A PRINCIPAL IN TRANSITION:

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

A Dissertation

by

CARL HENRY DETHLOFF

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2005

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	David A. Erlandson
Committee Members	Linda E. Skrla
	Luana J. Zellner
	R. Kelly Hester
Head of Department	Jim Scheurich

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ABSTRACT

A Principal in Transition:

An Autoethnography. (December 2005)

Carl Henry Dethloff, B.A., Austin College;

M.A., Austin College

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. David Erlandson

This research represents a highly personalized account of the complexities, interpretations, and reflections of a principal in transition from one elementary school to another elementary school in the same district.   Using myself as the subject and the researcher in the social context of an elementary school provided the impetus for this self-study. Through an insider's vantage point, I have chronicled and traced the experiences of my own administrative transition using the qualitative methodology of autoethnography. This genre of qualitative research brings the reader closer to the subculture studied through the experiences of the author. While every campus and district has its own unique culture and environment, the introspection and evaluation provided by the methodology of autoethnography greatly facilitates an understanding of the processes of transition. The experiences I have encountered, the problems I face, and the interpretations derived from them will strengthen my own practice as a public school administrator and provide insight into the ever-changing administrative position called the principalship.

Data gathering consisted of a reflexive journal, my personal calendar, faculty agendas, staff memos, and reflective analysis. At the completion of the school year common strands, key attributes, and coding of the data served to provide retrospective insights. These research tools were used to capture the experiences of my administrative transition.

The results of this study were expressed in a personal narrative that comprises Chapters IV through VI. Chapters I through III present a traditional dissertation model that includes the introduction, review of literature, and research methodology. Chapter VII offers recommendations, a discussion of the findings and concluding remarks.

DEDICATION

To my wife, Judy, whose constant encouragement, unwavering support, and patience provided me the willpower to continue my journey. Your confidence in me never faltered. Thanks for making my life complete.

To my learning heroes: the late Dr. Robert Mason, Athletic Director and Men's Basketball Coach at Austin College, whose mentoring and guidance about life still provide me strength; and my father, Henry Dethloff, your interest in my educational career, advice, and love are an inspiration for all dads.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with great appreciation that I extend my thanks to the many people that made this research come to fruition. I would like to thank the members of my committee for their support, constructive critique, and positive feedback throughout my experience.

Dr. David Erlandson, who chaired my committee, provided the idea that prompted this study. I am continually intrigued by your vast knowledge base and willingness to push the margins of qualitative research. Your concern for me as a person, professional, and student mean more to me than words can express. Thanks for looking out for me the last ten years and never giving up hope!

To my committee members: Dr. Linda Skrla, who continually shaped my work to be more scholarly and provided depth to the research through your insight and wisdom in the area of qualitative inquiry. Your feedback is always top-notch and pushes me to reach higher understanding. At the completion of each chapter I would pause and consider this question, "What would Dr. Skrla think?" This served as a quality control measure for my work. If my chapter passed this litmus test, I knew it would have value.

Dr. Kelly Hester, I appreciate your kindness, words of encouragement, and timely feedback regarding my study. It was encouraging to have a professional viewpoint that was outside the realm of educational administration. However, more than anything, you provided me a connection to my Austin College family. Your participation on my committee was a constant support, and I thank you for your willingness to serve as a member.

Dr. Luana Zellner, I thank you for "coming to my rescue" and serving on my committee in its final stages. Your enthusiasm, kind remarks, and constant support of me as a campus principal and TAMU student have always been first-rate.

I also want to extend my gratitude to a couple of individuals that were always unwavering in their friendship, provided invaluable advice, and imparted meaningful guidance. Joyce Nelson, I can't thank you enough for being a pillar of strength for me to lean on and showing me how to navigate through the quagmire of minutiae involved in a doctoral program. Clark Ealy, thank you for continually supporting my quest to make graduation a reality. Thanks for your guidance, advice, and encouragement.

Finally, thanks to the real educators in my life, my daughters Caroline and Abbey. I didn't know much about life, learning, or love until we were blessed with the two of you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The traditional role of the principal has undergone dramatic shifts in recent years. In this age of accountability, the principalship has struggled to evolve with the higher and more multifaceted demands of the position. This immutable role that we call the principalship has managed to sustain its function at a similar level for many decades. Only in the past decade has the principal's role shifted so dramatically. Is there a self-imposed glass ceiling that many of us bump against as we try to facilitate the growth and development of the position? Reshaping and examining the principal's chair is not an easy task. We must take a look at the position from the inside and learn from its intricacies. "Ed Bell" can greatly assist in this endeavor.

Ed Bell is a pseudonym and the main character from H. F. Wolcott's (2003) classic ethnography, *The Man in the Principal's Office: An Ethnography*. Ed Bell is a catalyst – a mechanism for examining the hidden mysteries, charms, tribulations, and representations of the modern principalship through an autoethnographical lens. Placing the self within a social context, such as a school, autoethnography connects the person to the cultural experience through research and writing (Reed-Danahay, 1997). A self-narrative presents the greatest opportunity to examine the changes in the role and functions of the principalship and methods of optimizing school leadership.

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The style and format for this dissertation follows that of *The Journal of Educational Research.*

School leadership can occur in assorted ways. Depending on which model you prefer, author you read, or educator you advocate, there are many ways to lead a school. With increasingly high demands placed on students and academic success, the principals find themselves perpetually needing to revise and update their practice – including instructional, managerial, cultural, and human resources leadership. Although many of these separate leadership functions are implemented by various educators and stakeholders in the school and community, they are initiated by the principal. In developing a comprehensive framework for the principalship based on the 21 domains developed by the National Policy Board on Educational Administration, Skrla, Erlandson, Reed, and Wilson (2001) suggest

> the principalship represents the entire leadership function that must be performed in the school and, though overseen and coordinated by the principal, includes the performance of separate leadership activities by assistant principals, teachers, counselors, and others. (p. 19)

They also add that it is useful to distinguish between the roles served by the man or woman who occupies the position as being the principal on the one hand, and the chief executive officer of the school on the other. Although many of us can describe an effective, strong principal, it is increasingly difficult to pinpoint the attributes and characteristics that make an effective leader. This difficulty stems from the multifaceted nature of the position.

In *A Call for Powerful Leadership: A Conversation with Rod Paige,* Scherer

(2004) quotes former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige's impressions of school

leadership:

> If the map were drawn and the course fixed, and all you had to do was keep the
>
> boat in the water and paddle, then powerful and great leadership would not be
>
> needed. But the expectations, needs, and demands of our nation have shifted.
>
> The speed of telecommunications and the marriage of computers with visuals and
>
> data have spun a new world. The Nation is asking for leadership in a world
>
> where there is little room for those who lack an education. (p. 20).

Secretary Paige's remarks support the notion of the complexity of the 21st

century principalship.

As Skrla, Erlandson, Reed, and Wilson (2001) profess, "the breadth and depth of

the knowledge and skill" associated with the job of principal can appear overwhelming

(p. 3). The managerial level of expectations for the principalship is now only a portion

of the fabric needed for overall effectiveness. Having closed out the last century in

education we must look introspectively at our successes and failures in regard to student

learning and leadership in our schools. As the swift winds of social change steer our

vessel into unchartered territory we must look inward. Social and economic pressures,

technological advancements, higher accountability, and a shortage of qualified educators

are the challenges to be overcome. With drastic change taking place since the early

1990s in the realm of the principalship, we must take on new and innovative measures to

study its intricacies and further the development of the position. Like my predecessor,

Harry Wolcott, did nearly forty years ago, I must take an anthropological look at the nature of the principalship in order to further its development.

Qualitative studies are increasing in the world of research, and the broader phenomenon of ethnography is not as misunderstood as a scientific tool of inquiry as it used to be. Wolcott (2003) described his work in ethnography as "researchers who want to have a look around at what people in some other group are doing, or what people in their own group are doing, and sometimes even at what researchers themselves are doing and feeling" (p. vii). Like Wolcott, I will concentrate my efforts around what researchers themselves are doing and feeling as I investigate myself within the role of principal – an autoethnographical glance.

Autoethnography can be problematic regardless of discipline or content. Located on the outer edges of scientific research, the methodology presents many rewards and obstacles. Andrew Sparkes (2000) suggests that autoethnographies are highly personalized accounts that greatly depend on the author/researcher to facilitate an understanding of the subculture studied. I compare autoethnography as a methodology to a vestibule in a state-of-the-art building, that is, something trapped in the margins, neither inside nor outside of the building, but attempting to free itself from architectural normalcy. The vestibule, like the principalship, is a space that can be utilized or criticized. This form of self-study research provides the opportunity for the researcher to examine himself and the forces that help shape him in a given context. It is not a personal narrative, a single event or experience, or written to the self as the major

audience (Duckarts, 2004). It is an opportunity to draw on my own experiences to support others in their understanding of my particular culture or context.

There is ongoing debate regarding the narcissistic nature of autoethnographical studies. Coupled with the use of soft data, researchers find themselves locked in passionate discourse with critics. It is precisely this soft data that gives this type of qualitative research a hard edge. A study that discounts the role of the researcher in the process is not providing a holistic view regarding the subculture studied. You cannot answer the question, "What is happening here?" by removing yourself from the experience. The experience is part of you, and you a part of the experience. Scholarly writers are expected to keep their voice out of the study in the traditional scientific model of inquiry. By developing their voice and "writing themselves into their own work as major characters," scholars have "challenged accepted views about silent authorship and author evacuated texts" (Sparkes, 2000, p. 22). We must break through the established hyperdominance of empirical studies and look introspectively to provide answers to our questions.

Statement of the Problem

The principalship is a highly complex role that has increased in its complexity since implementation of standards-based reform. The accountability for student achievement in our schools is growing at a feverish pitch and appears to be headed toward a crescendo. The principal is much more closely identified with academic achievement and performance than in the past. In our system of compulsory schooling

and accountability for student achievement a principal must be able to meet the new and varied demands of the position. These demands place extreme pressure on the administrator to be skilled and well-versed in multiple areas of organizational and instructional leadership. A principal making the transition from one school to another experiences a new level of complexities and some unique administrative challenges.

Educators, those charged with teaching administrators how to teach, manage, and supervise their students and faculty, are in need of quality, up-to-date research that supports the contemporary principal facing new changing conditions. Individuals cannot be properly prepared for the role of the principal in the 21st century if they do not completely understand the conditions and demands surrounding the position. Continuous support and instruction from the managerial and academic domains of educators are necessary to provide our school leaders with the tools and experiences needed to succeed in an increasingly complex role. As Smith and Andrews (1989) explained:

> The effective principal is actively involved in all aspects of the instructional program, sets expectations for continuous improvement and collegiality, models the kind of behaviors desired, participates in service training with teachers, and consistently gives priority to instructional concerns. (p. 13)

Using Harry F. Wolcott's (2003) earlier sociological study of the principalship as a springboard, I plan to further the effectiveness and understanding of the position by using myself as the research instrument, being both the researcher and the subject simultaneously–in the context of making the transition as a principal from one school to

another. There are very few written first hand accounts of the principalship since the early 1990s, when accountability first began to become a part of the learning environment and a new and growing element of the principal's role. An autoethnographical study of the transition of a principal will provide a true representation or model of the contemporary principal's position as that administrator moves from one school and culture to another.

It is in examining the changing interaction between the managerial and instructional roles that novice and experienced administrators need new and contemporary models of support. We must bring this dialogue to the front in any discussion or study of the principalship. The principal has traditionally found him or herself in an isolated role in their interactions with colleagues, peers and community. Coupled with contemporary pressures of accountability this isolation can be polarizing to the principalship and limit the growth and knowledge of the person in the position. While no two campuses and districts are identical and each has created its own subculture and identities with varied needs, obligations, and challenges, all are increasingly influenced by accountability. A new, contemporary autoethnography, an "Ed Bell" in transition, provides a useful and much-needed tool for better preparing prospective principals and current administrators.

Statement of Purpose

The goal of this research is to provide a highly personalized account of the principalship at one elementary school and to examine the complexities and problems of

transition from that school to another. Hopefully, this will enable colleagues and

educational peers to reflect on their own careers in administration as their experiences

may, or may not, relate to my own. As Denzin (1997) states, we must look inward on

the self, while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography. In order to provide an

inward glance at the principalship using myself as the subject and the researcher, much

of the remainder of this document will be written in the first person voice. In this study I

reflect on my past principalship at W. B. Luckett Elementary, through the transition year

of changing campuses and assuming the principalship at another established elementary,

Glade Springs Elementary, in the same school district. Luckett Elementary and Glade

Springs Elementary are pseudonyms for the schools in which I served. While every

school and every district has its own unique culture and environment, the introspection

and evaluation provided by the methodology of autoethnography greatly facilitates an

understanding of the processes of transition. The experiences I have encountered, the

problems I face, and the meaning I derive from them will strengthen my own practice as

a public school administrator and provide insight into the ever-changing administrative

position called the principalship.

Research Questions

My ethnographical analysis of the principalship will particularly examine the

following questions and issues:

1. What challenges did I face upon assuming the principalship at Glade Springs Elementary?

2. How did I respond to the challenges?

3. What occupied my time in making the transition?

4. What determined my priorities?

5. What barriers and obstacles did I encounter in attempting to cultivate a positive environment and an organization centered around learning?

6. How did I use accountability productively?

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions apply:

Age of Accountability: The implementation network of state mandated, high-stakes testing in Texas to determine school ratings based on Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores and Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports in the early 1990s and the impact of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation that has added increased federal guidelines to state accountability.

Autoethnography: A highly personalized genre of writing and research where the author uses his or her experience to extend understanding of a particular subculture.

Reflexive Journal: A written personalized diary account. They are not simply written accounts, but are also involved in shaping and forming the culture studied and author of the diary.

Member Checks: A term to describe soliciting feedback from respondents on the inquirer/researcher's findings and an additional method to gain further data and insight in a qualitative study.

Subculture: A group of people who share the same values, beliefs, and traditions.

Limitations

This study is limited in its scope to the viewpoints and experiences related to one principal's educational career in administration. This research is autobiographical in nature and limited to the observations and interpretations of shared encounters and interactions with colleagues in educational settings where I have worked.

Design of the Study

This is a naturalistic study involving autoethnography. A subjective personal account of the principalship will allow data and the research design to emerge as the researcher participates and describes himself as a member of a subculture. Developing and verifying shared and personal constructions of the setting will enable the meaningful expansion of knowledge (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). In this research design the subculture will consist of an elementary school; the design will be fluid in its creation, and "self" will be the primary data source. Research tools include a reflexive journal documenting the school year. Faculty agendas, staff memos, personal calendars, and reflective analysis will serve as primary means of data collection. These tools will

be used to chronicle and trace the experiences of the principalship. Common strands and key attributes will be analyzed and meaning derived from this analysis.

Significance of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to provide aspiring and current administrators with a highly personalized account of the principalship in a public school setting from the unique perspective of that position as the transition is made from one school to another. This will enable colleagues and educational peers to reflect on their own careers in administration to the degree that their experiences relate to my own in leading a school campus. The challenges of being an effective instructional leader, manager, and learner, as demands on schools and education continually shift, will be examined from an autobiographical perspective.

Contents of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into seven major units or chapters. Chapter I contains an introduction, a statement of the problem, a purpose statement, limitations, design of the study and operational definitions. Chapter II contains a review of the literature. The methodology and procedures are discussed in Chapter III. Chapters IV-VI provide a description of the subculture studied through a personal narrative and examine my role and activities as the principal of one school and my transition to another. A review of the answers and an analysis of the research questions that guided this study, the researcher's summary, conclusions, and self-reflections are examined in Chapter VII.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter examines the educational literature relating to organizational leadership, change, and culture. The overarching goal of this research is to provide a highly personalized account of the principalship at one elementary school, a snapshot of Ed Bell in the 21st century and to examine those elements affecting the role and scope of being a principal. The body of supporting literature for this personalized study of the principalship, in which the author is both the subject and the researcher, is considerable and diverse. I have therefore chosen to focus on three particular perspectives provided by the literature that best support my study and the chosen methodology of autoethnograpy. First, I examine educational literature regarding organizational leadership. Next, I look at the notion of the change process in schools. Finally, the literature on culture and climate as it relates to schools is investigated. These three key areas of literature support this qualitative form of inquiry as it relates to autoethnography.

Supporting literature that has helped shape and form my own personal experiences provided the motivation for the selection of the three areas chosen to guide my research. These concepts of leadership, change process, and culture have been critical in my own transition as the educational leader on an established elementary campus. In unfolding my own personal story, I lean heavily on these three concepts and the literature that forms their foundation. Researchers using the methodology of autoethnography rely upon a plethora of data sources to sustain and advise their

research. Painting an accurate portrait of oneself in a specific cultural context requires many tools for the researcher. These data collection methods and the descriptive tools are derived from many sources. Personal essays, photographic essays, poetry, short stories, and critical autobiography are a few of the resources identified by qualitative researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, p. 71). My own experience in the context of an elementary school utilizes personal narrative to position my study. Autoethnography as a methodology, and the literature that supports this form of inquiry as research, are outlined in Chapter III, Research and Methodology.

Organizational Leadership

The term leadership in its foundation provides us with a mental picture of power, prestige, and authority. As Yukl (2002) explains, "the term connotes images of powerful, dynamic individuals who command victorious armies, direct corporate empires from atop gleaming skyscrapers, or shape the course of nations" (p. 1). There is much ambiguity involved in forming an exact definition of leadership. Leadership, according to *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (1994) is defined as the office, position, or capacity of a leader; guidance.

A second explanation states: ability to lead, exert authority, etc. As Yukl (2002) further professes "leadership is a word taken from the common vocabulary and incorporated into the technical vocabulary of a scientific discipline without being precisely redefined" (p. 2). In transferring this term to the arena of education we are doing precisely what Yukl suggests. We are attempting to define leadership as a

function or descriptor of the principal's role in school – molding and shaping the term in many forms. Manager, executive, guardian, and more recently instructional leader and instructional facilitator are all familiar metaphors describing a leader of schools. Since the inception of the "little red schoolhouse" and one-room schools, organizational leadership as applied to education has provided us a multitude of meanings. In its earliest form, leadership at the school level has shifted from the teacher taking time to ready the schoolhouse for learning including preparing the materials and lessons, organizing the school day, and opening and closing the facility, to the multifaceted position of today's principalship. Local, state, and federal government have provoked sweeping change in educational reform during the past twenty years.

In that time, the leadership role of schools has transformed and evolved into the complex structure we have today. Increased accountability has shifted leadership at the school level from one of primarily management, to include guiding the instruction and the learning environment, curriculum design, staff development, measurement and evaluation, student guidance and development, and resource allocation, as indicated by the six domains developed by the National Commission for the Principalship (Skrla, Erlandson, Reed & Wilson, 2001). These domains relate closely to the standards suggested by the National Association of Elementary School Principals: leadership, vision, student learning, adult learning, data and decision-making, and community engagement (Patten, 2004). As one might deduce from the above information the principalship has undergone dramatic changes in its responsibilities and role.

In reviewing the literature associated with organizational leadership as it applies to the principalship this section will be synthesized in two key areas: (a) as a discussion of the evolution of the public school principal in terms of leadership, and (b) and examination of the qualities, skills, and expectations of the modern principal.

Evolution of the Public School Principal

As indicated in the opening paragraphs of this section on organizational leadership, the role of the principal has shifted tremendously since our earliest notion of public schooling. Quality leaders have existed since time began in all aspects of society. Smith and Andrews (1989) indicate that Socrates, Aristotle, Lao Tzu and countless others have puzzled with ideas about leadership, its function, its notions, meanings, methods and value to individuals and organizations. We continue our attempts to define, apply, and ponder the meaning and application of leadership in our public school systems. There are many individuals who view leadership as a function, rather than a role. Goddard (2003) states a role is defined by the person that occupies it, and a function is a task to be completed. Whether we view the principalship as a role or a function, key events in the country and worldwide continue to inform and shape our theories of educational administration. The education profession has spent so much time borrowing leadership theories from other professions, such as psychology, science, and metaphors from management, that we have rarely examined leadership as it applies to public school principals (Cunningham, 2000). Early twentieth century principals were expected to provide and enhance moral values to their students and constituents (Beck &

Murphy, 1992). Leaders were truly born when mandates, curriculum, and schools were

growing at breakneck speed, and services were being formalized by states. These new

leaders or "principal teachers" were appointed to serve a managerial function

(Donaldson, 2001, p. 3). During the 1920s these principal teachers also assumed the

role of scientific manager. Coupled with their new role of business manager, a principal

teacher also included a religious component. Beck and Murphy (1992) state that

"discussions of the principal's managerial role contained numerous spiritual, religious,

and value-oriented images" (p. 393). The role paralleled that of a priest in a parish. In

the 1930s the religious reference to the role of the principal was disappearing (Patten,

2004). The image of the principal as a public executive appeared in the first half of the

20th century as the role was modeled after the emerging field of business management.

Donaldson (2001) states that this leadership model was considered suitable for schools

in four respects:

> (1) Formal authority must be provided to specific roles in order to assure school-
>
> wide safety, orderliness, and productivity. (2) The people in these roles must be
>
> able to organize a rational institutional process so that the school's central work
>
> with students is uniform and meets state standards. (3) Leaders must be well
>
> informed, have access to governing and funding bodies, and be able to
>
> effectively manage personnel. (4) Leaders must be able to shape the school to
>
> meet the emerging needs among its students and the changing environment (p.
>
> 4).

In the 1940s and 1950s the school leader was thought of as a promoter of Democratic ideals. The principal was responsible to make sure that all citizens received an appropriate education. The 1950s were also marked by an increased focus for the principal to oversee the daily operation and minute details of operating a large institution. As indicated by the above criteria, the role of the principal in the mid-20th century was basically one of a captain in tending to the many details of keeping his ship afloat. This system of managers remained in place through the middle of the century until Sputnik.

Space exploration opened the door to many new frontiers and sparked our education system to increase the emphasis in the area of scientific inquiry. As the nation's insecurity escalated, the cry from the public to reform mathematics and science in our public schools took center stage. Sputnik, the first man-made object launched into Earth orbit on October 4, 1957 by the Soviet Union, triggered great changes in American education. In the aftermath of Sputnik, President Dwight D. Eisenhower announced that the United States must give priority to scientific education. Educators called for more and better science in secondary schools and colleges. Administrators, administrative boards, and the public began to insist on greater emphasis on mathematics, chemistry, and physics at all levels. Schools now were expected to cure society's ills, and promote excellence through stringent empirical methods based on scientific principles. The social concerns of the 1960s, coupled with our need to bolster scientific methods and logical positivist thought in our public school systems, and increased drug abuse, were all factors that shifted the leadership role of the principal

from one of manager to social worker. Principals were now expected to counteract social ills along with the typical responsibilities of the role (Patten, 2004). The focus on non-academic problems and social issues continued to be a mainstay of the principal's role in the 1970s as well.

By the 1980s leaders in schools were faced with an increased emphasis on instruction. No longer could a person with strictly managerial skills and a desire to cure current social problems be considered a quality candidate for an administrative position in education. A principal must possess the background and capabilities of leading an organization through the mentoring, modeling, and deep knowledge base of curricular and instructional strategies. The schoolhouse needed an instructional leader, and the principal was deemed this person. As the mid-1980s approached, there was also concern in the literature regarding the feasibility of this metaphor considering the overwhelming managerial duties still assigned to the position (McCurdy, 1983).

In our attempts to capture the appropriate metaphor to describe what principals should know and do in the area of leadership, yet another adjustment was made to the principal leadership profile in the middle of this decade. The term instructional leader was viewed as too encompassing, given the many other varied demands placed on the principal. A shift to instructional facilitator now captured the hearts and imagination of educational researchers and practitioners. According to Monahan and Hengst (1982) who pioneered in developing the role of facilitator as it applies to the principalship, "the facilitative principal demonstrates respect for individuals, is skilled in goal clarification and conflict resolution, and places top priority on his or her instructional leadership

responsibilities" (p. 314). In the decade that followed, educational theorists continued to stress the importance of the principal as being an instructional facilitator. The 1990s also saw the rise of accountability based on the belief that the economic security of our nation is dependent on our students achieving goals for academic success (Ealy, Hogan, Skrla & Hoyle, 1999).

In Texas, where I currently practice, academic and fiscal performance of schools is systemically measured within and across school districts and reported in the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). Controversy continues to escalate regarding the notion of accountability. As the leader of a school campus, the principal maintains the central responsibility to meet these increased standards. With this responsibility the principal must balance the lived reality in schools, handling the pressures that equate to both positive and negative outcomes in the education of our students. Administrators have many times become polarized in their efforts to keep the pendulum from swinging to the left or to the right as they wade through the quagmire that has become accountability, and its many varied interpretations.

Accountability continues to develop on the state and federal level in the 21st century with the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. This piece of law continues to hold principals and school districts accountable for student achievement across disciplines and increases measurement opportunities through rigorous student assessment. In an article regarding the role campus principals play as mediators of accountability policy, Linda Skrla (2002) writes,

At a time when accountability is reaching its zenith as the predominant force in

U.S. educational policy, there is a critical need for research that carefully

considers the full range of complexity associated with formulation,

implementation, and modification of such policy. (p. 28)

Principals in the 21st century continue to search for methods and to wrestle with

strategies that can use accountability productively.

