ideas" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 80). The chief difference between policy compliance at all costs and a geographically isolated system being successful is understanding their capacity to make changes and adapt to that change.

Advocating for a new educational system that is responsive, adapted, and integrated to local needs and goals changes the scope of accountability. Rather than struggling with expectations that assume that *place* is equal across this state, one would focus on a community's educational struggles. Measures and responsibility, all with the goal of improved student achievement, would become adaptive, realistic, and aligned with location rather than a generalized, widespread mandate.

Rather than rushing to consolidation or removing school boards, the emphasis would be on the entirety of a community. A school system mirrors society. One cannot fix the schools without layers of the community being peeled back and analyzed. We have gone through embarrassing enough and punishing enough, and they (whomever they are) will finally do their jobs. The same measures cannot apply across South Carolina as

it does now because equity is a historical problem. The only standard applied with equity across this state is accountability.

Our silence perpetuates the problem. While some regions and areas fall within this description, schools within affluent districts struggle because of their *place*. High expectations, mandates, or accountability are not the issue. The plea is for a peeled-back analysis reflecting the entirety of a community's challenges and capacity for change. This analysis has a chance to stimulate academic improvement in a realistic and timely manner. This type of advocacy is not meant to excuse these districts from quality instruction and high academic achievement but to recognize first how to develop the capacity to change and develop a plan for sustained improvement. Our professional, ethical, and moral obligation as educators is to focus on local problems with a realistic approach.

## References

- Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to Improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Harvard Education Press.
- Curran, F. C., & Kitchin, J. (2019). Documenting geographic isolation of schools and examining the implications for education policy. *Educational Policy*, 35(7), 1191-1229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904819864445>

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

**Classification of Artifacts**

*Table 1*

*Classification of Artifacts*

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Time (Days, Months, Years)

Location (School District 1,2,3, or all, state/nation)

Format (Document, Media, Interview, Video)

District Issue(s)

Gender Issue(s)

Curriculum Management Implementation

National Legislative Actions

State Legislative Actions

Supreme Court or Fourth Circuit Court Actions

Other

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APPENDIX B

**Researcher's Analysis Memoing**

Table 2

*Researcher's Analysis Memoing*

Memo Points & Reminders	Location (Circle) >	SDA	SDC	SDR	All Districts	State or Federal	Notes for Venue & Contact
	Format (Check) >	Document Internal? External?	Media	Interview	Video	Other	
Date of Artifact:				Date of Review:			
District Issue(s) What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Blue Recode: Y N							
Gender Issue(s) What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Yellow Recode: Y N							
Curriculum What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Purple Recode: Y N							
National Actions What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Green Recode: Y N							
State Actions What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Orange Recode: Y N							

Memo Points & Reminders	Location (Circle) >	SDA	SDC	SDR	All Districts	State or Federal	Notes for Venue & Contact
	Format (Check) >	Document Internal? External?	Media	Interview	Video	Other	
	Supreme Court or Fourth Circuit Court Actions What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Red Recode: Y N						
	Other Topic What? Keep or Discard? & Why? Code Color: Pink Recode: Y N						

APPENDIX C

**Systematic Self-Reflection**

Table 3

*Systematic Self-Reflection*

<b>District</b>	SDA	SDC	SDR	SDA & SDC	All Districts	State or National	Venue/ Contact
<b>Source</b>	Document	Agenda	Video	Print Media	Letter		
<b>Issue</b>	District	Gender	Curriculum	Federal	State	Court(s)	Other
<b>Code</b>	Blue	Yellow	Purple	Green	Orange	Red	Pink

Date of Artifact:

Date of Review:

11. The artifact that I found today which surprised me was:

12. It surprised me because:

13. What were the circumstances that created this artifact?

14. Who was the audience?

15. The emotion it provoked was:

16. Why was this emotion provoked?

17. This artifact reminded me of the following:

18. Today, after looking at artifacts, the most important thing I learned was:

19. Today, after looking at artifacts, a question I have is:

20. I will follow up by contacting the following:

## APPENDIX D

### Clemson IRB Approval



To: Jane C Lindle  
Re: Clemson IRB Number: IRB2021-0620  
Exempt Category: D2  
Determination Date: 27-Sep-2021  
Funding Sponsor: N/A  
Project Title: My Superintendent Journey: An Autoethnography Across Three Decades [working title] Alternate title: Autoethnography of a SC Superintendent

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The Office of Research Compliance determined that the proposed activities involving human participants meet the criteria for exempt review under 45 CFR 46.104(d).