Qualities, Skills, and Expectations of the Modern Principal

Leadership can be an elusive, puzzling subject as introduced by Cronin (1989).

The author adds that leadership is difficult to define, practice and teach, but always

fascinating to observe and study. It is within this frame that I attempt to decipher the

characteristics, qualities, and skills that encompass the modern principalship. The

expectations have shifted for the modern principal. We must take time to define these

new and enhanced qualities. Qualities that bring success to the organization are, in all

aspects, how the public now defines schools.

Although our culture still maintains that many leaders are born, not made, we

must search out these mysterious charismatic qualities that enhance the leadership

position in schools (Raudenbush, 1994). Other attributes of the modern principal stated

by Badaracco and Ellsworth (1989) include risk taking, flexibility, self-confidence,

intelligence, decisiveness, understanding and courage. In discussing research on

effective schools Purkey and Smith (1985) mention behaviors such as collegiality, flair

for teaching, commitment to assisting others, resourcefulness, self-renewal, facilitation

of collaboration, experimentation and capacity for reflection. Raudenbush (1994) goes on to state "the leader's interactions would speak of the value of organizational outcomes as opposed to solely statistical ends" (p. 48). In this era of shared decision-making, the principal must be an expert at providing voice and empowerment to his or her staff members and yet still maintain the ability to make decisions as the leader of the campus.

Dewey (1990) introduced the shared decision making concept a hundred years before its time by professing that all those who would be affected by the educational enterprise should in some way be part of the system. By the nature of the position, principals are viewed as the leaders of their respective institutions. In his description of the principal Fullan (1988) sees the effective principal as socially responsible for school improvement. He advises us to "err on the side of autonomy over dependency" and conveys that "closeness does not mean control, and autonomy does not mean neglect" (p. 40, 43). Collaborative structures must exist that are positive and support teacher learning. As Foster (1989) states, "leadership, then, is not a function of position, but rather represents a conjunction of ideas where leadership is shared and transferred between leaders and followers, each only a temporary designation" (p. 49). Twenty-first century principals must find innovative and creative ways to foster this delicate balance between providing autonomy to teachers, and yet provide the internal structure necessary for individual professional growth while meeting the mission of the organization. Raudenbush (1994) exclaims "the goal is to strive for a sense of

community where transformative practices can change social structures that impede positive development" (p. 56).

The transformation of the principalship is continuing to expand and redefine its role. As the school leader wrestles with ways to proactively balance the need for shared decision making among the school's constituents, the position must also redefine itself for the future. Mary Poplin, in her article regarding this transformation states,

> Instructional leadership having outlived its usefulness, our profession now calls
> on administrators to be the servants of collective vision, editors, cheerleaders,
> problem solvers, and resource finders. We must not only be self conscious about
> change, but we must also encourage it in others. (as cited in Cunningham, 2000,
> p. 8)

There is not a single formula, metaphor, or ideal that can encapsulate the elementary school principalship. Rather it is a complex interwoven series of character traits, responsibilities, knowledge base, communication and conflict resolution skills that rely on the person's ability to bring individuals together for a common cause. Sergiovanni shares this sentiment in his articulation of schools:

> They're not like most organizations; you can't apply organizational principles to
> places characterized by sandboxes, books, and children. Schools are more like
> families and small communities where, if you can develop the right substitutes,
> you can throw traditional leadership away. There's no need for it ever again. (as
> cited in Cunningham, 2000, p. 9)

There are researchers and educators who are working feverishly to revolutionize the way our public views school leadership. This change is not only to inform our society that modifications in school leadership are necessary to foster school improvement, but to mentor and teach this change in those aspiring to become principals. In developing authentic leaders, Aretha Pigford, a professor of educational administration, states that

> Instead of focusing on preparing administrative students who can demonstrate a knowledge of and ability to apply selected theories, my emphasis has shifted to helping my students approach leadership as a personal journey, a journey that focuses primarily on discovering who one is—not on what one does. (as cited in Cunningham, 2000, pp. 9-10)

This focus on the person rather than the position is gaining popularity as the complexities of the job increase.

The 21st century principal must be versed and knowledgeable in many areas. However, successfully teaching the multitude of theories surrounding the position makes it seemingly impossible to define its many functions. Thus, colleges and universities in their teaching of future principals are increasingly focusing on the person rather than the position. This evolution in the theory of teaching administration at the public school level validates the continued research and production of autoethnographical studies. Due to the limited research we have in the domain of how principals themselves view their own role in education, I will attempt to strengthen this particular field through my own personal narrative using autoethnography as the methodology.

As the pressure and responsibilities of the principalship grow, the demands and skills needed for the role also continue to rise. Black and English (1986) specify, "the most concrete daily plan an administrator can make is showing up for work" (p. 21). They go on to parallel the work of a principal as the "psychic blood bank of schools... parents, teachers, kids, other administrators, board members, secretaries, and custodians come in for daily transfusions in order to attend their needs, to heal their bodies and minds, and to get their problems solved" (p. 151). A vivid metaphor, such as the one mentioned above, helps us to depict the true work of a campus leader on a daily basis. Principals of today are required to be lifelong learners, acquire new knowledge along with their staff, and remain on the cutting edge of technology; all while technological advancements are taking place at breathtaking speeds (Cunningham, 2000).

A school's success is dependent on the education of its students, but perhaps even more is the perception by the public of its success. Public relations in a school setting can enhance or shatter the school's image. Cunningham (2000) expresses that "a school's image is dependent on its public relations, which reflect upon the school principal" (p. 36). It is the principal's responsibility to set the culture, tone, and climate of the schoolhouse. The public relations piece of the principalship is one that is typically not taught in traditional educational administrative course work. A principal must educate oneself in regards to issues, challenges, and important priorities of the local community. This proactive approach will support their work in the domain of public relations. With the increased responsibility of the principal to promote their

schools in the age of communication, skill in this area is a key trait of the modern principal.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has developed six standards to guide and define the Elementary School Principal. These standards include leadership, vision, student learning, adult learning, data and decision-making, and community engagement. The standard of leadership places the responsibility on the principal to ensure that the collective body of a school has learning as its first and greatest goal. The school itself must be centered on learning as the driving factor behind all decisions. This focus on learning shall be implemented by all the stakeholders on the staff including teachers, parents, children, and the leadership of the school. The school should actively engage in learning and prioritize all decisions based on this concept.

The second standard, vision, relates to the ability of the principal to set the course for his or her campus in terms of where the organization strives to be. Bennis and Nanus (1985) describe the term vision as an attractive target. Vision can be described as the overall mission of the organization and what measures the organization will take in its journey to fulfill its mission. A passion must be developed that communicates that vision along with the ability to inspire others to trust the vision (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Raudenbush (1994) suggests a leader communicates the vision by acting on it consistently. Communicating the vision of the organization to all of its stakeholders, including teachers, assistants, custodians, cafeteria workers, and office personnel is critical to move a school forward in its journey to fulfill its mission and vision. The

empowerment of staff is a key component in the formulation and execution of a shared vision at the campus level. Empowerment is the direction leaders provide staff members through ideals, vision, and a higher purpose. The principal motivates followers with ideas, rewarding his staff through informal and formal processes by inspiring them to overachieve (Burke, 1988). The empowerment of employees to help shape and form the vision, along with constant articulation of the vision by the campus principal is necessary to keep the focus and vision alive for the school. A social context, such as a school, cannot possibly reach its destination without a road map guiding the journey. Principals must send clear messages that convey a succinct vision with learning for all and high academic achievement at its core (Patten, 2004).

Hiring, retaining, and training high quality teachers encompass the third standard dictated by NAESP. This includes monitoring the alignment of curriculum with national, state, and local standards. Observing classroom instruction, providing appropriate resources for teachers that will support their efforts in meeting curriculum guidelines, and implementing accountability measures and assessing student progress in regard to these measures are all areas that exist in the third standard.

Professional development is the focus for the fourth standard, adult learning. The focus of this standard is the principal's own professional development, and how the principal enhances and provides the professional growth to his or her staff members and teachers. To this end, principals are expected to model, develop, and provide learning opportunities to each staff member that would support that staff member's ability to reach the goals of the organization, and promote the academic success of the child.

Fifth, principals are expected to assess student achievement using multiple forms of data and disaggregation tools. Finding the time, strategies, and opportunities to meet with faculty members and review student assessment data is critical to the success on this fifth standard. Not only must administrators take time to closely examine student data from formative assessments, they must take the time to plan and base future instruction upon the data. Teachers and principals must use accountability to productively determine each child's next learning step.

The sixth and final standard listed by the NAESP is the role of engaging the community. Community relations and providing meaningful opportunities for parents to be involved in decision-making processes of the school is vital to having community support. Principals must provide opportunities for parents, whether formal or informal, to provide feedback regarding the overall operation of the campus. The dialogue needs to be open to curricular matters, daily operations of the campus, school procedures, student safety, or any other area that is deemed important by the parent. Parent surveys are also a helpful tool to solicit feedback from the greater constituency. Community engagement can occur in a myriad of forms. The principals must make an effort to provide open and honest dialogue regarding community concerns, always being receptive to information regarding the strengths and areas of growth for his or her campus.

These six standards enumerated by a professional organization summarize, from a national perspective, the areas of importance for a modern day principal to focus on and excel in. These standards are by no means all-inclusive but do provide key focal

points of concentration for the 21st century administrator. This substantial

transformation in the principal's role in the last 20 years has caused us to look inward at

what principals do to make them successful in the daily grind of educating all children.

Today's principal is expected to be a psychologist, lawyer, counselor, health and

wellness director, public relations coordinator, accountant, mechanic, custodian, nose-

wiper, and to possess instructional prowess in all content areas which is quite a feat for

even the most well educated individual. It is in this light that university educators are

continuously searching for and examining the best resources, instructional

methodologies, and practices to adequately prepare, hone, and develop these leadership

skills in future administrators. Campus principals are expected to lead and manage

effectively, while they increase student achievement, create a passion for learning, and

remain sensitive to the needs of individual children and families.

Despite these key standards that are necessary for a principal to experience

success, there is a great deal of local internal pressure placed on the leadership position.

District standards, school board priorities, expectations from the local community and

neighborhoods surrounding the school, all comprise local level standards. Drake and

Roe (1986) perceived that "the social system or community in which the principal works

has a major influence upon his role behavior" (p. 24). As mentioned earlier in the sixth

standard developed by NAESP, community engagement can be a source for these

internal pressures from parents, neighborhood associations, and businesses located in the

school's attendance zone. These local expectations of the school and principal can take

place in wide range of settings. Sergiovanni (1984) and Persell and Cookson (1982)

both agree in their studies of effective leadership that principals are required to spend most of their time in personal and telephone conversations with staff, parents, central office personnel, and students. These individual conversations are typically the conversations that form the public's opinion regarding a campus principal or school. In my own experience as an elementary school principal, I was both perplexed and pleased that upon my transition to a new elementary campus, a large number of parents conveyed that I was doing a good job because I would stand at the front door of the school and welcome students in the morning. This evidence confirmed community support can occur in a variety of methods, and the local community can develop opinions while only possessing small amounts of information regarding my abilities or inabilities as an elementary school principal. Gordon Donaldson (2001) describes the interaction between a principal and their staff as managing by walking around. This concept can also relate to the community relations aspect. Public relations by walking around seems to also be an accurate term to describe the effective principal in regard to building community buy-in. Many perceptions are formed, both positive and negative, regarding the principal in this aspect of community building. Informal conversations with key individuals, both in and out of the school setting, support favorable or pessimistic views regarding the schoolhouse.

According to Strother (1983):

The principal is often the person 'in the middle' – caught between the central office and the school board, on the one hand, and between teachers and parents on the other. How a principal handles these roles depends not only on his or her

personal strengths, weaknesses, and training, but also on popular opinion about

what an effective principal should do. (p. 291)

It is a delicate balance for the leader of a school to teeter on the fencepost and make

prompt and well thought out decisions before coming to rest on either side of the fence.

The stakeholders in a school comprise an array of people such as, teachers, support staff,

parents, students, community members, district office personnel, administrative

colleagues, school board members, legislators, and university liaisons (Patten, 2004).

Public approval, as well as staff approval is a significant factor for the overall effective

operation of a campus. Donaldson (2001) also adds that friendships and alliances serve

as the best vehicle for communicating information and for sharing opinions about how to

respond to inquiries. These natural networks are the foundation in establishing quality

parent and staff communication. Both are critical attributes of the modern principal.

The qualities, skills, and expectations of today's principal can become mired in

the inhabitant's quest to balance the many pressures of the position. It can be polarizing

inasmuch as the principal must make decisions that will ultimately be divergent from the

views of many of the school's stakeholder groups. This eventually poses a great

dilemma for the school leader. There is not a person in education that is pulled in more

directions, and accountable to more people, than the campus administrator (Black &

English, 1986). There is great tension in this complex role for the principal. Blumberg

and Greenfield (1980) add that "principals face daily pressures of competing images

about what their role should be, and even the best have a difficult time maintaining a

smooth running school and serving as a catalyst for and facilitator of instructional

improvement" (p. 9). In this age of accountability, the principal must make all decisions based around the performance of students in the academic arena. There are guiding questions that a principal must use to inform decision-making. These questions include: (1) How will my decision impact student learning? (2) Does my decision promote staff collaboration and commitment to student success? (3) Is this decision in the best interest of the whole campus, not just certain individuals, grade levels, or content areas? Using the above guiding questions to inform decisions will greatly enhance the campus principal's ability to satisfy what is the ultimate stakeholder – its students.

Change Process in Schools

The study of change in schools is not a recent phenomenon. Since our earliest accounts of formal schooling, there has been a constant force of change knocking on the threshold, challenging us to improve our teaching and organizational structures. Attempts to reorganize, relearn, and advance our educational system often have been exercises in futility. In all likelihood there has not been an institution, system, organization, or business that has been reformed more often than our schools, and with less apparent effect (Evans, 1996). Nevertheless, Evans goes on to state that the structure of schooling and the practice of teaching have remained remarkably stable. This stability can be considered the Achilles heel of public schools. Society is changing at a remarkable rate in technology, demographics, knowledge level, ecologically, and in the life expectancy of our population. Our schools must grow and develop within these

trends to adequately sustain themselves and meet the needs of an ever-changing diverse group of students.

The restructuring of our nation's classrooms, administrative offices, and schools is not met with open arms. Educators are still predominantly engaged in the belief that this too will pass. We suffer from the mentality that if people can dig their heels in a little bit further, hold on a little tighter, and shut their doors when the going gets tough, they can make it through another round of new policy, new structures, and new beliefs, without changing their core beliefs. This opposition to change can create real dilemmas in a system that relies heavily on its classroom teachers to support and empower the change process. Without teacher support, there cannot be quality change in schools. Evans (1996) states "school improvement faces a fierce paradox: its essential agents of change—teachers—are also its targets, and, sometimes, its foes" (p. xii).

An organization's response to identifying and fixing key problems is at the foundation of its ability to change. Change, in and of itself, can be a term that is perceived in quite a negative connotation. However, broken down into very simplistic terms, change, as it applies to schools, is simply looking at your organization and trying to determine areas that need improvement and then doing something to improve them. If all children were being successful at all times, in all content areas, there would be no need for change. We know that the previous statement is merely a myth, and that systems must always look intrinsically and extrinsically at their mission, beliefs, values, and results, and operate in a continuous cycle of improvement. Morgan (1986) professes that change implies that the organization is responding to the outer environment.

Comparing information against operating norms, assessing whether these norms are appropriate, and scanning and monitoring are all processes that an organization must continually do to respond to its surroundings.

When there is a call for learning and change, many of us make the assumption that the change will be productive or good for the organization. Change can also mean deterioration, regression, and stagnation (Raudenbush, 1994; Argyris & Schon, 1978). Change must be made in the right vein for it to be a positive endeavor. For schools, this means that the underlying foundation for change is the increase in student achievement and learning. For the viability of an organization to undergo effective change it must examine, challenge, and if necessary modify its basic assumptions (Raudenbush, 1994). The school improvement rhetoric basically boils down to the ability of an organization to implement change in a way that positively impacts student learning. Although there are many diagrams, protocols, step-by-step guides, and programs available to aid in school improvement, it is merely an organization's ability to adapt to its environment that enables a school to improve. Although this may be articulated in a simplistic form, the transformation of a school or school district can be highly complex.

When we consider the processes necessary to implement organizational change, we must first consider the traditional theories of organizational change and their shortcomings. We have come to the realization that attempting to promote organizational change through a rigid structure that is very hierarchical in nature is not conducive to systemic change, or effective for any length of time. With this understanding the insight to provide new ways of looking at change has come to the

forefront. No longer can an institution strictly adhere to a lock-step method of structuring for change. Change must be couched in the belief system of its employees before true systemic makeover can occur. The new core set of values, or practices, must be embedded in the culture of the organization for the process of change to permanently take root and hold. In speaking of organizational change Evans (1996) explains, "Organizational change – not just in schools, but in institutions of all kinds – is riddled with paradox. We study it in ever greater depth, but we practice it with continuing clumsiness" (p.4).

It can be a painstaking process for the leader of an organization to promote the need for change in the system. There is great rigidity and trepidation in regard to teachers changing their practice, or altering their belief system to adhere to a new paradigm. When a teacher has experienced success in the organization's former model of conducting business or teaching this apprehension is increased significantly. A lesson that organizations have learned from previous attempts to change is that many failed because they did not focus on the fundamental beliefs of the inhabitants of the organization. The underlying and foundational behaviors, norms, and beliefs of practitioners, were not addressed (Evans, 1996). Only the outcomes of these beliefs were identified, and targeted for change. Meanwhile, the core set of beliefs in the system remained relatively unaffected. Consequently, teachers in these organizations just tacked on the new and improved reforms to their current practice. Thus, incompetent teachers remained incompetent with a few new twists to an already ineffective teaching practice (Evans, 1996).

The more complex our society becomes, the more we find our organizations in need of finding quick and effective ways to adapt. In his book, *Leading in a Culture of Change,* Michael Fullan (2001) provides us with five themes, or key dimensions of change. These five themes include: moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, and knowledge creation and sharing. These five themes interplay among themselves and are recursive in nature.

Moral Purpose

The first theme, moral purpose, describes how a leader achieves a goal (Fullan, 2001). You must have followers to be a leader and a leader without moral purpose will not have followers. The most critical end in education is for students to develop knowledge of the curriculum being taught and also to develop into productive citizens who will have a positive impact on society and in their community. The path to fulfilling this goal can be varied and seem almost unattainable at times. However, moral purpose, according to Fullan (2001), in its highest order is to improve the quality of how we live together. Leaders in all organizations, whether they know it or not, contribute to moral purpose in society and in their organizations. We have witnessed many leaders in school systems who are extremely charismatic and possess the gift of leading specific campuses and school districts to unprecedented success. Their ability to create a common mission and a strong following within an organization allows the organization to excel in their goal of student learning. However, too many times the system falters and experiences a down hill slide when this leader steps down from the helm. Ridley

(1996) suggests that these practices, beliefs, and ideas from leaders with moral purpose can be passed on from one person to the next and are infectious in nature. The charismatic leader in many instances has not infiltrated the system with the core beliefs necessary to sustain change over long periods of time to members of the organization. Thus, the organization falters and experiences a decline when the leader steps down as the principal or superintendent of the system.

When describing effective leaders, most respondents will mention integrity, reliability, steadiness, firmness of conviction, a high sense of morals, and a unique style that sets the leader apart from others (Sergiovanni, 1984). Sergiovanni asserts that authentic leaders display character and that personal character is the dominant trait of leadership. Sergiovanni's thoughts run parallel to Fullan's description of moral purpose. Moral purpose in leaders is the foundation that must be in place for the other four themes to be built upon. Operating from a leadership model that is based on moral purpose will provide the framework that is necessary to lead in a culture of continuous change. The sustained performance of an organization is contingent upon the organization's ability to have moral purpose as their guiding force (Fullan, 2001). Sustainability is an organization's ability to adapt and modify over time and continue to produce positive results. Fullan (2001) explains that the theory of sustainability is comprised of three elements including environmental soundness, social justice, and economic viability. If any of these three key criteria is missing from an organization, the system will not be able to sustain itself over time.

Understanding Change

The second theme Fullan provides is the understanding of the change process. The research on change theory in organizations is quite complex and comprehensive. There are multiple definitions, theories, ideas, strategies, and processes for implementing change in a system or organization. Schools and school districts must understand the implications of change, and its pitfalls before abandoning the process. Fullan (2001) states in his development of the change process that many individuals have concluded that change cannot be managed, stating that "it can be understood and perhaps led, but it cannot be controlled" (Fullan, 2001, p. 33).

Fullan (2001) summarizes the understanding of the change process in these distinct steps:

(1) the goal is not to innovate the most; (2) it is not enough to have the best ideas; (3) appreciate the implementation dip; (4) redefine resistance; (5) reculturing is the name of the game; and (6) never a checklist, always complexity. (p. 34)

As indicated by the steps listed above the process of change is difficult to wrap one's arms around and borders on ambiguity. The steps emphasize that change is not a process that can be formulated or completed via checklist or in a step-by-step process. It is a recursive process that is rather seamless and flowing. This theme also promotes the foundational theme of moral purpose. The underpinnings of moral purpose must be in place for a leader to navigate the unseen waters that change will bring.

Relationship Building

Relationship building is Fullan's third theme discussed in the change process. Without the ability of the leader to build relationships with the people in the organization, systemic change is not possible. I am reminded of my college basketball coach who consistently preached to all of my teammates including myself that it's always about relationships in everything you do, and how you build those relationships. I'm intrigued that his words basically summed up many of the works we have now in dealing with organizational change and how to be productive in life. Relationships in a school community must be based on student learning and developing the bonds between colleagues and staff members that facilitate student learning. We have all witnessed strong relationships in grade levels, campuses, or departments that are not positive ones.

I can recall a grade level at my former campus that was a very close knit, tight group of teachers, yet their purpose was not to better the organization, in this case the school or grade level, but to undermine and criticize every initiative, directive, policy, or instructional idea that was presented to them. Yes, they were a group that had developed relationships with one another, but not relationships that were conducive to the overall success of the campus. Fullan (2001) provides these words in the context of relationships, "relationships are powerful, which means they can also be powerfully wrong" (p. 65).

The quote above illustrates the importance of members in a system establishing relationships that are keeping in line with the goals, values, and mission of the organization. The ability of a school leader to develop relationships with all people in

the system is crucial to the implementation of positive change. Staff members, fellow administrators, parents, students, school board members, central office staff, and recognized members of the local community are key stakeholders that a leader must have a connection to in order to enhance an organization's ability to adapt, modify, and create positive change for its constituency.

Knowledge Creation and Sharing

The creation of knowledge and sharing that knowledge is a fourth theme discussed by Fullan. Again, these themes work together in a non-linear way. In every system or school the leader must start in a different place and with a different theme in order to implement successful change. Each organization is its own separate entity and functions within its own culture and climate. We must first take a look at the role of knowledge in organizational performance and then examine how a system infuses knowledge sharing as a cultural value.

As Fullan points out to his readers, knowledge only becomes valuable in a social context. We are inundated with new knowledge every second, minute, and hour of the day. So much of our new knowledge is through technological advancements. However, these advancements can only go so far in helping us develop an understanding of the new knowledge and how to use it. Access to new information is only beneficial if we know how to embrace it, understand it, and use it to benefit the goals of our organization. Typically, educators are notorious for sending individuals or even small groups to professional development sessions or trainings to enhance their practice or

knowledge base. These individual recognizant missions basically hold no value for the

organization. They may increase the knowledge and ability of the teacher or educator to

deliver productive lessons, but they are isolated in their effectiveness. The next staff

member may want to attend a different professional development workshop or training

session and have a completely different experience. While a person in the leadership

position at a campus or district needs to value the individual needs of different

employees, the focus must be on the overall organization.

Common experiences provide the catalyst for change in a school system.

Sending an entire grade level to a professional development session or institute can have

a significant impact on the practice and belief system of that grade level. Isolated

pockets of individuals attending sessions will not change the organization. I will offer

the suggestion as a practicing campus principal, that sending small groups to common

training programs may provide a greater impact at the campus level. The theory of

seeing systemic change taking place is based on the common experience more so than on

the group size. Sending small groups to varied workshops and seminars will not

promote change at the campus or district level. However, sending small groups of

educators to common sessions can have a great effect on changing the organization. As

Fullan (2001) points out, "leading in a culture of change does not mean placing changed

individuals into unchanged environments" (p. 79). Knowledge sharing is about

employees of the organization being able to access the knowledge and then being able to

use the information to better their teaching or productivity in the workplace.

The leader in a knowledge sharing school or business has a very important role in facilitating this type of sharing. The leader must be the person in the organization who creates opportunities for dialogue and growth with other colleagues. The leader must set the operating norms of the group and model what these norms look like. Asking key questions, listening, providing feedback and cultivating the proper tone are all responsibilities of the principal or leader to provide an environment conducive to sharing and using knowledge (Fullan, 2001). Although schools are institutes that are centered on teaching and learning, we do little in regard to sharing the many teaching strategies and classroom practices that make us successful. We still tend to function as independent islands within a vast archipelago. This analogy can be related to the position of teachers in connection with their grade levels or a specific campus in relationship to the school district to which it belongs. Schools and school leaders will need to continue to build infrastructures in education where the accessing and sharing of knowledge will benefit students and their learning. We are surrounded by solid teaching practices, innovative strategies, and creative learning techniques being implemented by our peers on a daily basis. Yet, we continue to establish and enhance the barriers that keep us from sharing and acting on our colleagues' best practices and strategies. As educators, we must get better at identifying what we know, how we know it, and providing our colleagues ways to share this information.

Coherence Making

The fifth and final theme that builds on the four previous leadership capacities is the theme of coherence making. This theme is centered on the leader or organization's ability to ride the wave of change through the ebbs and flows that it will bring. In a constantly changing, dynamic and complex system there is going to be multiple layers of disequilibria or fragmentation as the system changes to conform to new information. The ability of the leader to accept this condition and brace for its new learning and pitfalls is conducive for the system's maintaining itself during the change process. Coherence making is the term Fullan (2001) uses to describe this implementation dip and how a leader can successfully trust the dynamics of change through this process. Trusting the dynamics of the change process, and having an understanding of living systems is critical for a leader in a culture of change. I will summarize the four principles of living systems according to Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja (2000) and Fullan (2001) as they relate to the public school sector and the principalship.

First, when a school system is in a state of equilibrium it is not very responsive to changes occurring around it and certainly does not have buy-in as it relates to the faculty wanting to change. This stagnation can be overwhelming for the school leader, especially in a school system that has typically been deemed successful. Second, when threatened or in dire straits a system or school will automatically move toward the edge of chaos. This movement will stimulate creativity, and experimentation as the campus or system knows it must adjust or be rendered obsolete. New solutions to current problems are more likely to be created and implemented. The third principle in regard to

a living system is the ability of the system or employees to self organize. When ideas, thoughts, and creativity are enhanced based on the system moving toward chaos, staff members, teachers, administrators, and other key stakeholders will self organize and work to develop a structure that will support the new strategies or ideas that have been generated. The fourth principle states that living systems cannot be directed along a linear path. There will always be change. Unforeseen barriers and roadblocks are the norm. The system must work through and around these barriers to reach their desired outcome.

The principles provided by Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja (2000) remind us that living systems are exactly that—living. They are constantly changing and adapting to their environments. School systems have generally lagged behind in their evolutionary strides to adapt to dynamic conditions. Coherence making is the ability of the leader and the organization to provide experiences, set up opportunities for learning, and to explore change. The leader must let-go of traditional top down hierarchical methods and provide avenues to involve all members of an organization to provide feedback in the decision making process. The leader will ultimately have more control, more insight into the organization, be able to solve more challenges, and promote moral purpose in all of the staff. The most powerful attribute for a leader is the experience of working through the complexities and ambiguities of hard to solve problems (Fullan, 2001). The five themes, including moral purpose, understanding change, developing relationships, building knowledge, and coherence making, define the change process as it occurs in organizations. The more fully a system understands, accepts, and acknowledges these

themes, the quicker and more effectively the organization will respond productively to change.

School Culture

Anthropologists suggest that culture consist of the customs and rituals that have developed over time within a group of people. Edgar Schein (1992) provides us the following definition of the culture of a group:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 12)

Schein (1985) maintained that culture embraces three facets: artifacts, values, and assumptions. Artifacts form the physical representations of culture and can include the environment or physical surroundings. Artifacts may represent little meaning until cultural values of the group are understood (Patten, 2004; Schein, 1985).

Values in a particular culture are made apparent by the goals of the group. These values are what the group holds important as the central ideas, principles, and operating norms of the culture. The third facet, assumptions, forms the least visible aspect of culture. These assumptions can also be the most influential on group behavior. Assumptions help form the world view of the group, and play a large role in developing the group's belief system. Assumptions are the way a group member describes what actually is (Patten, 2004). This is their perception and reality. To truly develop an

understanding of a group's culture one must analyze its shared basic assumptions, and study how these shared assumptions came to be (Schein, 1992).

Culture as it pertains to the school context can take on a meaning of its own. School cultures are dynamic in nature and are influenced by current trends. As a response to the standards and accountability movement occurring nationwide, school cultures have undergone unprecedented examination. National and state expectations become established norms that schools must share culturally. Student expectations, testing and assessment results, curricula, and norms regarding quality instruction are all school norms that can be found in Schein's (1992) three facets of culture and are represented by artifacts, values, and assumptions. School cultures take on different characteristics at every individual campus. Patten (2004) reminds us that "the tide of current literature and legislation calls for schools to develop collaborative cultures that center on improving student achievement" (p. 133). Dalin (1993) supports the belief that school cultures change due to four societal trends. The first trend is that the direction of learning in schools is changing from top-down to lateral, interconnected groups. Second, the demographics of populations are becoming more diverse. And third, organizational structures tend to be democratic processes, rather than autocratic. Finally, groups are highly valued in today's society. Schools react to these societal trends and also must respond to the national focus on school improvement with improved scores.

Establishing a culture in a school that is conducive to learning is an arduous task. Although we continually hear catch phrases such as life-long learner and other terms

related to student learning in schools, the truth is that developing a true learning culture in a school is a monumental journey. A school culture that emphasizes learning as its core value is a school that is making strides toward success for all students. The concept of culture is most helpful if used to describe the ways and means that groups of people interact with each other. Schein (1992) describes a culture as shared or taken-for-granted basic assumptions held by members of the organization or group. In discussing the development of culture Schein reminds us that not every collection or group of people develop a culture. Groups having a great deal of turnover, or populations that have not experienced any challenging events may not have developed a culture. The term group is used most often with individuals or members that have developed some sense of history with one another. A collection of people or a crowd may describe many individuals when there is not that shared history (Schein, 1992).

Culture and Leadership

Culture and leadership are extremely interactive in the social setting of a public school. The people within a culture help shape the leader, and the leader helps shape the culture. A leader is the person most responsible for establishing, maintaining, or changing a school culture. Cultures do exist prior to the arrival of the campus leader or principal. Leadership and cultures are two sides of the same coin. When a leader first creates teams, groups, or structures within an organization this molds the culture of the organization or school (Schein, 1992). Once a culture exists, the people within the culture determine the qualities and attributes of the leader they want. The United States

in its infancy was a prime example of the dual roles culture and leadership play. The key stakeholders and leaders of the United States determined that George Washington possessed the type of leadership they wanted as President. At the same time George Washington helped shape the culture of the people that were developing the profile for their president. Schein (1992) states, "the bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them" (p. 15). Leadership originates as the foundation of a group's beliefs and values that they determine are important and critical as they go about attempting to manage their internal and external problems. If the leader's ideas and plans to achieve the idea are successful, then gradually the leader's vision becomes a shared assumption (Schein, 1992). One of the most challenging situations is for a leader is to go about changing a culture that is entrenched. School cultures can be entrenched in either positive or negative behaviors. Most organizations have their share of both.

Cultures in schools cover the gamut of behaviors. School cultures range from progressive to passive, nurturing to threatening, and invested to indifferent (Patten, 2004). Certainly schools that possess a culture that leans toward the progressive and nurturing side have a much better opportunity to satisfy all of their constituents and satisfy state and national policy in regard to high stakes accountability. Changing a school culture, therefore, is basically changing the shared assumptions by the group or staff. This can be incredibly painstaking, difficult, and time consuming. One of the central themes in my study of culture and developing my own autoethnography is to take a look at this process of changing an entrenched culture and the leader's role in doing so.

Autoethnography takes into account the culture studied and the researcher's experiences that are shaped by the culture. At the core of changing a school is how the leader unwraps the outer layers of a culture and gets to the root cause of the beliefs. The leader must then develop methods and procedures for dealing with the disequilibrium caused by the process of change.

The leader's involvement in shaping the culture of a school is not a recent discovery. However, since an abundance of research on the topic has become available since the 1980s, we have witnessed an increased focus on the leader's function in the context of an organization's culture. The concept of culture has been discussed under a variety of names: climate, ideology, ethos, saga, and includes a sampling of these terms (Raudenbush, 1994; Deal, 1985). Kilmann, Saxton, and Serpa (1985) use the following simile to discuss the topic, "culture is to the organization what personality is to the individual – a hidden, yet unifying theme that provides meaning, direction, and mobilization" (p. ix). School culture is a complex phenomenon that often can be elusive and misunderstood. The key to understanding a school culture lies beneath the outer structures.

Despite the many definitions, interpretations, and beliefs regarding school culture, the leader's role is very individualized in nature as it impacts the organization. A leader is an integral part of shaping and forming the culture of the school or system of which he or she is a member. Gordon Donaldson (2001) in his third chapter of *Cultivating Leadership in Schools* indicates that the social and cultural norms of most schools conspire against conventional forms and styles of leadership. Principals and

campus leaders must find the time and the means to lead teachers and staff, and also must engage the staff in the development and implementation of long-range plans and solving school wide issues. Many of these issues seem very distant and even irrelevant to a great majority of teachers (Donaldson, 2001). The typical teacher is so engaged in the daily routine of the classroom and the success of the students in his or her classroom that many campus wide concerns play second fiddle to the immediate concerns of the classroom. Campus principals many times also fall prey to the same dilemma in regard to district challenges and issues. The campus principal can be so entrenched by situations at his or her own campus that district concerns take a backseat. Teachers and administrators move in and out of their "circle of concern," borrowing a term from Stephen Covey (1998), in relation to the shifting of energy and focus from their primary responsibility to a greater goal for the organization. Donaldson (2001) reminds us that many individuals and groups operate on their own free will and many decisions that a group or committee supports, never come to fruition.

With the explosion of literature in regards to culture in organizations over the past 25 years, we have developed a much deeper database for analyzing teacher beliefs, organizational theories, and internal and external influences on school culture. Elmore (2002) refers to schools as "loosely coupled" systems where the fundamentals of teaching and learning exist in the classroom with the teacher, not in the organization. This parallels with the notion that a teacher's main function is to concentrate on the students and the learning inside their four classroom walls; the organizations mission is not top priority. This structure naturally presents obstacles for the leader or principal to

create buy-in for a common mission or centralized theme for the school. The autonomy experienced by the classroom teacher is a powerful, yet resistant force for the campus leader to wrestle with. Donaldson (2001) supports the notion of school leadership and the cultural context that surrounds this position by identifying five themes:

(1) teacher rewards are intrinsic and student-focused; (2) the ethos is individualistic; (3) collegiality is voluntary and permissive; (4) teacherhood is a semiprofession: It is undervalued and peripheral; and (5) organizational issues are the domain of administrators. (p. 23)

The first theme of rewards and intrinsic motivation maintains that a teacher's primary motivation for teaching is the relationship with his or her students and the personal and professional fulfillment derived from this work. The joy of seeing a student experience success in a teacher's classroom outweighs many external factors such as salary or status.

The second theme that ethos is individualistic pertains to the belief of teachers that their work is valued for the autonomy and individuality it allows them. The majority of teachers rely on their ability to maneuver through the daily challenges of the classroom and make quick decisions that have a positive impact on learning. It is this competence, flexibility and responsiveness that is encouraging and stimulating to the teacher as a professional.

Donaldson's third theme, that collegiality is voluntary and permissive, reflects the teacher's physical and emotional investment with his or her children. There is a great deal of isolation from other colleagues and administrators due to the time

consuming role the teaching of students encompasses. Many teachers are not engaging in the other activities of the school or collaborating with peers, due to the sheer exhaustion of working with students of varying academic, social, and emotional needs.

The view that teaching is considered a semi-profession, and that it is undervalued and peripheral is the fourth theme. Teachers are applauded, and in many cases rewarded either intrinsically or extrinsically, for their individual work and efforts in the classroom. These accolades may come from specific families, organizations, businesses, colleagues, peers, or formal recognition from the campus and district. Coincidentally, teachers are typically undervalued by their pay and social status, especially when compared to other professionals (Donaldson, 2001). These circumstances place leaders in an awkward position.

Mobilizing the staff to support campus changes and the philosophies of a new campus principal remains difficult to a workforce that on a state and national level typically is not compensated adequately for its efforts. Studies indicate, however, that teachers express feeling the most valued when they are included in making important decisions that impact teaching and learning at a campus level (Donaldson, 2001). This presents an interesting challenge for administrators. Teachers who feel they are undervalued professionally may not want to give the additional time and effort outside of their classroom. Involving teachers in campus and district problem solving, hiring, and decision making, is very rewarding to teachers on a professional level and may circumvent many of these beliefs of feeling undervalued. There are also outside factors that reinforce this condition of mediocrity on a professional level.

Schoolteachers have historically been valued just above a skilled-trade level job in many communities. Teacher shortages forced cities and towns to hire many unqualified individuals to fill teacher roles in the early 20th century. Many males have used the teaching position as a catapult to higher status positions such as doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and administrators. Donaldson (2001) suggests that the "subservience of teaching is inextricably wrapped in issues of women's place in our society and in the workplace" (p. 28). This discriminatory path is difficult for racial minorities and for women to circumvent. Despite these barriers colleges and universities are working to certify and train teachers to a higher standard and to cast away the underling label that the teaching profession has incurred. Much work needs to be accomplished in the area of gender, race, and compensation for teaching to be viewed as a true professional endeavor.

The fifth and final theme reflects the cultural context of schools that leadership is about "school-wide matters for administrators." The abundance of demands placed on the schoolhouse in the last 20 years is breathtaking. School reform has encompassed standards based testing, charter schools, religious freedoms, sexual preferences, and special programs including: vocational, special education, compensatory education, English as a second language, and gifted and talented. These are only a few of the many reforms and changes being implemented in schools at state and national levels. Individual teachers cannot possibly respond to these waves of change (Donaldson, 2001). Administrators serve as the buffer between the classroom and many of these challenges that are consistently becoming a part of the school tapestry. Classroom

teachers seeking protection from these political winds only make common sense (Donaldson, 2001). The administrator, in order to provide classroom teachers the opportunity to successfully do their job must handle troublesome staff members, parents, and other outside obstacles. The phenomenon of the buffering function may resolve the immediate concern of the classroom teacher to engage students in learning without interruptions; it, nevertheless, creates a void when the principal is looking for assistance in handling organizational issues or decision-making quandaries. This buffering function dynamic thwarts efforts by campus leaders to create participatory campus leadership, site-based decision-making, and collaborative group efforts in determining the focus and goals of a particular school (Donaldson, 2001).

How a person views a school's culture is essentially determined by the implicit or explicit conceptions of their own culture or setting (Sarason, 1996). Cultures in school are a complex web of interactions, rituals, symbols, conceptual structures, artifacts and ceremonies. It is not an easy task to define culture in any system or organization. The campus leader must take into account these obvious and hidden structures, organizational language, and the many existing subcultures, to be able to expand and continue the process of positive change. The study of culture as it applies to organizations and schools is an area we must continue to study and emphasize to enable schools to excel in an era of reform.

The examination of literature regarding organizational leadership, change process, and culture has been the primary focus of my literature review. The overarching goal of my research is to provide a highly personalized account of the

principalship at one elementary school. The three concepts I have reviewed provide the foundation to support my personal narrative in which I figure as both the subject and the researcher. These three key areas of literature provide the requisite framework for this qualitative form of inquiry as it relates to autoethnography. These three areas of literature also help shape and form the account of my own experiences as a campus principal, and are critical components in the further development of my narrative that seeks to attain a better understanding of the principalship.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The role of the principal has shifted dramatically since its inception in the early 20th century. In the last two decades alone the position has attained new and higher levels of complexities and responsibilities. The principalship has struggled to evolve with the multifaceted demands placed on the position. Increased accountability has shifted the function of the campus principal from one of primarily management to that of facilitating the learning of the students and staff, curriculum design, measurement and evaluation, human resources leadership, and the many countless responsibilities that fall in between. How has the principalship responded to these increased responsibilities and evolved with societal trends and demands?

Purpose of the Study

This research represents a highly personalized account of the principalship at one elementary school. The position will be closely examined from the inside to better examine, critique, and identify with its intricacies, shortcomings, and rewards. The experiences I have encountered, the problems I face, and the meaning I derive from them will enable educators to reflect upon their own personal administrative experiences in relation to my own, and thus grow professionally in their own development. Examining the self through an autobiographical lens will continue my own learning, and provide additional insight, data, and reflection regarding the role of a campus principal. Using the self as the predominant research tool in a given social context, such as a school,

offers the opportunity to closely scrutinize the changes in the role and functions of the principalship that are necessary to meet the growing complexities of the position.

Personal narratives bear a resemblance to autobiographies. This study positions itself as a first person, autobiographical account of a principal's experience in transitioning from one elementary campus to another elementary campus in the same school district. This study utilizes qualitative research as its foundation. Qualitative research is an umbrella term that covers several forms of inquiry where the researcher is studying a social context, while causing as little disruption as possible in the natural setting (Eaton, 2002; Merriam, 1998). Advancing to the borders of qualitative research is the methodology of autoethnography. Autoethnography is a qualitative genre of research where the researcher describes his or her personal experience within a social context – in this case an elementary school.

According to Patten (2004), autobiographical accounts and comparable research have been classified under a variety of names. Similar classifications include terms such as: personal narratives, complete member research, personal ethnography, literary tales, lived experience, critical autobiography, self-ethnography, ethnographic memoir, narrative ethnography, and native ethnography, as well as many others (Patten, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The broader category of self-research is not as misunderstood as a scientific tool of inquiry as it was in past research discussions. Harry Wolcott, nearly forty years ago, took an anthropological look at the inner workings of the principalship in his classic ethnography. Viewing the principalship from the inside will certainly taint and discolor the voice of the researcher in understanding the social

phenomena that is occurring. This is precisely the purpose in developing a self narrative and research study that is autoethnographical in nature. A study that discounts the role of the researcher in the process is not providing a holistic view of the subculture studied. We must embrace the biases of the researcher to develop a much richer understanding of the context studied.

Methodology

In traditional research, the researcher is expected to keep one's voice separate from the data and context studied. As researchers develop their voice in first person accounts, the study will gain richness in its descriptions of significant events, people, artifacts, and observed cultural norms. Readers of autoethnographical literature will be drawn in to the inner workings of the social context studied and become a part of the story. This shared experience enables this type of qualitative methodology to bolster a reader's own understanding and knowledge of the culture studied, as well as the author's. Patten (2004) describes this experience as a collaborative journey between the author and the reader. These highly personalized accounts draw upon the experiences of the author/researcher as they attempt to broaden their understanding of the culture that is at the center of their research (Sparkes, 2000). Krizek (1998) sums up the delicate balance and benefit of narratives of the self, "In short, we often render our research reports devoid of human emotion and self reflection. As ethnographers, we experience life, but we write science" (p. 93). The emergence of autoethnography and self narrative has been problematic in many research circles.

Located on the margins of "proper scientific inquiry" this type of research has challenged accepted views about silent authorship and author "evaluated" texts (Sparkes, 2000, p. 22). Charmaz and Mitchell (1997) contend that in proper research, authors are expected to remain on the sidelines and keep their voices out of their reports. In writing themselves into their own work, authors of personal narratives provide the catalyst to answer the question "What is happening here?" Researchers are part of the experience, and you cannot remove your involvement in the process. Empirical studies have long discounted a subjective approach to research. The recording of a personal experience provides the author with a deeper understanding of the social setting and aids in the construction of meaning. This occurs both for the author and for the reader participants. Richardson (1994) describes writing as a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Richardson further suggests that, "writing is a way of 'knowing' – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it" (p. 517).

Autoethnographical accounts are typically written in first person voice and contain contextual details, dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness and stories affected by history, social structure and culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This poses many challenges in determining its validity as quality research. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) have determined that a quality self study that engages the reader's imagination has compelling research questions, transcends the purely personal, and provides compelling answers to these questions creates a significant research piece. Opponents of self-study research argue that while certain research methods may be convincing in this arena, they

do not necessarily indicate the truth in what has been written (Phillips, 1987). But the truth has many faces. Self-study provides one significant aspect of the truth that too often is lost. Autoethnography is an opportunity for readers to draw on the authors experience to support their understanding of a particular culture. Introspection at such a high degree can also become problematic. Many view self narratives as narcissistic in nature; however, advocates of self narratives would propose that you cannot discount the role of the researcher and their own biases in the process of research. Multiple interpretations are formed by the readers of autoethnography, and it is the first person account, written as a story, that is compelling to its readers. The opportunity to become co-participants in the story, engage the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually, all are benefits of autoethnographical studies (Patten, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

History of Autoethnography

The term autoethnography consists of two key components. The foundation is ethnographic (or anthropological) and the auto reflects the autobiographical or personal narrative component of the term. The use of lived experience as a foundation for research stems from earlier work in Europe in the category of human science research (Raudenbush, 1994). Description, interpretation, and critical analysis form the catalysts for human science research. In discussions of lived experience research one must first look at Wolcott's (2003) *The Man in the Principal's Office* as the measuring stick for documenting a personal experience within a social context. Ed Bell, the pseudonym

from Harry Wolcott's classic ethnography, and the subject of the study, is expressed in vivid detail by Wolcott. This research has been the groundwork for many case studies, surveys, interviews, and other qualitative studies that have provided great depth to our understanding of the principalship (Raudenbush, 1994). Autoethnography takes Wolcott's work a step further by approaching the culture from the biases of one of its own members. In my particular study I will expand my own, and hopefully others' understanding of the principalship by using myself as the research instrument, occupying both the role of the subject and researcher simultaneously. My experience as a current elementary school principal transitioning to another established elementary school is the focal point of my research. The challenges and experiences I faced upon transitioning to assume the principalship at another elementary school in the same school district is the central focus of my study.

The study of a lived experience can add great detail to the abundance of qualitative research that focuses primarily on an observer's point of view. In an autoethnography the observer is part of the subculture studied. Van Maanen (1995) states that this type of research is carried out by a native who reveals his or her own group. In earlier work, Van Manen (1990) suggests in regard to lived experience research, "the fundamental model of this approach is textual reflection on the lived experiences and practical actions of everyday life with the intent to increase one's thoughtfulness, and practical resourcefulness or tact" (p. 4). Self-study research and lived experience research are written to stimulate the reader to reflect on their own experience in relation to the researchers. Pinar (1988) offers that a personal account

would go beneath the surface of daily reporting and offer a rich excavation of intent, focus, and vision. Autoethnography has close ties to phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology rejects scientific realism and the view that empirical sciences have a privileged position (Schwandt, 2001). Phenomenology questions and describes the experience a person encounters. It aims to identify and describe the subjective experiences of the researcher on a daily level. Phenomenology does not construct a theory of explanation but offers the possibility of insight that illumines experience (Van Manen, 1990). Examining all aspects of a personalized experience allows the researcher greater opportunity to arrive at the core meaning of the experience.

Hermeneutics is the nature and means of interpretation. It is the study of interpreting meaning. Hermeneutic research would ask the question: What does this experience really mean? It is within this vein that autoethnography is situated. In an autoethnography the researcher is studying him or herself within a subculture and attempting to make meaning of all of their experiences in this setting. Lejeune (1989) informs us that autoethnography composed by insiders leads to a more authentic representation of their experience than if done by an outside ethnographer. This connection between the insider and the experience allows for a more detailed description and connects the personal to the cultural through research and writing (Reed-Danahay, 1997). A hermeneutic approach helps us connect our thinking with our experiencing of reality (Raudenbush, 1994).

The documentation of a particular personal experience through a narrative has a long history in research literature and is gaining legitimacy. The ability to tell stories

has long been an asset of humans. These stories have been articulated, written down, and passed on, from generation to generation in the written form and orally. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) support the notion of using stories in educational research because humans are story tellers. The human brain gobbles up information that is told in story structure or format. Education is increased from the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories. Wolcott (1994) asserts that qualitative researchers need to be storytellers, and storytelling should be one of their distinguishing attributes. Autobiography provides us with the means to bring personal lived experiences into dialogue with theoretical perspectives (Raudenbush, 1994). Autoethnography is a useful way to examine the principalship and administration in a self-reflexive manner.

Telling the Story

What makes a good story scholarly? This question is perhaps the key central issue in determining if a personal narrative is credible, dependable, and trustworthy – all cornerstones of qualitative research. There is much debate regarding the methodology of autoethnography and whether it constitutes scientific research. The use of self as the only data source can be problematic in this regard. Ellis (1995) argues that a story could be considered scholarly if it makes the reader believe the experience is authentic, believable, and possible. The intended purpose of autoethnography is to provide the opportunity for the reader and author to become co-participants in the recorded experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). There are also multiple warning signs, skills and difficulties that are experienced or needed in writing ethnography, according to Ellis and

Bochner (2000). Researchers must be adept at identifying pertinent details, introspection, descriptive and compelling writing, and confronting things about themselves that may be less than flattering. Also, the researcher must handle the vulnerability of revealing oneself to a greater audience. The use of self as the source of data can be restrictive, yet a powerful aspect of unpacking the many layers involved in the study of a particular culture or social context. William Tierney explains that autoethnography is intended to confront dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim marginalized representational spaces (Tierney, 1998). In a world where empirical science is still king, producing evocative writing accounts that are labeled as research can be a difficult endeavor. Because people do not accumulate their experience in a social vacuum, autoethnography is not limited to just the study of one individual (Stanley, 1993). This study will take into account the benefits and challenges of studying a culture through the lens of a researcher as the primary instrument.