**Principal Investigator (PI) Responsibilities:** The PI assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects as outlined in the [Principal Investigator's Responsibilities](#) guidance.

**Non-Clemson Affiliated Collaborators:** This determination only covers Clemson affiliated researchers on the study. External collaborators will have to consult with their respective institution's IRB office to determine what is required for their role on the project.

**Progress Report:** A progress report is not required. Exempt determinations do not have to be renewed or extended.

**Modifications:** In general, investigators are not required to submit changes to the Clemson University's IRB office once a research study is designated as exempt as long as those changes do not affect the exempt category or criteria for exempt determination (changing from exempt status to expedited or full review, changing exempt category) or that may substantially change the focus of the research study such as a change in hypothesis or study design.

If you plan to make changes to your study, please submit an amendment request to the IRB office. All changes must be reviewed and approved prior to implementation.

**New Funding:** Notify the IRB office if new funding is received for an active study. IRB review of the new award must be completed before new funds can be spent on human research activities, as the new funding source may have additional or different requirements.

**Reportable Events:** Notify the IRB office immediately if there are any unanticipated problems involving risk to participants, complications, adverse events and/or any complaints from research participants by submitting the reportable event form within InfoEd.

**Study Personnel Changes:** Notify the IRB office if the PI of the study changes. The PI is not required to notify the IRB office of other study personnel changes for exempt determinations. The PI is responsible for maintaining records of personnel changes and appropriate training.

**CITI Training:** All study personnel are required to complete the [CITI human subjects training course](#).

**Non-Clemson Affiliated Sites:** A site letter is required for off-campus sites. Refer to the [guidance on research site/permission letters](#) for more information. An amendment is required to add additional sites to the study.

**International Research:** Clemson's approval is based on U.S. human subjects protections regulations and [Clemson University human subjects protection policies](#). Researchers should become familiar with all pertinent information about local human subjects protection regulations and requirements when conducting research in countries other than the United States. We encourage you to discuss with your local contacts any possible human subjects research requirements that are specific to your research site, to comply with those requirements and to inform Clemson's IRB office of those requirements so we can better help other researchers prepare for [international research](#) in the future.

**New IRB Application:** A new application is required if the study remains open for more than 5 years after the initial determination.

**Closure:** Notify the IRB office when the study can be closed or if the PI leaves the university. Closure indicates that research activities with human subjects are no longer ongoing, have stopped and are complete. Human research activities are complete when investigators are no longer obtaining information or biospecimens about a living person through interaction or intervention with the individual, obtaining identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens about a living person, and/or using, studying, analyzing, or generating identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens about a living person.

**Contact Information:** Please contact the IRB office at [IRB@clemson.edu](mailto:IRB@clemson.edu) or visit our [webpage](#) if you have questions.

Clemson University's IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. All research involving human participants must maintain an ethically appropriate standard, which serves to protect the rights and welfare of the participants. This involves obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality of data.

Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research Compliance  
Clemson University  
<https://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/>

IRB Number: IRB00000481  
FWA Number: FWA00004497

APPENDIX E

*Table 4*

*Issues and Trends Distribution among Artifacts*

Issues and Trends	Number of Artifacts
Curriculum Development and Management	453
Finance	205
Accountability	143
Legislative Acts	26
Total	827

## Appendix E

### Components of Curriculum Development

#### *Components of Curriculum Development*

Grade Level & Subject Standard	List grade-level standards for each subject. List national standard, if available and aligned, as well.
Related Standards	Note any other related grade-level or subject-specific standards.
Vocabulary	Specify standards-based new and unfamiliar vocabulary with their meaning before teaching the standard.
Example of Standard	Illustrating the standard is essential for clarity.
Strategies/Activities	Strategies/activities offered, as examples, on how to teach each standard. Usually, there are two to five strategies offered.
Resources	Resources included the text, supplemental materials, kits, web-based programs, and exemplar lessons
Sample Test-Like Assessment	This section included the state assessment test-like items, formative assessments, and teacher-made tests.
Other Areas	Other areas refer to homework activities, linkage to in-district magnet schools' curriculum, and innovative programs.

APPENDIX F

Curriculum Development and Management