Research Design and Methods

Depicting how principals themselves view their role is an overlooked aspect of research in educational leadership. A number of studies that indicate how other stakeholders view the principalship, but the information and perceptions from the persons in the leadership positions are scarce. Applying Wendy Bishop's (1999) definition of ethnography as the representation of the lived experience of a convened culture, to that of autoethnography is helpful in articulating the central mission of my research. Bishop (1999) states that culture cannot be replicated or tested because it is

observed for only a finite time. The researcher typically moves on to another culture to study or gain entry into it. Due to the nature of autoethnography, the researcher is always engaged as a part of the culture. The researcher does not pull up the tent stakes and look elsewhere when the inquiry is complete. The inquiry or field of research is an on-going occurrence and the culture is continually evolving with time.

This research, therefore, depicts my own perspective as the principal of an elementary school, taking into account my personal challenges, journeys, relationships, celebrations, and multiple realities of staff and colleagues that help shape and form my own experience. Deriving meaning from Lincoln and Guba's (1985) description of qualitative research, the design of my study is emergent in its design and negotiated outcomes. The meanings and interpretations I formulate are negotiated with human data sources and interactions that I have encountered as a part of the culture. As Cunningham (2000) noted, "as a principal myself, I am always interested in hearing the voices, interpretations, and experiences of my colleagues and constituents, and to recognize patterns in their perceptions" (p. 15). My intention is to take these voices, perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of my colleagues and weave them into a tapestry that encapsulates the portrait of my principalship.

Data Collection

The ultimate goal of self-study research is to produce literary representations and to add value to readers of our research. With this in mind, data collection tools vary greatly in self-narrative research and autobiographical studies. To ensure proper validity

in an autoethnography Feldman (2003) has developed four criteria upon which data

collection are based:

> (1) Provide clear and detailed description of how we collect data and make
>
> explicit what counts as data in our work. (2) Provide clear and detailed
>
> descriptions of how we constructed the representation from our data. What
>
> specifics about the data led us to make this assumption? (3) Extend triangulation
>
> beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to
>
> represent the same self study. (4) Provide evidence that the research changed or
>
> evolved the educator and summarize its value to the profession. This can
>
> convince readers of the study's significance and validity. (pp. 27-28)

Feldman's (2003) criteria facilitated the underpinnings of my own

documentation and data collection in my study. Data gathering began promptly after I

received the information that I would be transitioning as principal of an existing campus

to another campus in the same school district. After speaking with my committee chair

of my Ph.D. coursework, I was introduced to the methodology of autoethnography as a

possible genre for my dissertation. I immediately began collecting data during the

summer months proceeding the upcoming school year at my new campus. I began

keeping a journal documenting the experiences I perceived in my transition as the new

principal. This reflexive journal was completed after each work day detailing my own

summarization of the day's events. Day to day interactions, meetings, experiences, and

phone calls were recollected in my personal diary.

In regards to the daily maintenance of my personal journey, I found that analyzing and reflecting on the day's events worked best for me at the end of the work day or early in the morning before most of the faculty arrived. I found that my thoughts were much more clear and probably not affected by immediate circumstances if I entered my thoughts in the journal in the morning of the next school day. The time to accurately reflect on the previous day's experiences helped tremendously if I waited to make the journal entries. I was much more level-headed and removed from the turmoil and challenges of the preceding day. I would then try to adequately embody the day through a couple of paragraphs depicting my own personal thoughts and reactions to issues, celebrations, and impressions of the day's events. The days and weeks of the school year were depicted in chronological order listing the description and explanation of the experience. I avoided entering a new week's information into the journal until I had completed the previous week. My personal calendar was a valuable asset in providing concrete reminders of the daily events I encountered. I would use this personal calendar to jumpstart my memory to reflect on the emotion and occurrences of the day. In this personal calendar I listed descriptive words that would remind me of important topics I needed to address with key faculty members. At times I would record entries in my journal in chunks – reflecting, constructing, and interpreting the meaning of two or three days at a time. Usually, these multiple day summaries would be based on a central issue or challenge. It could take two or three days to arrive at a solution for a campus issue. Once resolved, I would then proceed to put my complete thoughts down on paper encapsulating the total dilemma from its inception to its completion.

Interestingly, data gathering significantly became more difficult starting in late February. It became increasingly laborious to find time to adequately reflect on the data entered in the journal. I believe that this stems from the frantic pace that starts with statewide assessments and testing in February. At the elementary level, writing is tested in grade four, and in early March reading is tested statewide. As has been the case in the last decade, both third and fourth grades are tested in two content areas in April. The spring semester poses many challenges for an administrator, especially for one in transition.

In the state of Texas accountability and respectability for a campus specifically hinge on scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. It is with this in mind that a campus principal's focus turns specifically toward the success of students in these tests. Although this should take place over the course of the school year, the pace quickens into a frenzy in the spring semester. It is my belief that in being in the role of campus principal at a new campus it was imperative that we demonstrate success on our state assessments, still the overall measuring stick for campus success. The testing of our students with special needs also was time consuming due to the number of Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meetings that were needed to determine the appropriate level of testing for a special education student. Spring ARD's or yearly ARD's were also being held in conjunction with many of these meetings to determine appropriate testing levels. These challenges were all contributors in making data entry more difficult starting in late February.

Faculty agendas, staff memos, personal calendars, and reflexive analysis serve as the primary means of data collection. These research tools allow the design of the study to be fluid in its creation, and provide the researcher opportunity to analyze and derive meaning from these artifacts. These sources were initially placed in a folder containing all written correspondence. The folder was then organized into subject area, strand, or other commonalities. Many pieces of the written documentation could be placed in multiple categories. Common strands and key attributes of these documents were analyzed through member checks and aided in the triangulation of data.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data begins the moment the researcher perceives the information. In an autoethnography the analysis of data is an ongoing event, developing and crystallizing over time. With each re-reading of my personal reflexive journal, each examination of a written artifact, and with further introspection and self analysis, the process and clarity of the research is enriched. These processes form the analysis of data in a qualitative study of an autoethnographical nature. The gathering and analysis of data go hand-in-hand as theories and themes emerge during the study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). The reflection involved by the researcher consistently shapes and forms the articulation of the experiences of the researcher in a self-study.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) assert that the analysis of data in a personal narrative involves a process where the researcher emotionally recalls the events of the past. The researcher looks back on specific, memorable episodes and experiences paying

particular attention to the emotions and physical surroundings during the recollection.

Emotional recall is expressed through writing that includes thoughts, events, dialogue,

and physical details of the particular event. A unique aspect of a qualitative study is the

ability of the researcher to let the data emerge as the research and writing is progressing.

In the initial phases of my study it was not always clear what distinctive themes would

emerge. As noted by Janesick (2002), "the qualitative researcher uses inductive analysis,

which means that categories, themes, and patterns come from the data. The categories

that emerge from field notes, documents and interviews are not imposed prior to data

collection" (p. 389).

I used the research questions to guide my personal constructions of data, and I

placed heavy emphasis on each of the following issues as my study unfolded.

1. What challenges did I face upon assuming the principalship at Glade Springs
    Elementary?

2. How did I respond to these challenges?

3. What occupied my time in making the transition?

4. What determined my priorities?

5. What barriers and obstacles did I encounter in attempting to cultivate a
    positive environment and an organization centered around learning?

6. How did I use accountability productively?

Keeping the above mentioned research questions at the forefront of my thoughts

in writing the narrative greatly supported the work. However, personal biases I have in

dealing with certain situations also made an impact in the final selection of information I

used in the narrative. The success of the initiative and the success or failure I personally

faced when attempting to facilitate or solve certain dilemmas also entered into the

equation of what was included in the final product. Of course, I attempted to remain as

fair and honest as possible in my personal narrative in my selection of both the successes

and failures I experienced as the administrator of an elementary campus in my transition

year.

Member checking (i.e., checking facts and interpretations with other persons in

the setting) is also used as a form of reflective analysis in this study. Admittedly,

somewhat different than a qualitative study where the researcher is studying a context

other than him or herself, member checking in a self study serves to help the researcher

clarify, rethink, add or delete comments, and to add any details that could further

develop the researchers own interpretations. The academic coordinator at Glade

Springs, the director of human resources (formerly the assistant principal at Glade

Springs in the early 1990s) and my spouse all served as member checks for this research.

Coding the Data

Categorizing the information collected provided a concrete structure that

facilitated the writing and interpretation of data. At the beginning of my study it was not

always clear as to which themes would emerge. Coding and categorizing the data from

my reflexive journal and personal calendar was very helpful in keeping the authenticity

of the moment in tact. The ability to make sense of the situation or event was increased

as the coding of the data was completed and organized. After attempting to categorize

the data, I realized that there is no one way to categorize or code data, but that it is ever-changing and very fluid. It could vary from one day to the next, so making a determination about the most likely place the data would fit proved to be an arduous task. My own constructions of the context were enhanced and more informed as my reviews of the data increased. This greater understanding can be attributed to what Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to as ontological authenticity – an understanding derived about the researcher's own point of view.

I first completed a thorough reading of the reflexive journal in its entirety. I assumed this would give me a more complete overview of the year and provide vivid details of the trials and tribulations I experienced. After an initial read, I then went back to my personal calendar and identified areas of the calendar that matched the journal entries. Notes were then made on a copy of my journal entries of any significant information or events that I did not mention in the journal. This served as a support for the journal and provided a more detailed description of the day. It also enabled me to keep all the written information from the day in one easy, accessible place.

Separating the artifacts I collected into important segments was the next phase of data collection. Coding the memos, staff bulletins, newsletters, PTO agendas, meeting agendas and minutes, and other official documents into similar categories posed multiple dilemmas. The challenge was in sorting these documents by time-frame, content, or personnel involved. I found that the event and the time or emotional commitment made to the event shaped the way I categorized data. For example, if I attempted to classify an event or meeting that involved a teacher with whom I was having difficulty, I would

tend to code this event under a specific teacher name, not the content or time frame. If the artifact I was coding involved a particular tough topic or content area I would categorize it under the subject. I believe this just gives credence to the methodology of autoethnography and to the realization that you cannot remove the emotion and other feelings experienced from a cultural setting. The emotions I felt during the coding of data were real and impacted the categorization of the data. When the researcher witnesses social action first hand in a culture and as part of the culture, it greatly enhances the information that is brought forth from the study. Nevertheless, the analysis and evaluation of data collected from past events was affected by my personal feelings and emotions. Thus, a sequential and basically historical presentation of the events was derived from my categorized data.

Summary

A hermeneutical phenomenological inquiry of a principal's self reported experience allows the writer and reader to pursue the essence and significance of being an administrator (Raudenbush, 1994). Attention to detail, nuances, subtleties and contextual understanding are at the heart of all such inquiries and provide the researcher with rigorous and thought provoking reflection. In this study, many names and proper nouns have been altered to secure some degree of anonymity. This is an important criterion of the research as I am still engaged as the principal of the school indicated in the study. I recognize that my personal descriptions and articulation of the events at the campus are subjective in nature and may not reflect what other peers or colleagues

experienced. The data I gathered formed the basis of my research and it was not a comprehensive sample, but a sample that was important in my role as the administrator of the campus. The objective here is to identify the experiences I faced, the meaning I derived from them (then and now), and to provide other aspiring or current administrators an avenue to further develop their own thinking about the principalship, and to promote further growth in the position. There are no prescribed methods or exact formulas in a personal narrative. There are only pathways and structures that serve as guideposts. First person accounts focus on life's turning points, on the openings, closings, and individual voices and milestones that collectively suggest formalized expression (Denzin, 1989).

Chapters IV, V, and VI contain a narrative that hopefully will offer readers a path to understanding my personal experience in the principalship, while perhaps bolstering a broader understanding of the administrative experience. From the position of an immersed researcher, I hope to provide readers, through a cultural anthropological avenue, a story and personal reflection that will impact their own careers. As Clandinin and Connely (1994) acknowledge, a narrative offers a path to understanding as a dialectical process. Hopefully, an autoethnographic account will produce an approximation of the truth or a more detailed description of the principalship and draw readers into the story where the experience can be actually felt (Schwandt, 2001). This verisimilitude will enable the reader to draw upon their own experiences and to better understand those experiences as well as to assimilate and learn from the experiences of others.

CHAPTER IV

A PRINCIPAL IN TRANSITION

The New Subculture

"Oh Mr. Dethloff…the superintendent is on the phone – are you in trouble again – hee hee," quipped our school secretary Mrs. Needleman. I wasn't sure if the sound at the end of Mrs. Needleman's sentence was a snicker, giggle, or cackle, but I had already grown to appreciate her dry sense of humor. As a thirty-year veteran principal's secretary she was usually correct in her predictions. The superintendent had called to schedule my quarterly evaluation. Typically, during such an evaluation we review a number of domains and have a conversation regarding areas in which I am succeeding, and areas that need further development. It really is a very positive, proactive, and professional way of developing the district's administrators while celebrating their successes as well.

The weather was overcast that day in February when I drove from W.B. Luckett Elementary to the central office. Based on my secretary's earlier prediction of trouble I pondered if the inclimate weather was indeed a sign or omen of the conversation I was about to have. I sat across from Dr. Miller, the superintendent, and after a few initial greetings and small talk we got down to business. "Carl tell me, in your opinion, who are the top three principals in this district?" Seeing this as an opportunity to let Dr. Miller know why I thought I should still be employed, I quickly considered my options before I vocalized them. If I placed myself at the top of the list that may seem to border

on arrogance (I also knew I didn't have the credentials to support a top ranking after

only three years on the job, and in my current role). Then again, if I did not place myself

in the top three, that would look like I did not possess any confidence in my own

abilities. I chose the option that I thought would prove to the superintendent that I fully

recognized that I had many miles to travel in my development, yet would let him know I

felt confident in my ability to lead a campus successfully. I placed myself in the third

position in my own personal rankings of the top three administrators. The person that

occupied my top spot was Dr. Carmen Hernandez. She had successfully led a middle

school to an exemplary rating in her first year as the campus administrator. Her

leadership enabled the school to move from an acceptable rating in the year prior to her

hiring, to the top status established by the Texas Education Agency in her first year. I

knew that I didn't possess the credentials or the knowledge to rank myself above the

work she had completed at her middle school campus. So I mentally patted myself on

the back for coming up with such a quick reply to Dr. Miller's question that seemed to

provide an adequate response.

I still was a little perplexed as to why Dr. Miller posed this question. It didn't

take long, however, for me to come to the realization with his next statement. "What do

you think our district can do to support one of our campuses that is struggling, knowing

your responses to the question I just asked," said Dr. Miller. I stated, "Certainly Dr.

Maria Hernandez would take the campus to unchartered territory and quickly turn it in to

a high performing school." I knew the district was also having difficulty with many of

its children of color at this campus and scores on the state assessment in this student

group were behind the state and district averages. The campus was also having difficulty with many of the student's families. It would be an added benefit that Dr. Hernandez is a woman of color, I thought to myself as the conversation continued.

Dr. Miller then articulated "Yes, she would indeed do a fabulous job, but she is committed to representing the National Association of Secondary School Principals as one of their leaders in the near future and she would not be able to fulfill this goal if she was the new principal at Glade Springs Elementary. I nodded in approval and responded with "Well, Dr. Miller, if I was needed to transfer to Glade Springs Elementary and become principal, I would do what was needed." I was internally processing to myself the idea that – yes, this would be a good option professionally for me to develop and change a school culture in need. Moreover, if the "boss-man" wanted me to be the principal at this school, he must have real faith in me and a deep level of confidence. Generally speaking, I enjoy following rules and want to please people in positions of authority to whom I am subordinate. We ended our conversation and I proceeded back to my campus attempting to process the dialogue with the superintendent. It wasn't your typical evaluation and I knew that "change was in the air"–most likely in the near future. I just wasn't sure if it involved me.

A few weeks had passed since my last meeting. In the middle of February I was again called to Dr. Miller's office. I intentionally decided to complete another task at the central office that day so I could provide Mrs. Needleman, our campus secretary, an adequate explanation of my next visit. Mrs. Needleman is very quick to pick up on subtleties that may offer her the real premise for my visit with the superintendent. I

thought it would be best at this time if faculty members knew nothing of my visit, and I didn't want anyone to start unsubstantiated rumors. I myself did not know at this time why I was being contacted to chat with the superintendent so quickly after my recent visit. I knew it must be a meeting to continue the discussion about my recent comments and that things may become interesting. I was both excited and a little nervous about the outcome.

When I walked into the superintendent's office he immediately greeted me and asked me to have a seat. I sat down and for a split second, a moment that seemed like an eternity, and contemplated how I was going to be involved in this change. Would Dr. Hernandez move to Glade Springs as the principal and I take her position at the middle school, or would I become the new principal at Glade Springs? These questions and more were churning through my head as Dr. Miller then asked me the million dollar question, "How does it feel to be the new principal at Glade Springs Elementary?"

My emotions ran the gamut from one of excitement to fear of disappointing my current staff after only three years as their principal. As Dr. Miller began to map out the plan, I began to realize that it impacted many buildings and people. This was not a simple transfer of principals that affected only two individuals. There were assistant principals involved at four other campuses and thus principals at the other campuses were impacted as well. Dr. Miller then brought out the infamous "Velcro chart" (as it became known a few months later in principal circles). With this Velcro chart he carefully placed each current principal in a position on the large piece of tag board. The chart consisted of each campus in the district and then all of the assistant principals and

principals' names were on smaller pieces of tag board and had Velcro fastened to the back for easy application and removal. I quickly realized that the reorganization of our district's administrators had been thoroughly discussed, planned, and designed with much thought. This was not the first time this "Velcro" board had been used. It was evident the key decision-making team in our district, the superintendent's cabinet, had used this board many times in plotting out scenarios for our district campuses and administrators.

We completed our discussion of the district's overall plan for the next school year. The transitioning of administrators involved eight elementary administrators who would either have a new team member transitioning to their campus or would be transferred to another campus themselves. This was quite a significant alteration of current assignments in our district. Our district had ten individuals working in the capacity of elementary administrators and eight of these individuals, including myself, would be impacted by the changes. Dr. Miller then strategically laid out the core essentials of what my charge would be at Glade Springs next year. Among these were reestablishing and building relationships with our African American community, supporting children of color on the state assessments, and bringing test scores to an adequate level that was more consistent with state standards.

After our conversation regarding the areas I needed to target for the next year we moved on to discuss the timeline of these decisions and when all the pieces of the puzzle would fall into place. Our district and community were still small enough to have a vigorous grapevine in place that could move most information to interested parties

within a few minutes. I knew that if this information were to be revealed to even one person outside of the immediate circle that soon gossip, hearsay, innuendo, and plain old fibs, would be circulating in rampant fashion. I was sworn to secrecy by the superintendent, and the only person I could inform would be my wife. The timeline to release the new assignments to all of the parties would be about six weeks, so maintaining the confidentiality of the information would be crucial. Dr. Miller said that he would inform the principal who would be taking my place at W.B. Luckett immediately following our meeting and from then on we should keep the information extremely confidential. I believe his exact remark was "Carl, let's take this information to our pillow at night." This was my cue to say absolutely nothing! I knew that if someone heard this information that it would be extremely easy to find the culprit who spread it. I would not let that happen to me!

The next step for our district superintendent was to have individual conferences with all individuals who would be affected by these transitions. These conferences took place over a two-week period, and once everyone was informed of their new assignment, plans were made for each individual to go to their respective campuses and provide the new information to staffs via personal contact. A central office administrator would facilitate the meetings held at each campus. These central office representatives included the superintendent, the deputy superintendent, and the personnel director. These faculty meetings were to be held simultaneously in order to prevent information from leaking out via email or cell phone before all staffs were informed. The district wanted to eliminate as much misinformation as possible.

The day of the district faculty meetings arrived and the recent transitions were to be shared simultaneously to all of the constituents. I am continually amazed at the speed in which information is spread in an organization. That morning at Luckett Elementary there seemed to be a certain stirring in the air. Staff members seemed to sense that something was going to happen at the afternoon faculty meeting. I had already been approached by a couple of faculty members inquiring about my moving to another campus. However, the inquiries were very off base in their predictions. This was especially difficult for me because I felt that I was not being truthful with my colleagues when I was directly asked about the intention of our faculty meeting that afternoon. I would skirt around the issue, and let them know that the meeting would contain some important information and that we would share at the meeting when everyone was together. It was a complex situation in which to be placed. I was experiencing mixed emotions about the whole transition process and felt very awkward when asked about the agenda for the afternoon meeting.

At 3:30 p.m. our faculty seemed to gather more quickly than was true when most meetings were held after school. There were no reminder announcements or personal reminders about the upcoming faculty meeting to teachers in the hallway. Everyone was in their seat and ready to be informed at 3:30 p.m. sharp. I felt a little queasy as I prepared myself in the office before I made my way to the learning center, where our faculty meetings were held. These were very peculiar circumstances for me. First, although I was excited about transitioning to a campus that could possibly benefit from my views on learning and administering, I also was despondent, and would miss the staff

immensely. I hadn't exactly raised my hand and asked to be the new principal at Glade Springs Elementary, yet neither had I rejected my superintendent in his belief and request that I would be a very good fit for the role. It was almost a surreal experience. The clock seemed to slow to a crawl as I contemplated and recalled my experiences up to this point at W.B. Luckett Elementary.

My Experience at Luckett Elementary

I arrived at Luckett Elementary as the quintessential "empty vessel." I was definitely a "tabula rasa" as coined by the early Greeks in regard to my administrative experience and knowledge base. Despite my own labeling of myself as a "blank slate," I suppose I must have possessed some characteristics that the committee and principal were looking for when they hired me. I was hired six years earlier at Luckett Elementary as the academic coordinator. This was a newly coined term for the assistant principal at the elementary schools in our district. The change in name was supposed to highlight an emphasis on the academic and curricular aspects of the job rather than the traditional organizational duties, discipline, and textbook keeping that is typically associated with the position. Although I had a good grasp of how students learned at the elementary level, I certainly wasn't steeped in the content areas since I came from a kinesiology background.

I suppose the manner in which I handled children and people took precedence over my lack of experience in instructional knowledge. Despite a horrid interview on my part, where I had a severe nosebleed moment before entering the interview, I still

managed to receive the committee's approval. In any regard, I was very pleased to land the academic coordinator's position at the campus.

After three years as the academic coordinator, my principal left to become the director of curriculum at our central office. This transition took place at the completion of the first semester in December. The district's plan was to name me as interim principal for the spring semester at Luckett Elementary. The spring semester arrived and so did I as the new interim principal at Luckett. I was fortunate in having followed and held onto the coattails of my former principal when I was in the academic coordinator's position. I was much more equipped to handle the pressures of the position than I had anticipated. My learning curve during that three-year period under my former principal's tutelage was tremendous and it was certainly paying dividends at this point.

The month of May arrived at Luckett Elementary, and there seemed to be a positive buzz in the air among our faculty. Students and teachers were busily engaged as dynamic participants in teaching and learning. Our Luckett community seemed pleased that students were safe, well-cared for, and being provided a top-notch education. We had just completed our state assessment (TAAS test) at the end of April, and we were to learn later that we had closed many gaps in our student assessments. I was greeted one morning, as I was walking down the fourth grade hallway early in May, by the superintendent and the deputy superintendent. The deputy superintendent, Dr. Betty Reaves, congratulated me on a job well-done the past few months and indicated that the title of interim would be removed and that I was now officially the principal of W.B. Luckett Elementary. Dr. Clyde Davis, the superintendent, congratulated me as

well and indicated how pleased he was to have me in this role as a permanent fixture for the next school year.

The Maturation Process

I viewed my tenure at Luckett Elementary as basically my growing-up time as a professional. I became a principal as a 27 year old and had just completed a year and a half of marriage. I was a novice in both the workforce, having completed four years of teaching, and in my married life as an adult and as a partner in a newly formed couple. The staff at Luckett really embraced me during my tenure there and were a catalyst in my learning and professional growth. I tried to soak up every conversation, celebration, conflict, or opportunity for growth so I could learn from it. Judy, my wife, and I also celebrated the birth of our first child while I was an administrator at Luckett Elementary, and the staff was especially supportive in many ways. We received more diapers, baby clothes, furniture and accessories than I could have ever imagined at our first baby shower. We continually turned down offers by the staff to baby sit our daughter. It was a time that was extremely meaningful to my wife and me as a family.

There were many caring individuals and conversations that took place that warmed my heart to the staff at Luckett. An interesting side note to the maturation experience during my first years as a principal was the age difference with many employees. In the realm of leadership, it is always beneficial if you have experiences that provide a sufficient knowledge base that will help you lead an organization or people. I believe that quality leadership can occur in many veins, and direct experience

is an area that is valued among the constituents you are leading. Although my past educational experience provided me a quality understanding of the unique needs of children from kindergarten to the sixth grade and the strategies that work with these students, I did not possess the content knowledge of a regular classroom teacher. Although age does not supplant the need for direct experience or background that is necessary for the position, it can support the leader in the people's perception that the leader has the necessary knowledge to lead the organization.

For example, I had the unique opportunity as the principal of this school to be "the boss" of a teacher that came to Luckett Elementary the same year I was born. This presents a unique opportunity in administration and in the leadership arena. There are most likely very few instances where the leader of an organization is 35 years younger than a staff member. This was one of the quandaries I faced as a new principal at this campus. From later conversations I learned that it was indeed difficult for Mrs. Stoneweiller, 35 years my elder, to accept me as the instructional leader of the campus, yet at my departure she was one of the most disappointed staff members. These leadership opportunities and more all made the process of growing-up as a leader more complex and at the same time more rewarding. I remained the principal at Luckett Elementary for the next two school years after my initial spring semester, and then I was appointed to the principalship of Glade Springs Elementary.

Back to Reality

I was startled back to reality when the phone on my desk suddenly rang. I immediately glanced at the office clock. I still had three minutes before our faculty meeting. In public schools three minutes is considered a very lengthy period of time. Three minutes remaining in a conference period or three minutes left of a lunch break is considered exhilarating by many educators. Three minutes is usually viewed as an eternity in the business of working in a school setting. The phone was still ringing and I realized I had been daydreaming of my past experiences at Luckett Elementary. I quickly picked up the principal's private line, it was the only line that rang directly into my office, and I heard the voice on the other end of the line say "Are you ready?" It was my wife providing one last word of reassurance before the moment of truth – the faculty meeting. We exchanged a few thoughts with each other and I informed her that I was feeling a little nauseated at the moment, accompanied with a surplus of butterflies.

Two minutes and fifty-nine seconds, two minutes and fifty-eight seconds...the clock continued to slowly tick away. I worked so hard the last six years at Luckett attempting to make teachers feel good about their school and their profession that I was concerned that I was letting them down by transitioning to another campus. There are many references to personal mission statements that guide a leader or administrator's thinking. I believe that my personal mission statement would simply state something of this order, "Be good to people." That would mean students, colleagues, administrators, and parents. I just don't understand teachers that aren't excited about providing students an opportunity to learn in all facets of life. As an administrator I always wanted teachers

to wake up in the morning and know they are going to have their principal's complete support to make their work experience a fantastic one. When members of an organization feel good about their jobs, feel a sense of pride in their organization, and know they are trusted and supported by their leaders, they will always produce better results. My assistant principal and I worked feverishly to make sure all students, teachers, and parents, were treated with respect and valued. At the moment I was very apprehensive that the work we had accomplished would no longer be carried on and that Carl, the person, would no longer be valued. After years of making great attempts to please people, I was concerned that I was now deceiving them. It was an awkward moment, and one that I will remember for a lifetime. The clock meticulously counted down…one minute and fifty-nine seconds, one minute and fifty eight seconds.

I wasn't quite sure how to approach this one. I was of course referring to the faculty meeting that was waiting for my arrival. If I was too over-joyous, or too excited, then I certainly would hurt the feelings of many of my colleagues and send the message that "Whew, I can finally get out of this place." That was clearly the opposite of how I felt. The building of our teachers' self-esteem and school's reputation within the community was a key goal of our last six years and could all be washed away if I appeared exultant or pleased with my departure. The next ten minutes, in my opinion, would be very critical in the future success of my present campus and in making a successful transition to a new school. It would also affect the way I would be remembered as a leader of this school.

Although I certainly experienced excitement and anticipation of my new role as principal of Glade Springs Elementary over the past six weeks, the reality of the moment had begun to set in only in the last 24 hours, and I felt great remorse for vacating my current campus. I felt that I indeed was experiencing a two-edged sword in terms of having to make a decision. I could have possibly expressed my intent to the superintendent that I wanted to remain as the principal of Luckett, and he possibly would have granted me that wish. On the other hand, I knew that he would be pleased with my decision to make the transition. This decision, according to our district's top administrators, would be best for the district and thus use my talents to help children. These were two criteria that I strongly supported and wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to make a difference. Most educators would display a great deal of satisfaction knowing they have a chance to make a positive impact to students and a campus. With this in mind, I knew it was a tough decision, but making the transition was the right thing to do.

I proceeded to walk out of my office and make my way to the learning center, where our faculty meeting would be held. I nearly bumped into the glass door of the office on my way out. I nonchalantly pretended that I had forgotten something in my office to see if anyone had witnessed my clumsiness. The coast was clear, and for the moment I was off the hook. The office was empty. It appeared the rest of the school also was vacated due to the information that was about to be shared. I walked down the hallway and my stomach was now touching the bottom of my tonsils. Linda Evans, the director of curriculum and instruction for our district, and also my former teammate and

my predecessor at Luckett, met me in the hallway and we proceeded together to the site of our faculty meeting.

Linda had convinced the central office that she would be the best choice to represent the district administrators at Luckett during our transition faculty meetings that were occurring at each elementary school across the district. In the discussions I had with Linda we both thought this would be best since having her representing the central office would "keep it in the family." She was the key catalyst for change at Luckett and knew how emotionally attached we both were to the campus. She also knew that this would be a difficult time for me. She had been through a similar situation at the campus three years earlier when I transitioned to the principalship. I was relieved that she would be next to me as we announced the news to the faculty.

The Time Is Now

We walked into the room known as the learning center and the crowd quickly settled into place and a hush fell over the entire room. I was thinking to myself that I wish all faculty meetings were this conducive to a presentation. Usually it takes a few minutes, or clever signals, to have the teachers quiet and focused on the agenda of the meeting.

I typically open up an instructional meeting or informational faculty meeting with a witty cartoon, story of the day, or humorous incident. However, it was obvious that the participants involved in this meeting were not interested in such an icebreaker or introduction. For a brief moment, I felt encouragement looking out over the audience at

the faculty. After all, these were all people I felt a great deal of connection to and it was reassuring to realize that although this was indeed big news, these were still the same folks I had grown to trust, respect, and care for as their administrator and colleague.

I wasn't sure of the range of emotions I would experience during the meeting, but during the moments before, I continually told myself "don't cry." I'm not sure if past gender stereotyping caused me to feel this way, or if showing emotion would convince our teachers that I was being dragged into this by the superintendent and central office and that really I didn't want to change campuses. It was actually a decision that I could have backed away from, but I didn't believe it was the right thing to do. I knew the latter (that I was dragged into the decision) would perhaps make my life easier during the upcoming month and possibly my future with Luckett Elementary teachers, but I also knew that playing the victim's role would not be the best decision for the district. It may get me out of hot water for the moment, but would only lead to an inferno later.

I was really distressed on two accounts. I didn't know what feelings I was going to experience and that caused me concern, and I wanted to represent the superintendent and district in good terms. However, I also wanted the staff to realize that I truly adored the campus and teachers I had worked with over the last six years. It was a difficult process for a young administrator to work through.

All eyes peered directly to the front of the room as Linda Evans began to speak. She first acknowledged that there were many rumors traveling rampant through the district at this time and that we would hopefully clarify and clear up a few of those

reports at our meeting today. As she continued, I was in deep concentration staring at the top of the teachers' heads in the back row. I had remembered reading somewhere that if you are experiencing a case of nerves while you are speaking in public a good strategy is to focus on the hairline of the audience so that you avoid their gaze. Making eye contact seems to circumvent the speaker's thoughts on many occasions. I was focused on the tops of teachers' heads more to prevent a sudden outburst of tears. I knew that my tear ducts were in jeopardy if I made eye contact with certain individuals on our staff. Linda began to articulate the work that had been accomplished at Luckett Elementary the last six years and how the campus was now at a place where they could continue this work under different leadership. She also explained how the strengths that I possessed would be very valuable at another campus and would benefit kids in our district. She articulated some of the changes that were happening around the district in administrative circles and highlighted how the teachers on this campus have been instrumental in the success of my development and that they should be extremely proud. I knew that my opportunity to speak was on the horizon and I felt the blood rush to my neck.

My voice came much easier than I had anticipated as I began a dialogue with our staff. I first thanked them for helping me grow as an administrator and person during my tenure at Luckett. It was about at this time that my demeanor and the tone of my voice started to change. I remember glancing at the blue chairs the teachers were seated in and found my self staring at the checkered padding that rested on the back of the chair to provide comfort. I also realized at this moment that while I was focusing on the chairs

that I was still talking to the staff. I would be intrigued to discover what I might have said during those few minutes I stared intently at the padding on the chairs. As awareness returned to my thinking, I then began to stare at a few individuals that were seated on my left hand side of the room. I don't believe I ever glanced to the right side of the room, or if I did, the moment did not embed itself into my long-term memory. It was at this point that I had the very response that I was attempting to avoid… tears.

I was suddenly overcome with emotion and was choking through the words as they were escaping from my vocal chords. I believe this emotional outpouring came from the same notion that we all (educators) hope to convey to our teachers and children in education. That the relationships formed are the catalyst for continued learning and improvement! I find it rare to learn about a student who did not have a special bond with a favorite teacher. I would also find it unusual if this student did not make significant gains in learning because of this teacher. These relationships that I built with the teachers at Luckett Elementary were overriding my enthusiasm for the challenge of a new position. I now realize that my development as a person, father, administrator, and professional on this campus was of astronomical proportions. I gained so much from my interactions with the staff over the last six years! As the frontal lobe of my brain started to gain back control from its neighbor, the amygdala, my speech pattern was again becoming comprehensible. I regained my composure, posture, and breathing rate and picked up the oration where I had left off.

Through tears, hugs, good-byes, and farewells, the faculty meeting achieved closure. I am certain that amidst these acknowledgements that there were individuals that were not touched by my words, actions, or thoughts that day. I'm sure various faculty members were excited about a new start and leadership for the Luckett campus. As is the case with many organizations, new leadership is many times refreshing, invigorating, and necessary for positive growth to occur. I adhere to this belief as well, that leadership in organizations needs to change every five to seven years for the organization to expand its horizons and reach new heights. I was very moved by the emotions demonstrated by the Luckett faculty at my announcement. However, I was certain the faculty did not support the decision for my transition. As I was walking out the door, I overheard many small group dialogues regarding the plan of action teachers were going to take to have this decision reversed. It was an interesting dilemma to be placed in the middle of. Again, I wanted our teachers to support the change in administration, yet I also wanted them to know how much they meant to me on a personal basis. If I had only known the multitude of conflict that would occur in the next month, I would have perhaps tried to handle my emotions differently.

I now realize the power in dominant norms and cultural values that an organization possesses. In hindsight, I would have made a much more gallant effort at restraining my emotions during our faculty meeting. Perhaps this would have made the transition easier for our central office or superintendent. I am torn between the logistics of pure administrative theory, or practiced theory, that quality decisions are made

without emotion. I believe that if you lose the ability to be emotional as a leader, than you lose your ability to lead.

The complexities of each social context only add to this dilemma. Luckett Elementary has its own unique fingerprint among the schools in our community and a strong culture permeates its walls. This culture is one that feels that it has played second fiddle to other elementary campuses and that it never receives its share of acknowledgment among key community leaders, school boards, or central office staff. Although this belief is inherent in only a quarter of its staff members, it is a belief that is perpetuated by these staff members who are seasoned teachers and have the power base at the campus. These same teachers are also masterful in their craft, and are extremely supportive of the development of the whole child. Emotions run rampant with these key stakeholders, and yet those emotions and care are what make them excellent teachers. Much like the teachers who were my colleagues, I also exposed my passions and sentiments during the course of our faculty meeting. In reflecting on the overt demonstration of emotion, I ponder if that impacted various members of the staff to dissent and vocalize their discontent. However, after much thought in this regard, I feel that these individuals would have made the same commitment to overturn the decision if I had remained stoic and untainted with feelings. I continually contemplate if the actions at the end of the faculty meeting would be any different if I had controlled my emotions. I believe to remove emotion from the discourse is denying a critical aspect of servitude and leadership.

Switching Offices and Making a Change

The month of May always moves at breathtaking speed for public school employees and this May was certainly not an exception. I not only was changing campuses, but I was being paired with a new administrative partner as my assistant principal. This time frame poses many new challenges in terms of finding time to develop a new relationship. This new partnership will require me to assess the strengths of my new colleague and discover areas in which she may need support. My new partner and I had been corresponding a little over the past three weeks. She was informed of the transition a couple of weeks after I had met with the Superintendent. It was a lengthy time period for us to keep this information confidential. Now that the faculty meetings on all the campuses were complete and changes had been announced, we were eager to check out our new campus.

Helen, my new teammate and academic coordinator, and I were anxious to have the opportunity to meet our new staff at Glade Springs Elementary. From information I had gathered from informal conversations around the community, and from the Superintendent, Dr. Miller, the Glade Springs staff was extremely excited that we were going to become the new leadership team at the campus. Dr. Miller had wanted to provide the information to Glade Springs first hand so he was the central office representative who personally delivered the information to the Glade Springs staff during the district's faculty meetings. I was pleased that my supervisor showed excitement regarding the reactions of the Glade Springs staff. I knew he would have his hands full handling the Luckett staff and their concerns about the new changes.

Not only was the Glade Springs staff acquiring a new administrative team, but the administrative team at Luckett was going to be new as well. My former academic coordinator was placed at another elementary campus in town. With great anticipation we were anxiously awaiting Dr. Miller's "green light" to visit our new campus. We decided to visit the campus on a Wednesday, and with approximately two weeks remaining until school was out, we knew it was going to be a quick trip. Helen and I arrived in the Glade Springs office and were greeted by the current principal. John Giddings was completing his 38th year in public education as a coach, and elementary school principal. This was his 27th year as an elementary principal and he was considered very successful by the community. He had recently completed his third year at Glade Springs and was placed at this campus to alleviate issues with a local neighborhood that was primarily composed of economically disadvantaged families. This was a neighborhood that experienced generational poverty. John and I exchanged pleasantries, and we proceeded with Helen Webb, my new assistant principal, to meet and greet the office staff. Introductions were made and we were presented with a few welcoming gifts and tokens of appreciation. It was an exciting time for me.

I was very eager to begin the new school year and start working on the change process. I was greatly relieved at the welcome the staff provided Helen and me. Only seven years earlier I was a physical education teacher at this campus, and I was unsure of the welcome I would receive due to my lack of direct classroom experience. The small town atmosphere of our community was an asset for me in this regard. We were still a relatively small district with five elementary schools, and many teachers had

personal or professional links with other campuses and their personnel. This provided

teachers a direct line of communication with friends and neighbors to "test the waters"

and see what the staff at Luckett Elementary really thought of me.

I suppose it was due to their input regarding my administrative skills that the

Glade Spring teachers accepted me in this position in such a quick fashion. I pondered

again the experience I had with Mrs. Stoneweiller, the teacher at Luckett who was 35

years my senior, and wondered if I would have to prove I was worth my salt to the

experienced teachers on our new campus. I was delighted that the teachers accepted me

with open arms despite my lack of direct classroom experience. This was the last time I

deliberated about my deficiency in direct classroom experience. The experience of

working with elementary children and the interpersonal skills I possessed superceded the

need to have taught in a grade-level classroom. The willingness to learn, conflict

resolution skills, and vision needed by a leader were more valued than past experiences

in the classroom. This was an important mental hurdle for me to move past, and this

transition to a new campus was the catalyst in removing this hurdle.

This was a great day for us to meet the staff at Glade Springs. There seemed to

be a positive buzz in the air as we made our rounds to meet and greet staff members. Of

course, any new situation does not come without its challenges. I had a third grade

teacher inform me after we were introduced that I didn't hire her at Luckett Elementary,

and she guessed I was stuck with her now. In my opinion, it was not a typical opening

statement for greeting your new supervisor for the first time. Again, I am certain that

staff members had their reservations about our arrival, yet the welcome we received was certainly encouraging.

During the next week Helen and I were invited by the office staff, including the secretary, attendance clerk, and counselor to have dinner together. I thought this was a very generous offer and I was extremely appreciative that they would make this effort to make Helen and I feel a part of the Glade Springs family. Unfortunately, I was the source of my next dilemma. The evening arrived that I was scheduled to have dinner with our new office staff. Meanwhile, I was busy running errands with my family. We arrived home with our kids and checked the answering machine as we typically do. It was then that I heard the message that caused me ulcers. I pushed the play button on the machine and this is what I heard Helen say, "Carl, this is Helen. We are here at the restaurant and its 6:45 p.m. We were just wondering if you were going to make it." After my heart sank, then I heard the second message, "Hey, its 7:20 and we were just finishing up and wanted to check on you. Come on out if you get this message in the next 30 minutes."

I was now utterly sick to my stomach. Not only did I completely forget about the meeting, but this was my first opportunity to meet the office staff in my new capacity as their principal, and I didn't show up for the meeting. I thought sarcastically to myself, "Wow, what a great role model you are for the office staff. They are really going to believe you now when you schedule a meeting, or want people to be there on time." I did call each office member and apologize for my indiscretion. I spent the next several days metaphorically beating myself up over this blunder until I finally came to peace

with the fact that everyone makes mistakes, including the new principal at Glade

Springs.

Summer finally arrived and provided me more down time to make the transition.

Although our teachers at Luckett were provoked by the recent transfers, the temptation

of leaving the stress behind them was too great, and most departed for the summer. I'm

sure the thought of not being at school provided a nice reprieve from the chaos that had

transpired over the last month. After most of the dust had settled and our staff seemed to

accept the changes, I got busy with the work of trying to wrap up the end of school

paperwork that arrives with the month of June. Dr. Miller and the other principals who

were making a transition to a new campus or position agreed that June 10th would be the

day that we coordinate our moves. On this day all of the administrators involved in the

changes would officially move to their new campuses.

I had not realized until I had tidied up the typical end-of-year procedures how

difficult it was to prepare an office for a new administrator to occupy. I made sure old

files were thrown out, stored, or reformatted to make it easier for the new principal who

was taking my place. The principal succeeding me was from another campus in our

district and a colleague with whom I had worked for the past three years. Susan Tucker

was also very comfortable in her past position and was facing many of the same

challenges shifting to a new campus as I was. This was the first sweeping change in

principalships in our district involving so many individuals. Changes had taken place in

the past, replacing a retiring principal or another who was leaving the district, perhaps

on two or more campuses, but none involved the rotation of so many current principals to new campuses.

I thoroughly cleaned out the many artifacts principals gather in their tenure on a campus. The principal's office can indeed become a storage unit for a variety of materials and items on a campus. Old tennis shoes for when it is raining at parent pick-up (you don't want to mess up your dress shoes), pieces of playground equipment that needed repair, a teacher's chair with a cut in the seat and a note wanting a new one, treasure boxes with toys used for happy visits and for children of irritated parents during conferences, plus band-aids, toolboxes, and a various assortment of books, periodicals, journals, and the infamous binders that need to be stored or boxed. Boxing and cleaning up the evidence of my tenure proved to be quite a task. I wasn't certain of items I should leave for my successor, or what items she would find of value. I knew that all administrators had their own way of conducting business, and items that I felt were of most importance, may not be items she would consider valuable.

With this in mind, I left behind the materials that were mandated by the district and by the state. I had spoken with my successor on a few occasions and attempted to provide her with some insight to the inner workings of the campus. This can be a delicate matter. You don't want to discolor a picture for a person that is new to a campus. Challenges, issues, and conflicts that I may have had with certain staff members may very well not be a challenge to the new principal. Campus areas of concern may not be areas of concern for my replacement. This poses a unique predicament. How much information is too much information when you are succeeded

in a leadership position? You do want to provide support for your replacement, yet you do not want to taint their perception of the organization or staff members within the organization.

I knew that in my new position at Glade Springs that I did not want peripheral information to cloud my thinking. Insight into the organization and personnel is helpful but you also want to have the opportunity to shape the vision and mission of the campus without preconceived notions. The principal I was replacing and the principal succeeding me at Luckett Elementary were both colleagues of mine. As colleagues, we were comfortable with sharing information regarding our staffs with each other and also providing our own embellishment of certain situations. This presented a great dilemma among us as we contemplated how much information is valuable to the transitioning principal and what information is irrelevant. With these thoughts swirling through my head I began to write my successor a welcome note. The note is included in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1.–Note to my Successor

Welcome Susan!

Hopefully you will find things left in a facade of organization. I thought I would leave you a few tips on finding important documents. I have thoroughly cleaned out antiquated files and moved them to a bigger and better place.

If you are facing the computer (or where the computer goes) in the far right wood filing cabinet on the bottom you will find **02-03 PDAS appraisals, Campus and District plans, Teacher Self-Report forms, End of year check-out sheets** etc. You may want to browse through the labels on the folders.

Above the computer in the cabinet will be the current **Luckett budget items** in a folder. Also, there you will see a folder with **ITBS scores, employee recommendations 02-03,** and a copy of the **01-02 teacher handbook** for your perusal.

On the Luckett **server** we have created a folder with your name on it. Liz Mesher (from technology) or Marsha can help you access the folder. It contains key documents or information regarding handbooks, rosters, duties, and other important information you may need.

In the **gray storage cabinet** are old **videos, campus plans, banners** and old appraisals in a maroon file box.

I'll bring my keys to you on Monday of next week 6/10/02. File cabinet keys are on the key ring. I also have outside storage keys I will get to you.

I did leave you one junky file drawer (2nd from top) in the file cabinet. These are teacher folders that I rarely use but they may have confidential information or old appraisals in them. Usually I keep the PDAS appraisals together for the year instead of separately filing them.

When I get in touch with Deb (from cingular wireless) I'll send her over to Luckett. You'll love the staff! Have a great year.

Carl D.

I carefully folded the letter and placed it neatly inside an envelope with Susan's name on the front. I then sealed the envelope and placed it in an empty upper cabinet in the credenza above my computer.

My desk was cleaned and the office was very neat and tidy. I made a very conscious effort to make sure the office was in the same shape I would want my new office to be in before I took occupancy. I left Susan the necessary information and documents that are needed such as PDAS appraisals, teacher files, and other important personnel files. Other than the mandated documents, I really didn't believe other files

would be of use to her. I realize that each principal has his or her own different and

unique filing system and way of categorizing the overwhelming amounts of information

that comes across the desk. This includes electronic communications, in-box mail,

notes, phone calls, and other ancillary items. My main objective was to provide a

sanitized, neat area for her to occupy and take up residence. Thus, I really culled down

the information to the basic personnel documents that would transfer to the next year. I

really feel that the principal would need to shape and form her own opinions and vision

regarding the school and its personnel. Luckett Elementary was a complex campus, and

I wasn't sure how many of these complexities I should attempt to reveal.

CHAPTER V

BECOMING THE PRINCIPAL OF ANOTHER SCHOOL

My New Pad

June 17th arrived, and I proceeded to move my 17 boxes over to my new school, Glade Springs Elementary. After taking great care to have my former office ready for its new occupant, I was absolutely flabbergasted that the office I was now going to inhabit was completely in disarray. John Giddings had more files, boxes, artifacts and muddle than I had ever seen an administrator possess. And this was after he had previously moved from his former campus and had the opportunity to clean and purge after 25 years as principal there. I was befuddled as to how one person could assemble so much clutter in only three years. John helped me move a few items in and sort through a couple of my boxes. He took great care to debrief me on a few challenging personnel issues and also parental disputes of which I might need to be made aware. John was a successful principal in our community and maintained a great reputation among the teachers and community members. I listened closely to any nuggets of wisdom he had to offer me on the children, parents, and teachers at Glade Springs. In fact, John and I had a relationship that I would wager not many principals have had with one of their colleagues. John was my principal when I attended his former campus during my elementary years. He had the unusual distinction of being my colleague and my former principal. This was certainly a tribute to his longevity in an upper middle class community that valued education. Despite our relationship on many levels, I was still shocked at the surplus of stuff he kept.

As John and I moved the office furniture around, I graciously thanked him for all of his assistance. It was then that I popped this seemingly innocent question, "So what do you plan to do with the rest of your summer?" I had no idea that his response to this question would cause me great heartburn over the course of the next two weeks. He replied, "Well, I've still got ten days to finish out my contract here at Glade Springs." I knew after visiting with our personnel director and the superintendent that John was free to go anytime he wanted once the month of June arrived. After accruing over a 150 days of sick leave he had certainly earned the right after 38 years to go out on his own terms. The struggle I had with this information stemmed from the awkward position this placed me in for the next two weeks. Here I was in his office redecorating, reorganizing, throwing away items that may have been important to him, and adjusting all of the furniture.

John would sit in the front office and visit with the office staff while my new administrative partner and I altered many of the items in the office and around the school. We were busily changing procedures, routines, and schedules that impacted the school. My new assistant principal was incredibly quick at organizing, decorating, and creating. For ten work days we were taking things apart that he helped create or supported. This caused me a great deal of discomfort. I didn't want to intrude on his turf or hurt his feelings by removing his previous work, yet I also did not have the luxury of postponing this summer cleaning until he officially left for the summer. I also realize that Susan was doing the same at my former campus. The difference was that I was not there to witness the deconstruction. I contemplated contacting the

superintendent, Dr. Miller, to possibly encourage John's departure, yet I also deeply felt

that he had earned the privilege to be on our campus the last ten days of his career. I did

not make the phone call but did decide to go on with the work I needed to accomplish

and at the same time honor John's wishes to stay on the campus. I also deeply admired

his work ethic for wanting to report to work until his contract had officially expired.

After I conducted internal negotiations with myself, I came to grips with my decision. I

would try to make his last few days enjoyable, without adding my stress as a concern of

his. I am still reminded of Mr. John Giddings and his last nugget of wisdom he offered

me that summer, "You'll know when its time to retire…You'll just know."

Our last contract day finally arrived in late June and the preparations we needed

to make at our new campus had only begun. Helen and I mapped out our plan of attack

for the summer and set off on our separate ways to take a breather. Elementary

principals in our district were on an eleven month contract or employed for 220 days.

Officially we didn't have to report back until July 24th. We made an unofficial

agreement that we would at least stay away from the office for two weeks and try to get

some much needed rest. Although we both knew the temptation would be too great to

resist not coming back to the office to finish unpacking.

I did manage to stay away from the office for a few days during my break and

catch up on some much needed family time. Our youngest daughter was now six

months old and we were experiencing quite a few nocturnal issues with both of our

children. In my early adult years before we had children I never anticipated that waking

up only twice a night would be considered a good night's sleep. The summer seemed to quicken its pace as Independence Day passed, and I knew that a challenging, yet exhilarating year was right around the corner.

I made my way to the new office a few times in the next two weeks attempting to have my office set up and decorated for the new school year. I was never one to rely heavily on the need to decorate, yet it seemed very important to many teachers that the principal's office was somewhat fashionable and that it gave the impression that the person occupying the office was going to stay for awhile and call it home. Luckily, I frequently called on my significant other to help me place memorabilia, pictures, and the decorative items around the office and on my bookshelf. Apparently, you should place the items on your book shelf in groups of three or five. This was new information for me, so I am glad Judy assisted with this endeavor. Up to this point, my entire educational career has been at the elementary ranks, and elementary teachers seem to have a knack for decorating. I definitely wanted to make sure I made a good impression and that my new office was aesthetically pleasing.

Helen and I arrived at work ready to conquer the day's challenges. The summer was now officially over, my predecessor, Mr. Giddings, was enjoying a cold beverage at a fishing hole somewhere, and here we were ready to start another school year. The end of July usually means that as an administrator that you have one more week to complete any planning or paperwork before the masses start arriving in droves. The first to gather are the teachers who start to appear in the building as the month of August draws near. One by one, day by day, the tempo builds to a crescendo until all staff members have

made their first appearance in the office. The teachers, rested from the summer break, are anxiously waiting to see what changes have taken place, what new families have enrolled, and if there are any last-minute resignations from other staff members. One of my favorite times as a principal is seeing a teacher for the first time since summer break. It is always fun to catch up on their families and what they did to entertain themselves over the course of the summer. Of course, there is also the realization that your quiet time to work and accomplish tasks quickly is now over.

The first week of August is a time when all administrators grow accustomed to this remark, "I got a quick question for you." I do my best to give a reply with a reassuring comment that (whatever the answer to the question may be) we will work it out and take care of the concern. I always take time to pay careful attention to these relationships, because I believe that building relationships is what being a leader is all about. Establishing a community of openness and respect will take you extremely far in a people business such as teaching.

The Teachers Arrive

Now that we were in our "official" capacity as the administrative team at Glade Springs, Helen and I really began to clean house. It was early August and the school was really starting to surge with energy. One of the peculiar items I had noticed earlier was that there were many bulletin boards, displays, or picture walls that were left over from the administrator before Mr. Giddings. These displays just seemed frozen in time from three years ago. They were not touched, removed or added to in the last three

years. Helen made quick work of the "teacher of the year" display board in the conference room. Pictures of the Glade Springs teacher of the year were hanging on the wall in the conference room. These pictures suddenly stopped three years ago as well. I pondered the true meaning behind these artifacts and the discontinuation of these projects.

Under my desk, which was the largest piece of furniture I can ever remember seeing in any office, was a red button. This button was put in around 1997 (two years before John Giddings) to monitor parents that were being abusive, disrespectful, or who brought allegations against the former principal and the school. The principal, Gary Nolan, would simply push the button and a video camera would start filming the interaction with the parent and the principal. I later learned that this was a legal practice if a notice was posted on the door to the office and school that stated video surveillance was in operation. In the upper corner of the principals office was a video camera hanging from the ceiling. On the credenza below the camera was a VCR system with a place for multiple tapes. Once the red button was pushed these tapes would start filming the conversation taking place. Apparently, the former principal's lawyer recommended the video camera as a way to avoid a lawsuit with a few families and angry parents who were bringing forth harassment claims.

My predecessor never used the red button or video recorder in his three year tenure as principal from 1999 to 2002. He mentioned that it never really worked anyway, and something was always going wrong with it. I wondered why in the world it was still sitting on the desk, if it didn't work. Apparently, it was much like the "teacher

of the year" wall that seemed frozen during time. I contemplated, as an arm-chair psychologist, what this all meant. Can an organization be growing as a system when the all the concrete indicators appear petrified?

I think the school secretary and attendance clerk were a little startled when I then made the decision to erase many of these memories and start with a blank slate. I reached under my new desk, grabbed the red button with both hands and ripped the screws, casing, and wire out from the bottom of the desk. I then followed the wire to where it was inserted into the wall and yanked the wire as hard as I could until about six more feet came out of the plug. I knew my charge at Glade Springs was to increase parental relations with many members of the same community that this camera was set up to monitor. I knew that without trusting parents, teachers, and students, we could not possibly build a community based on openness and respect. This respect is linked to building successful relationships with all families and children by providing academic excellence and establishing social justice for all students. The video camera and taping system had to go!

I removed the video cassette recorder from the credenza and then contemplated how I could remove the last "Big Brother" reminder that was placed in the corner of my office. I could not help but link this camera to the classic George Orwell novel, *1984*, and the electronic eye that is placed in every home and office in the book. I had just unpacked one of my talent show boxes, which contained quite a few costume items that I used to dress up and entertain the kids at different times during the year and at our annual talent show, and noticed an unusually large black felt cowboy hat. I really didn't

have a good place to store this hat, so the option that immediately caught my attention

was to use the camera as a hat rack. I threw the black felt hat up toward the camera a

few times and then finally, after a lucky toss, the hat stayed on the camera and my

problem was solved. The last evidence and reminder of the principal's surveillance

system was no more.

"Man, that's a big desk" said one of my central office colleagues as they came

over to see how I was progressing. "When did you get that?" he added.

"Actually, it was here when Mr. Giddings was here," I responded.

"I guess I just never knew because there was so much furniture jammed in here,"

my cohort exclaimed.

I really wasn't sure what to do with this desk, or where to put it. It was beautiful

walnut colored wood that obviously was built to withstand many years of educational

discussions and decisions. I heard that it was a former superintendent's desk from ten

years ago and that the principal at that time wanted it when the superintendent purchased

a new one. Although the desk was a massive piece and very functional, I knew that it

portrayed an image I wanted to erase. That image was one of a figurehead staying

behind a desk and shouting directives to his or her subordinates from across a five-foot

wood structure.

One of the characteristics I wanted to model to our campus and parents was one

of servitude. To serve individuals you must have dialogue at the same level and

establish trust. Sitting behind a barrier or desk, both metaphorically and physically, does

not send a message of collegiality, but a message of one-way communication. I wanted

our staff to enable others to be participants with us in their child's education. I needed

to send this signal from the principal's office before I could expect this of our staff.

Sitting across a large desk, visiting with teachers and parents, would not adequately

model this message. I asked our secretary for a furniture catalog earlier that summer and

placed an order for a round table with four chairs. Shared leadership would be much

more prevalent with the right tools (in this case a round table).

As the pace quickened at Glade Springs and teachers eagerly sneaked a peek at

their new administrators, I felt like I was in a fish bowl. Everyone waits patiently to get

to the front of the line to view the newest member of the organization. I know that

principals have the same needs for affirmation when a new superintendent is hired. As

employees of organizations, we anxiously wait our turn to "size up the new guy" and

make our own judgments about his ability. After meeting with many teachers on an

informal and formal basis, I had to switch gears and start planning our staff retreat and

staff development for the start of school.

Staff Development

Our school district typically applies for a waiver to receive ten days of staff

development per school year. Three or four of those days fall in August before the start

of school. I knew this year it would be of the utmost importance to conduct our

professional development in a manner that was energizing, intriguing, and provided

learning opportunities for all. I also knew that it was critical to acknowledge the past

successes of the organization and then develop ways for us to continue our success and

further improve our areas of need. It was complex equation for me as the new

instructional leader. I must embrace the past, honor the present, and plan for the future.

I had thought about our opening day retreat for many months now and had the idea

basically planned out in my head. We needed to schedule an off-campus retreat to a site

that would be conducive to team building, framing our campus vision, and discussing

what matters most to us as a learning system.

One of the enormous benefits of traveling away from campus for an opening day

retreat is the physical space created between the site of the retreat and the schoolhouse.

It is the nature of our profession to be in a rush-hour mode during the month of August.

A few days before the start of school teachers receive class rosters, procedural

information, master schedules including duty and lunch times, background on students

that will be in their classroom, and other information pertinent to the start of school. It is

human nature for teachers and administrators to be thinking about the many

responsibilities they have in the classroom and their "to do" list that needs to be

completed before the start of school. I have found that when you conduct professional

development or a retreat on your campus teachers have a much more difficult time

removing themselves and their thoughts from the many responsibilities that they have in

their classrooms. I suppose it has much to do with proximity.

When the staff are only footsteps away from their classrooms in the cafeteria or

library for staff development, they have a hard time disconnecting from the many tasks

that need to be accomplished in those classrooms. When you provide a setting that is

somewhat aesthetically pleasing or unique, they automatically become more engaged in

the day's activities. We decided to travel to a lodge and resort that caters receptions, conducts weddings at an outdoor chapel, and is located in a heavily wooded area that is secluded from the rest of the community. The retreat site was only ten minutes away from our school, and it provided the ambience we were looking for to enhance the illusion that we were many miles away in an isolated forest.

Typically retreats are a time for dialoguing with your colleagues regarding big picture items such as goals of the organization, brainstorming ways to provide all students significant opportunities for success and participation, and building meaningful professional relationships with one another. A teacher has a much better chance for dialogue with a peer regarding instructional strategies if they have a personal connection with that colleague. Embedding the goals and focus of the organization into a retreat type setting greatly enhances the ability to create a community of difference that impacts all children during the course of the year. Our lodge provided the perfect setting to build our new community.

In determining the focus of our opening day retreat I knew it was profoundly important to recognize the past successes of the organization and honor those triumphs. One of the ways I planned to accomplish this was through a skit right after lunch that focused on the district's need to distinguish between the terms accommodation and modification. These were terms that had been previously thought to be interchangeable and our district was attempting to clarify the difference in these terms for children that were receiving changes in instruction due to programmatic placement in special education. Many regular education students were receiving what we called "M2"

modifications on their report cards. This was actually was a practice that was not in congruence with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills that each grade level was required to honor. An M2 modification meant the student was receiving instruction that was not on grade level in content. Our district was eliminating this concept to make sure we met the content expectations in each grade level for regular education students. I decided to bring back Mr. Giddings, the principal whom I replaced at Glade Springs, to help me with a skit depicting a funeral for M2. Mr. Giddings was known for his humor, and I thought it would be a special treat for the staff to secretly plan a surprise visit by Mr. Giddings dressed as a pastor for our imaginary funeral. Mr. Giddings walked out of the woods from behind a building that was used for our meeting place dressed in pastoral black and wearing the wardrobe of a clergyman. He stepped up to the outdoor chapel and proceeded to read these words, "We are gathered here today, to honor one of our fallen soldiers of education, M2. He was a brave soul, and provided our teachers the opportunity to give grades to children that they really didn't receive."

We then had John Giddings bring out a cardboard cut-out of a giant M2 and proceed with the service. It was a playful skit that hopefully shared the importance of providing children and parents a real picture of how their child was progressing academically. The M2 designation seemed to provide a facade to the parent, hiding the child's real academic abilities, and how they were progressing on the state curriculum. The real importance for me as an administrator, however, was providing the staff a connection to their past. Having my predecessor there demonstrated to the staff that we honored the work that had been done at the campus even as we are moving forward in

our learning. This was a critical component in the change process. Although I knew my

charge was to change many of the dynamics on this campus and to create true systemic

change, we first had to embrace where we had been. I needed to validate the

accomplishments of the staff before we began our new journey. Thus, the title of our

retreat that we placed on all of the correspondence and on the PowerPoint presentation

that day read, "Glade Springs Elementary – New beginnings… A rich history."

We made great efforts that day at our retreat to set the stage such that all matters

related to Glade Springs Elementary would be based on creating a learning community

that honors differences and celebrates students as persons and learners. I was fortunate

that my transition as principal corresponded with upper level administrative changes in

our district. Dr. Miller was new to the superintendency and there were many positive

changes that were being implemented in relation to student learning and shared

commitment among principals and teachers. This proved to be an excellent time to

inherent the instructional reins at a new campus. Not only were we implementing deep

change in the culture of our organization at Glade Springs, the district was involved in a

similar process on a grander scale. The district's simultaneous efforts proved to be a

positive force behind our goal to bring about reform at Glade Springs.

Our retreat focus that day centered around the mantra that discussion, debate, and

decisions will be based on what is in the best interest of students. We used a very

simple, yet meaningful tool that day as an assessment to gather information from our

staff. A full sheet of paper was provided to all of our staff members to complete before

they could leave for the day. On this sheet of paper we listed three words with space to write a response underneath each word. The first word listed was "stop." The second word listed was "start," and the third was "continue." The teachers were to list any programs, mandates, policies, or behaviors that we wanted to see stopped at Glade Springs under the first bolded section. Under the start section, teachers were to list any of the above mentioned criteria that they wanted to start at Glade Springs. Staff members then listed any ideas, strategies, policies, or programs that we felt benefited our campus under the continue heading. This quick assessment provided us a window into the collective psyche of Glade Springs and created for us an awareness of where the staff perceived our greatest strengths and areas of need.

During the next break from activities Helen and I quickly scanned the Start, Stop, Continue sheets and looked for similarities. We had briefed the staff that we expected many viewpoints, yet if an area was significantly supported under a category we would research that area and determine if we need look at some things differently. I made sure the staff knew that we would look at areas of significance, yet gave myself an opportunity to research the topic that might be a point of contention. For example, I didn't want a majority of staff members to respond under the start heading that our staff wanted to be able to change the time of their arrival in the morning to 7:45 a.m. instead of 7:30 a.m. I gave myself room to look at the area of concern and make a judgment whether it impacted student success. We would use the success of students as our overarching criterion to determine if a point had value.

Helen took a stack of papers, I took the other stack of papers and we flipped rather quickly through each sheet to look for similarities. We had briefed the staff that we may have quite a few outliers and that they may not be reason enough to address, regardless of the passion or motive behind those outliers. Those tended to be individual concerns or issues, and we let the staff know that while some of them may be serious, they probably do not affect the rest of the school or even the grade level. Those items needed to be addressed administratively through campus leadership. As we browsed through the forms we immediately noticed under the Stop heading, a connection that ran through a definite majority of our sheets. The majority of the staff wanted the faculty at Glade Springs to be able to wear jeans every Friday. Although initially we didn't feel that this fell under the category of student success, we began to contemplate its legitimacy.

The predecessor before Mr. Giddings arrived at Glade Springs was very adamant about teachers dressing professionally. She was a stickler for closed-toed shoes, matching accessories, and clothes that were well tailored. While I support teachers looking professional in their roles, I also understand the reality of the early child. Having comfortable clothes to sit on the floor with students, wearing shoes that allow you to stand up quickly and track down the nearest escapee, and clothes that can take a year's worth of physical abuse are necessary. I personally have had my ties written on inadvertently with marker, torn my slacks on a few file cabinets as I was restraining children, and had my new leather shoes topped with poop and spit from a few unhappy campers. Teachers feel the same way in the classroom, and business professional attire

simply is not suitable for our profession. I advised our staff to dress and appear clean, neat, and put together. Our policy has been nothing too loose, too tight, or too short, and to make visitors know that you are proud to be a teacher by your appearance. Professional dress just looks a little different at the elementary level.

Keeping the history of Glade Springs in mind, we were now becoming very enamored with this idea. Not only would changes in the dress code be pleasing to teachers because the majority of our staff placed the concept of wearing jeans every Friday on their form, but it would also send the message that we take their input very seriously. Although this was informal data, it was shared by a clear majority, and it would perhaps support our further looking at student data down the road. We could always use the start, stop, continue process, as evidence that informal data are also powerful. And of course, it became a brilliant public relations move to create buy-in for us as the new administrative team.

Hopefully, teachers would realize that if we had the data to support a decision then we would act swiftly on it, if it was in the best interest of our campus and students. Our 15 minute break was coming to a close and teachers were gathering back together in their seats for the last segment of the day. I began with the announcement,

> We invite you back from a fabulous break and hope you will participate with us
>
> for the remainder of our day. I have some news that may interest you from the
>
> stop, start, continue forms we completed before our break. In looking at the data

from our staff we are now making our first executive decree at Glade Springs…

All Fridays will now be jeans day!

The applause reverberated off of the metal roof in the meeting room we were in and the excitement was evident. I knew we had made our first good decision as the leadership team at Glade Springs.

Our retreat was full of positive energy that day, and it appeared that the staff greatly enjoyed the opportunity to go away for staff development rather than staying in the sanitized confines of our school cafeteria. We had the opportunity to frame many new district initiatives for the Glade Springs staff and also take a glance at our student data from the previous year. We had a lengthy discussion regarding the data and what they really meant to our instructional program at the campus. We examined parallels in the data from grade level to grade level, looked at gaps, anomalies, and current trends the campus had experienced. We discussed how we much we can grow from this data, but that it is only a snapshot of the past. We needed to improve our formative measures of assessment so we have a better on-going picture related to where our children really are academically.

As far as I was concerned the timing was impeccable for the district to start new initiatives. The campus seemed more apt to accept these initiatives due to the leadership being new to the campus. One of the concepts we established on our campus was the curriculum council. This council was formed to assist teachers in curricular matters. Points of contention, support, and recommendations to the administration could be made

through this council. The council contained representatives from all grade levels that were recommended by their peers.

I also personally encouraged a couple of teachers to express an interest in representing their grade levels. One of these teachers was a superb instructional teacher from second grade who had the unfortunate reputation of being quite offensive and discourteous to former administrators and other colleagues. This person was delighted to play the saboteur and did so in many arenas. The other teacher was a fabulous fourth grade teacher who taught math and was well liked and respected by her colleagues. I knew that if I were going to have a chance at really changing and enhancing the culture of this campus to one of collegiality, teamwork, and success for all students, I would need to keep our saboteur close at hand. This would allow me, and her peers, the opportunity to truly dialogue with her and perhaps encourage her to think differently in regard to a few areas. Keeping a skilled professional who harbors negativity on a large scale close to the decision-making processes provides that person the information that may change his or her viewpoint. I knew that the teachers on our council would be good sounding boards and also positively deflect the negativity and help frame real concerns in a positive light. This would also discourage a problem teacher from impairing the rest of the staff with spur of the moment e-mails the moment a piece of information was brought forth that they did not like. It was much easier to provide this person the information that was behind a campus policy or an instructional decision at the onset, rather than to repair the damage later.

We're Back…The Students Arrive

The first day of school arrived on a Thursday in the middle of August. The hot weather in Texas always reminds me of the start of school and hot, sweaty red faces coming in from recess. In my experience the principal is busiest from March until May with the closing of school and from the first of August until the week after Labor Day in early September with the start of school. The first couple of weeks in August is spent planning staff development, making sure all classrooms have the necessary furniture and equipment, hiring any last minute personnel (usually assistants or paraprofessionals), and figuring out the best way to get more than 600 students in and out of the building in a safe and orderly manner on the first day of school.

The first day of school for an elementary administrator is all about welcoming the parents, reassuring upset kindergarten moms that their child will come back to them in the same shape we found them, and attempting to perform traffic control duties on the approximately 300 vehicles that pull through the parent loop after 3:00 p.m. It is truly a remarkable task to empty a school of over 600 students in a 15-minute time frame and have the parents pick them up in an orderly fashion. I usually make an attempt to kill two birds with one stone, that is, to manage traffic, while smiling and greeting the incoming parents. Coupled with the heat in the middle of August, this always proves to be a difficult task. It was especially problematic due to the previous method of dismissing and releasing students on this particular campus. It was basically a free for all and a battle for pole position between the parents. The traffic would flow from two

lanes, to three lanes, and back to one lane while the vehicles would jockey for position to pick up their children.

We decided to install a much safer and organized method of releasing students. Of course, with any new method comes an implementation and education process that causes much anxiety among parents. To circumvent this anxiety we passed out fliers to every vehicle in the parent loop for the first two days of school providing parents plenty of notice before we changed the routine the following Monday. I soaked a few freshly pressed shirts and ties while out in the heat during the first few days of school attempting to make our front parent loop a safe place to deposit and collect our children.

On my calendar I had made myself a reminder note on the first day of school to make contact with 13 students that previously failed the state assessment the year before. These students were predominantly children of color except for one child. It was evident looking at the demographics of this group that we had our work cut out for us to make sure all children succeed, not just the affluent population. I knew that one of the best ways help our children of color to become successful was to strengthen these relationships. Our teachers and administrators needed to reach out to these students and their families and find out how we can help them become successful in a school setting.

When school began I had the list of these 13 students in my pocket and was perusing the hallways making sure I hugged, greeted, or shook the hand of each one of them. We had carefully placed these students into three classrooms (they were all fourth graders who had previously failed the state assessment in the third grade). We had prepared the teachers of these three classrooms extensively in the academic background

of each child and also the best way to erase the borders between the home and school. We needed to understand their community and attend functions with members of their community. It would take great effort in establishing a rapport with these families to better serve these children.

We had to realize that we understand there are outside factors that impact student learning. However, we don't have the privilege to use these as an excuse for not teaching a child. We must find different ways, different techniques and strategies to help them learn. We need to establish learning communities and not just learning schools. The home and school connection is the first step in making this a reality. These teachers were ready for a challenge and accepted the responsibility to make it happen.

We also tried a different approach with these 13 students in the form of reducing the class size. These 13 students (who all failed the math section of our TAAS test the year before) were taught their math content in a classroom with a teacher pulled specifically for this assignment. Our "math club" teacher, as we called her, was well versed in instructional strategies and had her own arsenal of manipulative devices to better establish the foundation for students to understand math concepts. We divided the 13 students into three small groups and had Mrs. Lager teach each small group for a 90-minute block. During this 90-minute period, the groups of four or five students received intensive and personalized math instruction, and their math grade was taken from their work in this class. This was a departure from past content mastery or pull-out programs that were only 30 minutes in duration. All of these students were regular education

students and did not qualify for resource support. The success of this new class routine was immense. In the spring semester when the confidential student reports arrived from the state, twelve of these thirteen students passed the new, more rigorous TAKS math assessment (in the first year of implementation of the new test). This was a prime example of using the current resources on a campus but thinking differently about the best way to provide instruction for special needs students.

After making contact with our thirteen students, I went about browsing through the hallways and making sure teachers were in the right spots, and with the right kids, and that the building was flowing in an organized manner. Shortly after that the school secretary sought me out in the hallway and let me know that I had two upset parents who had called. She also added that a third was in the office yelling profanities. I quickly gathered my thoughts and attempted to make predictions about which parent it would be. I was accessing my mental card catalog and flipping through potential names of people that may have a reason to be upset with me. When I arrived in the office it was a woman who was very irritated that the bus did not pick her child up that morning. Irritated is a rather mild word to describe her actions. I managed to carry the conversation outside of the building under the front porch where hopefully it was at least out of earshot. I certainly didn't solve the situation, but I absorbed enough verbal blows so that she wasn't going to waste any more blasphemy if I didn't respond and fight back. The parent-teacher-school interconnection was a complex, sometimes confusing thing.

Now I had my first meeting parent-teacher organization (PTO) meeting scheduled for the year, and I was a little uneasy about how this might play itself out. I

also wondered why in the world anyone would schedule the first PTO meeting at 1:00 p.m. on the first day of school. Don't they understand that I'm a little busy? As 1:00 p.m. rolled around, I made my way to the library where the meeting was to take place. I'm sure the look on my face showed the initial shock I had when I entered the door. There in front of me were 31 well dressed members of the opposite gender all staring directly at me when I entered (and this was only the PTO board, not a general meeting with open participation). This was shocking for two reasons. First, at my previous campus our PTO consisted of ten individuals, half of whom were of the male gender and usually showed up to our meetings with work gloves and tools ready to fix the first problem they noticed that needed repair. In fact, the former PTO president at Luckett Elementary even assumed control over a crew working on the Luckett library and directed them to complete a task based on the wishes of the librarian and not according to the contractor's plans. They did so! But this PTO group engendered a completely different feeling as I entered the room at Glade Springs. At Luckett I had developed a close-knit association with all of the PTO members. With such a small group we had formed a close bond, and it had been very difficult to leave this collection of avid volunteers behind.

I sat down at one of the tables and all eyes were peering in my direction. This was the first time I had met with this group and also the first time I had to associate which of these parents belonged to which children. I had met a few parents individually, but I wasn't exactly sure of the positions these moms occupied on the board. At the table I promptly sifted through the sheets of paper that were lying in front of me. An

agenda, minutes from the last meeting in May, a treasurer's report accompanied with a budget and expenditures, and a couple of fliers stating different fund raising opportunities. I knew at this point that this organization was a well-oiled machine that probably didn't need or want the new principal's viewpoints or suggestions quite yet. I did what every new principal should do at their first PTO meeting. I listened until the PTO president gave me permission to talk. It was at that point that I provided the group a brief rundown of my experiences in education and also a little about my personal life and family. It always helps to talk about your own children or family in a new situation. I think it sends the message to the group that you are actually a person in this role. It also helps the individual sharing become more comfortable with the group by talking about personal matters before the specific information of the business at hand.

The PTO meeting ended about an hour and fifteen minutes after it started. After that I completed the mass hysteria also known as the first day of school parent pick-up. I hobbled back into the building with sore feet and ankles. It seems I forget every year the exorbitant amount of walking and lifting an elementary principal completes on the first day of school. Of course, I was wearing my new shoes from the local mall, and they hadn't quite been broken in yet. I had a couple of blisters and my feet were extremely tired from standing on the hot cement for 45 minutes and directing traffic at dismissal time. After plopping myself down in the main office area, I began to reflect on the day's events.

A few teachers came in and shared the sentiment that the first day of school went well. One teacher exclaimed, "this was the best first day of school I have been involved

with in my 18 years of teaching." Of course, I wasn't sure if this teacher articulated this statement every year or not, but it was certainly good to hear. I believe that teachers are born with an inherent gift to have selective memory. The vast amount of energy emitted the first two weeks of school to adequately develop routines, procedures, and prepare the classroom is colossal in scale. Many times this hard work is coupled with tears, anxiety, and frustration as the teachers try to understand what makes each student succeed. However, once the first couple of days are completed, the true joy of being a classroom teacher becomes evident. I am continually entertained when teachers confess that if they only remembered how tired they are at this time every year, they wouldn't sign up for another.

Let's Call It a Day

The weekend jumped to the rescue of many exhausted teachers after their first two days on the job. Our district typically started school mid-week to provide a shorter week during the first week of instruction. I agree with this philosophy and knew that teachers, students, parents and administrators were certainly ready for a reprieve after the first two start-up days of school. Personally, I liked starting school on a Wednesday, as opposed to Thursday. I believe the extra day allowed the teachers a better opportunity to establish those routines and procedures that are necessary for an environment conducive to learning. The additional day also allowed us to work the kinks out of our big-ticket procedures at the school such as lunch rotations, lunch duties, morning drop-off and afternoon car pick-up.

The short week provided me a great sense of personal relief as well. My energy level was draining rapidly, and a short break would hopefully afford me some much needed rest. In my experience as an administrator the first days of school are physically exhausting as you run around attempting to troubleshoot the challenges of the day. However, it is the preceding days that are much more cognitively and emotionally intensive for the principal. It is in the days leading up to the first day of school that the work on staff development must be completed. The professional development of teachers has always been a top priority for me, and I take great pride and care in planning, implementing, and developing the day's activities based around the needs of our campus. My body was sensing the stress from the past three weeks focus on planning quality staff development and the intense physical work that accompanies the opening days of school. The time and effort it took to organize and plan our staff development coupled with establishing many new routines and procedure school wide was very taxing. With the campus staff development now behind me, I knew I had completed a considerable piece of the work involved in opening a school year. This year's effort was especially important due to my transitioning to a new campus. I would certainly use this first weekend to reflect on the past few days and the opening of school.

Increasing Our Relationships

One of the charges that Dr. Miller, our superintendent, set for me as the new Glade Springs principal was to rejuvenate and increase positive relationships between the school and its neighborhood that comprised mainly African American and

economically disadvantaged students. This neighborhood historically has seen little change in the last 50 years with many of its inhabitants. Many of the same last names occupied the homes as they had for many years. There is also a great pride in this neighborhood among its community members. The streets that encompass the area are different in their composition. One of the streets historically has the most drug arrests in the city and is predominantly composed of duplexes. The other streets are single residence homes predominantly with lower income families. However, there are a few professional families that chose to keep their residence in the neighborhood they grew up in, and these homes are scattered throughout. The community has made great efforts over the last few years to preserve and revitalize many older buildings and spots of historical significance. A community center is located in close proximity to the streets where most of our students from Glade Springs live. This community center serves the surrounding area and houses a gymnasium, a few classrooms, technology center, and food service area and kitchen. Local churches meet here on Sundays as well as different organizations throughout the week.

Our school receives approximately 20 percent of its total enrollment from this neighborhood community. Many of our more affluent families at Glade Springs from other communities have grown up in a culture of education and understand the norms and practices of the school system. By contrast many families in this disadvantaged neighborhood do not feel that the school provides them a system that meets their needs. We needed to work on ways to provide this community the same advantages that we provide other middle class students. It would take new approaches, safeguards, and

optimism to overturn the obstructions we historically placed in front of these children. We had to provide this local community the opportunity to enter into the conversation to help us close the achievement gap.

I knew that we must explore our possibilities and new opportunities to open up the dialogue with community members and parents in this neighborhood in order to better support the children's education. One way that I decided to engage in this conversation was to volunteer to serve on the community center's advisory board. This board meets monthly to discuss the center's efforts in education, event planning, and programs offered. They also discuss the financial obligations of the center, including budgets and income. The board consists of predominately African American men and women, one other pastor from a predominantly white church and me. We had previously met on July 30th and were scheduled to meet again in early September. Our first meeting went extremely well, and it provided me a direct line to the community leaders of this area. Most of the committee was from the neighborhood or had a leadership role in the local African American community. These meetings helped establish relationships with key members of the surrounding area and set the stage for us to increase our commitment to the welfare and success of these students.

My local contacts were also a huge asset in establishing relationships with this community. I graduated from the local high school and was raised in the area. I never would have anticipated that my relationships from 20 years ago in high school would have benefited me in my profession. In high school I played on sports teams with many friends that now had sons and daughters from this area that now attend Glade Springs.

These relationships allowed me to enter into the community with better access and a much deeper initial layer of trust than a total outsider. However, I was still a white, middle class principal of a predominantly affluent school, and I had to demonstrate through my actions and caring conversations that I truly had the best interest of these students at heart. I maintained a close professional friendship with the gentleman in charge of the community center, and we worked together to make the proper connections that would be in the best interest of the students. I took the opportunity to visit the center a couple of afternoons a month during the first semester of school so that the students knew I was interested in what they were doing in their own community. Many of our children of color went to the center before they went home for the day to participate in the after school program. The after school program provides a place for tutorials and homework, and also supervises games. The supervisor of the center also took the opportunity to come over to Glade Springs and visit with our faculty. It was a reciprocal relationship that helped open doors for all of our students. For us to achieve academic success, we had to acknowledge that differences provided us a greater richness in our school and community. I continued to serve on this advisory board throughout the course of the school year.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW SCHOOL YEAR AND A NEW PRINCIPAL

The Fall Semester Is Underway

The end of August was parent orientation season around our community and

school district. The evenings of the next two weeks were booked solid, including three

separate orientation meetings held at Glade Springs for parents. Head Start orientation

occurred during the day at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, August 19th, and kindergarten

orientation followed later that evening at 6:30 p.m. Our third and fourth grade

orientation was held on Tuesday. On Thursday evening we hosted the first and second

grade orientation. All the orientations were scheduled from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. Our

agenda typically involved introductions of the teachers, and then we provided a synopsis

of our state assessment results from the previous year to fulfill a state requirement for

holding a school report card and AEIS public meeting. This year I really did not want to

dwell on past years' information, so I highlighted areas of growth for our campus and

also strengths the campus had characteristically shown. I did not want to get into

number crunching in one of my first opportunities to address the parents of Glade

Springs. I wanted the parents to know what the vision of our new administrative team

was and how we were going to capitalize on the past celebrations of this campus and

extend those even further to better assure the academic success of all children.

The first month of school was not only strenuous for the administrators and

teachers on a campus but their families as well. Teachers were busily introducing and

modeling proper procedures and routines in their classrooms and experiencing real

physical exhaustion during the first month of school. This can be very difficult for teachers with young children in their own family. As an administrator with young children, I felt much of the same pressure with time commitments during the first month of school.

A principal's busy schedule usually starts August 1st and doesn't conclude until Labor Day in September. The orientations and evening meetings play a major role in the stress placed on a principal and his or her family. My wife, Judy, knows this a critical time, and we have grown to accept this in our family. Having two young children does not make the time commitments in August any easier; however, I know that I am fortunate at the elementary level where the time commitments of an administrator are much less than that of middle and high school principals.

The end of August was here, and we had just wrapped up our last orientation meeting with the parents. We had completed many of the required nuts and bolts type of activities that were necessary at the beginning of a school year. These included class changes and student placements. School-wide procedures were in place, and we had accomplished our orientations and mandated meetings. It was now time for us to turn our focus to instruction and professional development, having completed the crucial start-up effort. The challenge now before us was to alleviate the redundancies and gaps that were occurring in our state assessments of our economically disadvantaged student group and our African American population. More than a matter of improving scores, my focus was to make sure we establish a school climate where we acknowledge differences and use those differences in a positive way. We should do everything in our

power to help all students become an integral part of our campus community and provide the resources for all students to experience academic excellence.

One of my professors at the university where I studied said the way to implement systemic change in an organization is through every single interaction with members of that organization. I took this message to heart and came to the realization that you indeed do not change a campus during faculty meetings or by stating the mission and goals of the organization in front of a large audience. True change comes in the daily interactions between the administrator and their constituents – one conversation at a time. These conversations with teachers, parents, children, and colleagues form the catalyst to positively transform an organization. The message, that we needed to look differently at how we educate children of color and economically disadvantaged families, could not be sent in the form of mass communication. It had to be sent one step at a time, one individual at a time, until we had buy-in from grade levels and small groups. This would then provide us the momentum necessary to have teachers model different and unique instructional strategies, brainstorm different ideas to benefit these students, and start the dialogue with other teachers as to how we can get better at educating all of our children. We were really good at educating the students of middle class and affluent families. We needed to step back, reassess our mission to educate all children, and find ways to achieve this goal.

Instructional Focus

One of the ways we decided to approach this undertaking was through off-campus instructional focus meetings. As I stated earlier, I am a big advocate of taking teachers away from the daily grind of the workplace to an off campus site where we have the opportunity to really concentrate on the work at hand. There are too many distractions at a campus for thought provoking professional development to occur. On September 18th we hosted our first instructional focus meeting at my home. We arranged for half-day substitutes who were to go to the fourth grade classrooms in the morning from 8:30 -11:30 a.m. and then to the third grade classrooms in the afternoon from 12:30-3:30 p.m. This would allow us to utilize our substitutes and our time efficiently and give each grade level a three-hour block of time to dialogue. The task was to have an open discussion about student needs, based on data (both formal and informal), and highlight successful strategies currently used in grade levels and classrooms. This also provided me, as the instructional facilitator on our campus, better insight into current practices in the classrooms and grade levels. We, of course, served the morning group breakfast treats and the afternoon group desserts to support the notion that this was a professional conversation and not a typical meeting format.

We were really moving full speed during the month of September in terms of utilizing our time for the purpose of improving instruction and sharing quality instructional strategies. As educators we are notorious for not being able to find the time to share our best practices. There are so many fantastic instructional strategies that are taking place on a daily basis in a single grade level. Each teacher is under the false

impression that the other teachers already must use this strategy because it works so well. There are a plethora of solid practices being implemented everyday on an elementary campus and sharing these practices is a difficult task under the time constraints a teacher has placed in front of them. As the instructional facilitator of a campus, it is my responsibility to provide and create time for teachers to share philosophies, approaches, and opportunities to enhance their practice.

One of the ways that we planned to get the most out of our time during the typical monthly faculty meeting was to focus on instructional issues. We had teachers block off every Tuesday for the duration of the year to attend after school sessions such as instructional dialogues, committee meetings, and faculty meetings. Although we didn't meet every Tuesday we wanted to make sure that doctor's appointments and other after school responsibilities were scheduled during other days of the week. I also instituted a 45 minute meeting cap on all after school faculty meetings. There were too many occasions that principals would squeeze the last drop of enthusiasm out of their teachers by conducting exceedingly long meetings held after school. Three-thirty to four o'clock is already the embalming period of the day for teachers. They are shutting down both cognitively and physically as the late afternoon arrives. Our teachers seemed relieved that we understood this dilemma and would only have them engaged for the 45 minute session. I let the faculty know that if we would stay focused and participate actively then we would always complete the meeting in our time frame.

During September and October of the fall semester, we hosted one regular faculty meeting to discuss nuts and bolts type items, a numeracy faculty meeting and

two literacy faculty meetings, with an optional literacy discussion taking place after school. We arranged the faculty into three teams to create smaller groups that would be more conducive to having an open dialogue. We also agreed to meet in classrooms for our instructional faculty meetings. This provided the visiting teachers the opportunity to see the arrangement and structure of another classroom and also the overall classroom environment. I am continually amazed at how much one can learn about a teacher and his or her instruction just from walking around the room and noticing what is on the walls, how the desks and tables are arranged, and the general ambiance of the classroom. The numeracy team consisted of the math teachers in the third and fourth grade that team taught with another partner. We also added self-contained teachers from Head Start, kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. In the early grades we strategically placed individuals on our numeracy team that might be stronger in the language arts content area but had the overall philosophy of teaching children. We included self-contained teachers that needed support in the area of math, as well as those who were exceptionally strong in this area. The same concept applied to our literacy team that focused on language arts instruction. A few self-contained teachers from the early grades needed to grow in this area, and a few teachers that were very strong in the area of language arts were also placed on this team.

The third team we formed was basically composed of specialty teachers that had unique teaching responsibilities. This included special education teachers, music teachers, art teachers, physical education staff, our counselor, and computer instructors. We also included many support personnel and office staff on this team. We provided

each team with a name for them to use as future reference. The gold team was our numeracy team, the silver team was our literacy team, and the platinum team represented the specialty teachers and support staff. I wanted to make sure each team was small enough that the environment would be conducive to having real conversations and a positive, yet relaxed, learning atmosphere. I do have a hesitation that continues to cause me some anxiety in regard to our meeting structure. There is much valuable information that is shared in each content area instructional meeting that needs to be voiced in a school-wide setting. However, I contemplate that if we were meeting in large groups much of this valuable comment may not be brought to the surface or mentioned in front of a full staff.

I also mull over the role specialty teachers play on our campus. Our district has struggled in the past with creating professional development that is helpful to these specialty teachers. They can certainly pick up quality instructional strategies that are used in the classroom and plug in their own specific content area. However, there is still a need for specific information related to their field. I do think that all specialty teachers should also have a common knowledge about what steps the campus is taking in the core content areas of math, language arts, science and social studies. They should be able to articulate the strengths of each content area that we see as a campus and also provide support to the areas that we need to improve. Overall the meeting structure was well supported and teachers felt good about being divided into smaller groups for content specific areas they teach. Many teachers felt that faculty meetings had been a waste of

time in the past and that they never had related to what they were teaching. One teacher

remarked, "I like it this way. We get in, get good information, and get out."

I enthusiastically agreed with her and hoped she would spread this jubilance to

her other colleagues. We used a consistent format for the agenda during our faculty

meetings. The agenda was structured with five key components. The components were

objective, groups, resource, approach, and evaluation. We wanted to provide an

appropriate model for our teachers that is not only successful for student learning but for

adult learning as well. This plan really helped us and teachers be strategic in our

approach to teaching and learning. The objective would let the audience (or students)

know what the key area of learning was for the day or assignment. The groups heading

or name would let the teacher know if the learning would take place in large group,

small group, or as individuals. Resource was the heading where we would place the

books, packets, or information we were using to guide the learning. The approach was

the style the teacher used to convey the material to the audience. Examples of this

included small group instruction and teacher modeling of the material. The final

component was the evaluation component. This was basically how we would know we

if did what we said we were going to do. What was the evidence produced that indicated

we understood and were able to apply this piece of learning? The agenda components

served as a constant reminder that we must be accountable to our learners and focused in

our teaching.

Oops, I Goofed

Tuesday, October 1st was scheduled as a staff development day across our district. Our school district was making great strides in providing consistent district-wide structures that would help us academically reduce the gaps in achievement we were experiencing in some of our student groups. Up to the point before Dr. Miller arrived, the campuses were all pretty much independent islands operating without transportation to the next island. As a district we had worked extremely hard the past two years attempting to provide consistent support to our students not only from grade level to grade level, but from campus to campus. Content area leadership teams were formed at the district level to help in this endeavor, as well as curriculum councils on each campus.

During this staff development our goal was to focus on the process of curriculum mapping and also teach a component of the essential elements of instruction (EEI), both district initiatives. I scheduled our meeting at an indoor/outdoor facility just south of town. This facility was set in a cowboy décor and resembled an old ghost town that you read about in the old west. The site was a great place to have an evening party or other social gathering. We rented the facility at a discounted rate, due to October 1st being on a Tuesday. However, in my haste to provide quality professional development experiences off-campus I made a serious error in judgment. In planning for this day I decided to take a chance on the weather in Texas. A mistake I will most likely never make again. In considering the weather conditions around the area, I made up my mind that we would certainly have mild temperatures in October. I think I was justifying in my mind that for some reason the weather would magically change into fall after the last

day in September, which was on a Monday, to the first day of October. Due to the fact

that this old west town was a "fresh air" facility (politically correct for no air

conditioning), the weather was a huge factor.

Helen, my assistant principal, and I arrived at our destination giddy with

excitement because we had planned such awesome and creative places to meet for staff

development. This time however, the staff development gods were not on our side. The

weather was sticky with moisture, and the temperatures were rising quickly. We had

two box fans that were on in the central meeting area, and blowing teachers' papers all

around the room while they were working. We also did not count on the fact that the

natural light coming in through the openings in the wall made it almost impossible to use

an overhead projector or PowerPoint.

To top it all, the task for the day involved a process of mapping our curriculum at

each grade level and for the grade level to develop consensus maps. These were overall

plans the grade level had set for the year, highlighting times and areas when and where

certain content would be taught. This provided a general structure for the teachers in

their groups to develop the time periods certain content would be taught. They could

choose monthly segments, six-week time periods, nine-week time periods, or chunks of

the year to focus certain areas of student learning. To do this each grade level needed a

word processing program to develop the appropriate document. The district had created

a standard format that was to be used for the creation of the consensus maps. Helen and

I thought we would be very resourceful and bring ten lap tops out to the meeting area

with the programs already installed. We again did not plan on the natural light making it

extremely hard to see the computer screen, and also the technical difficulties that many of the computers were experiencing.

Not only were we taking on the task of a new district initiative that didn't greatly appeal to the majority of teachers, but we were setting our teachers up for failure. Uncomfortable temperatures, vision impairment, no air conditioning, and lack of available technological resources caused great stress among our teachers. This is a time when an administrator must know at the precise moment when to cut his or her losses and bail out. We stayed until 10:30 a.m. that morning and the humidity, lack of air, and technology pitfalls caused us to officially pull the plug. I admitted to the faculty,

I am sorry for the conditions that are causing us grief but I will do my best to make it up to you. If you will be in your grade levels ready to work on your consensus map this afternoon you can take an extended lunch from break from 10:35 a.m. until 1:30 p.m.

I did hear a couple of "whoo-hoos" coming from the audience, so I was hoping our bail-out tactic worked and that we would continue our forward momentum.

The Honeymoon's Over!

It was Wednesday, October 2nd, the first day back at school, and we were still fresh from the staff development fiasco of the day before. I'm not sure if the events of the previous day caused long term side effects or if staff members were suffering symptoms from the heat, but the adults were not playing nicely on our campus. It was the first time I sensed urgency in the air coupled with negativity. I suppose this day

compared somewhat to the first quarrel between newlyweds, when the wedding and honeymoon are complete and the initial shock of a long-term relationship arrives. The day was topped off with a discussion regarding the library and its master schedule. This was Glade Springs first year not to have a library assistant, and it wasn't sitting very well with the grade levels. We had a joint meeting involving six teachers representing different grade levels. For the first time in my seven years as an administrator, I had to raise my voice and in an incredibly strong tone announcing to the group that their behavior was unacceptable. I stated to the group, "let's be professionals, act like adults, and end this nonsense." I ended the conversation with the metaphor "energy suck" to describe the events of the meeting and the interactions that took place. We at least filtered out what the teachers and librarian wanted in a master schedule, and we made the commitment to reconvene after Helen and I took a closer look at the schedule. Also, we agreed as a group to take the library schedule to our newly formed curriculum council.

As we were reaching the halfway mark in the month of October, I began to receive a couple of parent complaints regarding their first grade teachers. An unofficial protocol that I try to follow in handling parents who want to move their children out of classrooms is to wait six weeks. I have found that if you make the decision to move one child as a result of a parent complaint, it triggers a landslide of transfer request from other parents. I hold to the tenet that I will consider a transfer after the initial six weeks are complete. This usually appeases the parents, and normally they are quite receptive to their current teachers once they have provided this teacher a few days and weeks to

get to know their child. The six weeks were completed two weeks earlier and report cards were issued the previous week.

A few of these parents were now at the point, based on their child's grades and report card, that they wanted a change. This six week time period had also allowed me to get a better feel for each teacher on our first grade team. After meeting with the parents and gaining a better knowledge of each teacher, I was startled to find that I agreed with the majority of the parents. These were not the typical issues of parents wanting their children to be with friends, but were based on realities they had witnessed or heard through the neighborhood grapevine. I soon realized that this was not a parental problem, but a Glade Springs first grade problem. One student I moved to another classroom due to a historical conflict between the mother of the child and the teacher. It was my belief that this did not set the teacher, parent, or child up for success due to the surrounding conditions and negative tones the adults had toward each other. The other three children were in situations where the parents were sent the message that their child did not have the skills to perform in the classroom and that they must have done a poor job of parenting for this to happen. I made the decision to cut my losses and move the children even though it could cause a severe backlash with other first grade teachers and parents wanting to switch their child as well.

This is a complicated position to be in as an administrator. You want to support your teachers as much as possible in a situation that involves conflict. However, it was morally unethical for me to allow such behavior on the part of teachers. As a parent myself, I would also want my child to be taken out of these classrooms. The interactions

of the teachers went against the vision we were trying to implement at Glade Springs. With six weeks of information tucked neatly away in my files, I immediately began to develop a plan for our first grade team. We needed physical change, accompanied with new insights regarding parents and students to enable us to move forward. I would continue to gather information and formulate a plan for change. I started penciling in potential names of Glade Spring teachers in other grade levels that would help support this undertaking. I knew in mid-October that our first grade team would have a different composition the following year.

I felt my cortisol levels rising as I walked quickly down to the fourth grade hallway. I was the lone administrator on campus and our office staff was depleted as well. My stress was building as the office became a waiting room for the behaviorally ill. Our counselor and assistant principal were involved in a meeting at the central office and the secretary was also out. This was the fourth student to implode during the morning, and I was frantically running around the school attempting to put out fires. One of our fourth grade students, that I had not come in contact with yet because this was his first day on our campus, was already in a heap of trouble. This young man had been suspended from class in the previous year and was serving his time in our behavioral modification program for elementary students. A child really had to have severe behavior concerns for this type of placement. This fourth grader was probably a quality candidate because on his first day back on campus he lit a fire in the boys' bathroom with toilet paper and a lighter. I really could not believe that it only took three hours for him to misbehave at such an excessive level. By the time I made it back to the

office around 1:00 p.m., I could feel my shoulder blades tightening. This was the area

where I usually held my stress, and this was the first opportunity at Glade Springs for me

to experience this type of muscular tension. I looked forward to the month of October

ending.

If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them

November was here and cooler weather was as well. There seemed to be a fresh,

positive feeling in the air. Cooler in Texas usually means a dip into the lower 70s, and

we were very pleased to finally have this type of weather. Our office staff celebrated

two birthdays in November, and I was increasingly becoming entertained and intrigued

by the whole concept. For every office staff member's birthday we would gather in the

conference room and have a theme for the party. This, of course, had to be kept top

secret by the rest of the group. This theme was based on some character flaw of the

birthday boy or girl and the rest of the group joined in the charade. When I think about

the change process and culture, I think about the Glade Springs birthday celebrations.

The birthday celebrations were such an important part of their history that the

preexisting office staff, before our new leadership team arrived on campus, made sure

that we knew that these parties would continue. The party also involved the exchange of

gifts to each person who was celebrating a birthday. The average price of the gifts was

around $15 to $20, and I thought that would be rather expensive after eight celebrations.

However, I learned that as the leader of an organization you must choose carefully your

areas that need focus. Although our new administrative team could have easily declined

to participate or perhaps suggested that we keep celebrations lower key, it was in our best interest to participate. This gesture of participation seemed to alleviate some concern of the remaining office staff members, and we continued to celebrate and poke fun at the person whose big day was being celebrated.

In mid-November our campus celebrated its open house, where parents and children are invited to the school for a night of games and activities. It is an event designed to be low key and fun for our Glade Springs community. We provided bus transportation to and from one of our disadvantaged neighborhoods to allow easier access for those without transportation. Pizza, drinks and snack items were served at no charge. The festivities lasted about an hour and we closed the doors a little after 7:00 p.m. At the completion of the event, several teachers and I sat down and brain stormed how we could make this event even better the next year. Helen, our assistant principal, chimed in with these words, "we could hold the open house on the 50th day of school and center the activities on math. We could also dress up in 50s attire and hold a sock hop!" Our small group of teachers loved this idea and from that moment on we knew what we would be doing on the 50th day of school next year. Elementary schools are usually known for holding large celebrations for the 100th day of school in the spring, but we thought this was a great idea to hold a fall celebration and tie it into a family math night atmosphere. It allowed us to not only hold a community and family event, but also to give the event an instructional focus.

The Thanksgiving holidays were approaching, and I was delighted not to don the awful blue pilgrim suit provided by my former mentor and boss, Linda Evans, for the

occasion. I had kept this tradition alive at my former campus, W.B. Luckett Elementary, during my tenure as principal there because the children (for some reason) seemed to be entertained by the thought of their principal wearing a baby blue pilgrim suit. However, that was one ritual that I was happy to part with upon my arrival at Glade Springs. I will do almost anything for the enjoyment of children and their success in schools, but you do reach a point where your pride must intervene. I could not muster the energy, or the will power to don the suit of our early settlers for even one more feast.

We closed out the remaining days of November with a numeracy instructional faculty meeting. A group of teachers volunteered their time and expertise to introduce math menus to our staff. These menus were strategies that involved hands-on processes, based on games and manipulatives. Students worked through the menus during the period of instruction and moved at their own pace through this curriculum. The teachers had the autonomy and authority to change, delete, or add to the menus at any time and restructure them to fit the grade level essential knowledge and skills. We also had a general discussion prior to our instructional focus regarding discipline referrals and students with attention deficit tendencies. We had to reiterate to the staff that we list only observable behaviors on our discipline referrals, not judgmental comments. We must stick to nonjudgmental facts in our documentation. In our discussion on the topic of attention deficit, we reminded our teachers that our job was not to label or diagnose Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Our job is to list behaviors of the student and then it is a physician's job to label the attention deficit behaviors as ADHD

or not. "We as teachers do not diagnose or prescribe" was a key phrase we used during this meeting.

Before the month of November elapsed, I was involved in three more parent conferences. The number of parent conferences I have had at Glade Springs seemed to be double those I participated in at Luckett Elementary. This concerned me on many levels. First, what are we doing to our parents that is creating a frustration level so great that they need administrative intervention to solve it? Second, do our teachers immediately give up ship the moment they sense conflict and quickly refer their problems to the office? I contemplated the reasons behind this and tried to sort out the possibilities that might change this behavior. Helen and I instituted a stricter guideline for referring children to the office for misbehavior. The teachers now had to complete a form stating only the misbehavior and leaving out the personal annotations and classification of the behaviors. We also made it our protocol as administrators to refer many parents back to the teachers if they had not had a conference, or we included the teacher in our parent conference rather than handle the issue on our own. We had to use common sense to know and understand when a teacher truly needs support in dealing with an angry or difficult parent, or when they were simply referring a parent to the office the moment the conversation became uneasy. We attempted to model appropriate conflict resolution skills during conference times and noted them as reminder items on our faculty meeting agendas.

The last few days of November seemed to drag on endlessly. A few more parent conferences involving first grade teachers were on the front burner, and I was wondering

if they would ever end. I did question whether the number of the conferences would

subside once the parents developed a level of trust in me as the principal, or perhaps,

once the teachers also developed a level of trust. I also made a few attempts to complete

Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) observations with teachers.

My personal goal was to complete 12 before the Thanksgiving holiday, and it was

looking rather grim.

The day before the holiday break I escorted our fourth grade students to the Bob

Bullock Texas State Museum in Austin. I was making great attempts to let our teachers

know my willingness to support their needs with our students. This fourth grade group

had a special need. It composed one of those unusual anomalies that drift through a

school system every few years. There were some extreme behavioral challenges within

the ranks, and a few "stinkers" to top it off. This group of students had ravaged the halls

and classrooms of Glade Springs for the last four years and now was set to complete a

perfect sweep of each grade level. This group of students was most likely the final straw

that helped Dr. Miller make up his mind to transfer me to Glade Springs.

The bus ride over from our city to Austin was rather mundane and calm for our

students and caused me to anticipate that the last day of classes in November would end

on a positive note. The trip through the Bob Bullock museum went extremely well –

then we decided to push our luck. The state capitol was just a block away from the

museum, and it seemed like a clever idea to fit this into our schedule. We knew that

many of our students would not have the chance to see our capitol for many years, or for

some, perhaps never. However, much to my dismay, once we entered the rotunda of our

state capitol, the flood gates opened and many of the students could no longer handle

being model citizens. I first ducked into the boys' bathroom to try to locate two missing

students. Based on their past indiscretions, I wanted to make sure I located them in a

timely manner. I knew in my heart that the smooth operation of our state government

depended on my finding these children rather quickly. And true to form, they sprinted

out from around the corner and down the hall to view the political processes of our state

government at work. At that moment, I whistled to another teacher to keep an eye on

these two while I attempted to move another one of our students.

She was lying down in the middle of the hallway of the capitol building and

students from other classrooms could not pass. Moving this student was no easy task.

Although we do our best in public schools to keep student information confidential there

is some information that the principal of a campus is privy to that others may not be. In

the case of this young girl, I happened to know her weight thanks to the school nurse.

She was a sizeable child who weighed 242 pounds as a fourth grader. I knew going in to

this endeavor that I could not physically move her. I also did not want to create a scene

in which the Governor of our state would forever have a memory of our school etched in

mind – and the image would have nothing to do with academic achievement. With my

concern not to cause a scene, I set out to coax our young student into moving to a

different spot to nap. At this point, keeping the student on task was out of the question.

I just wanted to redirect her napping to an appropriate setting. I eloquently told her,

"woo-wee, there is a long bench over by the wall and the air-conditioning blows real

hard and cold there. That would be a fine place to take a good nap."

After hearing the word nap, she mustered up enough energy to make the transition. I thought to myself, "Whew! Our school at least may not be on the Austin news tonight." I could see the headlines in the *Austin-American Statesman* the next morning, "Principal can't control children; legislature has to reconvene." We did manage to corral the students who were being opportunistic in their own ventures and return them to the class with the rest of the children. We boarded our bus and made the long journey back home. I did crack a smile on the way home, knowing that the majority of our students had a fantastic learning experience and were well mannered in public. It had been an adventure for all!

Holiday Jollies

The midpoint of our school year was now rapidly approaching and with it teachers seemed to become rejuvenated. In the back of our minds we all knew that anything is tolerable for three weeks. This was the period of time until the long awaited holiday break on December 20th. We still had a few important business items to attend to as a campus before we went into total shutdown mode. I find it fascinating that some professionals suggest that we should just end for Christmas break two weeks early because we don't do anything anyway. My suggestion to these individuals would be that if we ended two weeks earlier there would be an additional two weeks that we don't do anything. Although elementary schools traditionally change the educational pace during the last two weeks before the end of a semester, I would propose that these two weeks of hands-on lessons and social interactions working with groups are extremely

valuable. The nature of the elementary child is to be consumed with excitement during the holiday season, and adjusting our curriculum and activities to fit these characteristics is working smarter, not harder.

Out with the Old, and In with the New

Baby New Year came to visit our community once again, and I personally hoped 2003 would start off in lackluster fashion. Considering all of the changes on our campus in the fall semester we could probably benefit from a few weeks of monotony. When I first learned about my transfer to Glade Springs in the spring of 2002, I immediately scheduled a consultant to focus on team building, communication and learning, using the latest brain research as a vehicle to convey this information. A surprising piece of learning that I experienced after attending a few conferences regarding the brain and its capabilities is that teachers are more accepting of information coming from a scientific or anatomical perspective than from fellow educators. If a teacher is attempting to convey new strategies that work for kids that is strikingly different from one's own theory of teaching and learning, many teachers refuse to accept the new information. I have found that if a presentation or educational model is based on biological or scientific research regarding the brain's inherent tendencies of learning, one has a much better opportunity for changing a teacher's perspective. When they see PET scans or other scientific evidence of how the brain learns during certain episodes, they have greater buy-in for the possibility of adjusting their practices and philosophy of learning.

Using my personal experiences as a catalyst for planning our staff development, I scheduled Dr. Debbie Estes to visit our staff in January for a motivational kick-off for the new year. She was a dynamic and energizing speaker and staff development specialist. As a former principal and curriculum director she knew the ins and outs of working with teachers and how to plan accordingly for a successful session. Nine months earlier, when I first learned of my transfer, I scheduled her for a visit to Glade Springs. Her presentation focused on team building opportunities and dialogue regarding how children and adults learn. Beginning the new semester with a more holistic approach to learning focused our staff and provided a positive energy flow. In my experience, when I embark on a new semester or school year it is much more conducive to positive staff morale if I start with a greater vision and purpose than with the details of our profession. An administrator must take great care to provide staff members with additional time to work on the details of their practice and classroom teaching in order to round-out quality professional development.

To solicit quick and accurate feedback regarding the motivational session we used an assessment practice I derived from the Macaroni Grill restaurant chain. At the Macaroni Grill, waiters and waitresses write on the white paper tablecloths with crayons as you are awaiting your meal. We decided to use this strategy for a quick assessment at the end of our day. Reading the white tablecloths we had placed on each table provided us the informal data indicating that the day had been a huge success and that our staff members felt energized and ready to begin the new semester and year.

Teachers want to have nuts and bolts information about conducting their classrooms effectively. However, administrators must carefully balance the need to focus on the goals and the overall mission of the organization with the details needed for teachers to experience success with their students on a daily basis.

Member of the "Gang"

I'm not sure of the exact moment that I became part of the "gang." However, I think it happened over the course of a two-week period in late February. Our front office staff had historically participated in the school talent show hosted by our PTO. In reflecting back upon this experience and early conversations with our PTO members and office staff, this was one of Glade Springs' hidden rules that permeate organizations. I passed the first strand of this culturally significant event when I accepted the task of continuing the office staff's participation in the talent show. I am really not sure that I had much of a choice, but it was a form of acceptance for me to acknowledge that the show would go on. The process of becoming socialized into a culture or organization is one that cannot be defined with hard data or quantitative measures. It is a feeling that both parties of the organization (the new member and the current members) have when true acceptance is provided and reciprocated.

There are, of course, stages and structures that researchers have provided to map out the socialization process, but the actual moment it happens is not predictable. There is also a professional socialization that takes place that is based on an individual's background, training, education, and previous work in the field. However, becoming

socialized into an organizational subculture is much more difficult, and the impact and influence much stronger than professional socialization. It was during our two practices for the talent show that the members of our office staff truly accepted me as one of them. Luckily, I had experience in this endeavor. This would be my 17th consecutive talent show dating back to my senior year in high school. During these 17 previous exposures, I had charge of creating, directing, and planning our group's talent. Usually this involved some sort of skit, coupled with a lip sync, or song and dance routine. This year would be no exception, and I took on the self-appointed role of organizing our group and developing our routine. It was during our second practice that the group dynamics changed, and I was no longer the new person on the block, but their leader. I find it intriguing to discover that the ability to cross-dress and plan a dance routine would be the moment that defined my completed socialization process as the leader of Glade Springs Elementary.

Spring Has Sprung

I continued to place periodic journal articles regarding educational challenges and quality instructional practices in teacher's mailboxes in the spring as I had in the fall semester. I had to use caution in doing this due to the possibility that an overabundance of articles in teachers' mailboxes could inadvertently send the subliminal message that they needed to immediately drop whatever they are teaching, and use the information in the article for their teaching. Of course, that was not my intention, but rather to encourage the reading of educational literature that might contribute to new insights,

ideas, or an adjustment of current practices. We needed to get better as a campus and as

an administrative team. We needed to become reflective practitioners and constantly

work on improving our craft.

These articles provided a forum for teachers to engage in professional reading

and discussion. I was careful not to inundate them with these articles, but twice in the

fall and twice in the spring I copied excerpts or entire articles for their perusal. While I

was a little leery of placing the last article in their boxes in early March due to our state

assessments being right around the corner and teachers feeling a high degree of stress, I

convinced myself that a state assessment does not preclude us from growing

professionally as teachers. With this thought I went ahead and placed our last article of

the year in the mailboxes. Spring break was a week away and that would provide our

teachers a valuable reprieve before testing mania encircled our campus and state. I knew

that many staff members would not participate in the reading of the article, but I wanted

the experience to be voluntary. If we could build the intrinsic motivation with a few

teachers on a grade level, it would spread to their colleagues. Although based on limited

feedback, I was pleasantly surprised that a couple of grade levels even discussed the

article over their lunch period. It is these types of conversations that enable a campus to

build a collegial atmosphere based on adult and student learning.

As the stress of the spring semester was before us I wanted to have yet another

informal assessment piece of how our teachers were adjusting to the changes on our

campus. I placed a spring feedback form in all the teachers' boxes with these three

questions listed: (1) What have you done differently (instructionally) than you did last

year or last semester based on student information and assessment data? (2) What you

have you stopped doing instructionally that you did last year, or last semester? (3) How

do you know you are making progress?

The answers to these three questions would help us gauge how reflective

teachers were in their practices and to assess the instructional changes they were making

because of the particular students in their classroom. The process also suggested to our

staff that we needed to be looking at what works with our children and base our

instruction on their needs as learners. These responses would also be beneficial in

providing us information about many of the instructional techniques teachers use to

make their students flourish academically. We would then be better able to refer other

teachers to particular individuals for support.

Although our math and reading TAKS test were conducted in late April, as the

instructional facilitator of our campus I wanted to make sure that our staff knew that

learning would go on at our campus despite these assessments. After spring break was

completed in mid-March we had three more instructional focus faculty meetings

occurring before the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. In the

last week of March we held a gold faculty meeting that compared our previous scope

and sequence work at Glade Springs in the area of math to our Texas Essential

Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and examined what would most likely be tested on our

new TAKS. This was an important meeting for us to recognize the differences that

would most likely occur on the new, more rigorous state assessment. Our silver team,

consisting of language arts teachers, also met to further define concepts in the area of

writing and what that looks like in our early grades. The literacy teachers met again in early April, and we also held an off-campus curriculum council retreat to develop our campus plan for the next year.

The 2002-2003 school year in Texas was an unusually good year for transitioning to a new campus. It was the first year of implementation for the TAKS test. This was the newer, more rigorous test that assessed the state's new TEKS curriculum. Since the 2002-2003 school year was the baseline year of the TAKS test, the state did not use the scores to determine accountability ratings for campuses and districts across Texas. As an administrator transitioning to a new campus, this provided me a wonderful opportunity to have a year in the principal's chair before the accountability ratings would take effect. I did not feel compelled to overindulge in concerns about our scores and how that would impact our campus. This off-year provided our teachers and administrative team the chance to assess where our strengths lay and to determine what our areas of need were in the area of instruction. It gave us time to adjust to the administrative change, establish routines and procedures, and really focus on becoming a learning organization, rather than an organization that produces good test scores.

The End Is Near

We were all relieved when the long-anticipated new and improved TAKS tests were complete at the end of April, and we now had a real knowledge of the test and what the expectations were for our children. Teachers again become bubbly with enthusiasm

in early May as they became very creative in their approaches to teaching the remaining content in their grade levels. I always pondered what the results would be if we could bottle that enthusiasm and teach as creatively and as relaxed as we do in early May throughout the months of February, March, and April. Teachers are meeting with their colleagues and planning units and themes designed to engage our students in unique ways during the last few weeks of school. You see outdoor camps, experiments, group projects, scientific inquiry, role-play, and other kinesthetic approaches to teaching that typically take a slumber in the early spring.

I also was much more relaxed in my approach to administrating and leading in May. I found myself talking to students more about their school year and personal interests than I did during the preceding months. I also engaged teachers about their plans for the summer, taking a sincere interest in learning about their families. I probably do a much better job of being a good listener at this time than at other times of the school year. The energy level in May is off the charts for teachers and students. It takes a high energy level to keep up with the end-of-school activities that include graduations, the hiring of new staff, assemblies, behavioral opportunities, teacher and parent conferences, staff appraisals, finalizing campus plans, and a vast assortment of other imminent requests and challenges. For some reason, educators always rise to the occasion and handle these situations with great resolve and purpose.

I began the last day of school much like I had started the year of transition at Glade Springs. I was standing next to the bike rack at the front parent loop. The heat was again a factor, yet May in Texas was still much cooler than its older sibling, August.

Instead of carrying a sign that read, "Form one lane, please stay in your vehicle," I was now carrying a travel mug full of a flavored coffee that I had stopped to pick up earlier that morning as a personal treat for withstanding 183 days of exhilaration and opportunity. As the parents drove by and dropped off their children, there were many waves, shouts of "thanks for a great school year," and hugs from parents who were walking their children into the building. I felt a great deal of pride that morning. We had worked through the many tribulations, fears, instructional challenges, celebrations, and emotions that present themselves in the course of a year. The journey was certainly one of excitement and intrigue as I reflected on the first conversation I had with Dr. Miller fifteen months earlier and learned of this possible voyage. I hoped that through my own continued development as a campus administrator and the collegiality we built with our staff, that students were academically enriched and more enlightened and that we had increased the opportunity for our students to become contributing members of our community. Our goal was to profoundly influence these students during the academic year and set them up for future success in school and in life. This chapter marks the end of my story as a principal in transition. Hopefully, through my experiences, the meaning I derived from them, and my self reflection, current and future administrators will be enabled to grow and develop for the benefit of the children we serve.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

This study provided a highly personalized account of a principal in a public school setting transitioning from one campus to another campus in the same district. The purpose of the research was to take an inward glance at a principal in transition and examine the unique challenges of being in this position. An autobiographical perspective lends itself to taking a look at the position of a public school administrator from inside the researcher's point of view. A personal account of the transition process will allow colleagues and educational peers an opportunity to reflect on their own current or future career as principals and grow and develop their own understanding of the complexities, challenges and celebrations associated with the position.

Few studies have been conducted on a principal in transition. The goal of this research is to add to the scant body of knowledge in this area, from the unique perspective of an autoethnography. Examining oneself within a social context, in this case an elementary school, provides a rich perspective about the inner workings and hidden mechanisms behind the decision-making processes the principal undertakes. We must take a look at this position from within to better examine the intricacies of the principalship. I utilized the emerging field of autoethnography to provide the basis of this qualitative study. Through a self narrative, autoethnography connects the personal to the cultural (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Providing an anthropological look at leadership, through the eyes of the participant, should help further the development of the leadership position.

Meaning was derived from the varied artifacts used as tools for this self-study. A reflexive journal was kept, documenting the daily occurrences, feelings and thoughts of the researcher during the process. Faculty agendas, staff memos, personal calendars, and reflective analysis all served as data collection tools. These tools were divided chronologically by the data source and then compiled into a journal. The journal traces the day-to-day interactions, meetings, thoughts, and experiences of the person in the principal's position. This final chapter re-examines the research questions that guided this study, as well as the researcher's summary, implications, and self reflections to promote future phenomenological studies in the area of autoethnography. Readers of this research will find their own storyline through my own lived experience.

Researchers agree that developing meaning in qualitative research is an emergent process. According to Thornton (1993), "unlike with experimental researchers, there is considerable likelihood that qualitative researchers will find things they were not looking for in the first place" (p. 68). As my own self narrative developed and I explored the data I had collected, my analysis of the story changed. My perspective shifted, and the scope of the study developed different borders than I previously anticipated. The meanings that surfaced from my own personal reflection on the data provided new understandings and viewpoints to be developed. If I want to understand my own place in the human interactions of a social context, I must let the themes emerge from my data. Originally, I anticipated my story to be that of the 21st century principal and the complexities of this position that have developed since the early 1990s. However, the deeper I probed into my own tale, I realized the experiences were much

more centered on the trials, tribulations and multifaceted demands required of a principal in transition. It was in the process of transition that occurred from late February in the spring semester before I changed campuses, through the next school year that the story really unfolds. These were critical months in the development of my own character, professional experience, and understanding of the principalship. The change process involved with my new campus and the socialization process I encountered during the school year were integral parts of my journey.

Challenges I Faced at Glade Springs

The first research question was: What challenges did I face upon assuming the principalship at Glade Springs Elementary? The first obstacle I had to confront in assuming the principalship at Glade Springs was the culture that was previously established. Changing a culture is inherently difficult. The unique challenge that this social context provided was for me to find the delicate balance between two former leadership styles that were very divergent. One leadership style was very authoritarian in nature and driven by procedures and rules. The other style of leadership was very lenient, relaxed, and laissez-faire. While both approaches worked well in different settings, it was the conflicting nature of the leadership styles that was problematic. Without a transition process in between, it was a difficult conversion for the faculty of Glade Springs. There was also an inherent belief that one of our disadvantaged communities was a continuous thorn in our side. We needed to change the belief that we are entitled as teachers to have a classroom without diversity, disadvantaged families, or

differences. Our role as teachers should be one of servitude. That is, we must develop a community of acceptance with all of our stakeholders and provide all children the full opportunity to participate in an education that is not exclusionary.

A series of challenges was also encountered prior to my arrival at Glade Springs. These were more emotional barriers I had to work through rather than physical challenges or the embedded cultural characteristics of my new campus. These challenges were self-imposed and derived from my previous experience at Luckett Elementary. I met the initial conversations regarding the administrative change with great trepidation with regard to my colleagues at Luckett Elementary. We had established an environment that was growing and was responding instructionally and collectively to the needs of our school community. Teachers were pleased with the direction of our campus, they were energized, and the focus was on improving the academic success of our students. Parents were very content with the current leadership of our campus (the principal and the academic coordinator), and they deemed our school a safe and pleasant environment to nurture and develop their children. I had developed many close personal and professional relationships on this campus and it was difficult to say farewell. Due to these established relationships I felt the inner turmoil that I was letting the faculty down by leaving after only two and half years in the leadership position. This disequilibrium I experienced proved to be an area that would take a few months to work through based on the analysis of my reflexive journal, personal calendar, and past reflections.

How I Responded to the Challenges

The second question was: How did I respond to these challenges I faced upon assuming the principalship at a new campus? Bullough and Baughman (1997) point out that when discussing the acceptance of change in a new social setting "we also engage in accommodation and create new beliefs, new ways of being in the world in response to new experience. Sometimes these changes are more or less forced upon us; at other times they are openly sought" (p. 75). Luckily, this innate ability of humans to adapt to change was very helpful in my own transition to a new campus. The staff seemed to have the longing and need for change, yet could not articulate what they wanted to be the end result. Change can be positive or negative in an organization and my charge was to decrease the level of dysfunction during this transition.

My first response to change the culture and climate of the campus was to model the behaviors I wanted to support through every interaction I engaged in on the campus. Quoting the greatly used expression, I had to "walk the walk, and talk the talk" in every aspect of my leadership in order to transform the current culture. Campus faculty meetings, dialoguing with teachers, meeting with grade levels, parent conferences, and discussions in the hallway must not stray from the course we charted. Every interaction was to be in line with the goals and vision of our campus and what we hoped to attain for all of our students. This was a difficult task, in that change always provides opportunity for resistance. It was during these stages of resistance that I had to stay the course and remain positive and optimistic. The close relationships with my spouse and assistant principal proved invaluable as a mechanism for voicing my frustrations and

apprehensions in the day-to-day challenges I faced in my new leadership role. These frustrations could not be expressed to the faculty if true buy-in was to occur. I wanted to focus solely on moving the campus forward in a positive manner. Identifying and focusing on the negative attributes of certain staff members to others would not be conducive to moving the school forward. These specific incidents would be addressed on an individual basis.

We also responded to challenges in the transitioning process by making sure we validated teachers who were veterans at Glade Springs. In a social system such as a school there are many isolated episodes of excellence in teaching taking place throughout the building. If the office staff or central administration was experiencing difficulty with individuals with parental concerns, there was also a large faction of the staff at Glade Springs that was not experiencing problems with parents, students, or in the course of educating their students. These teachers and staff members who consistently demonstrated excellence in all facets of their teaching were to be commended. As a new administrative team we knew we must value the previous work of our employees and then extend their new learning.

We also could increase our level of knowledge as principals by maintaining many of the procedures, routines, ideas, and structures from previous administrations that were an asset to the campus. We made great efforts to embrace the past, yet look to the future in our vision for Glade Springs. I relate this effort to the experience of Bob Stoops, the head football coach at the University of Oklahoma. Coach Stoops, immediately upon taking the leadership role of the football program at Oklahoma,

contacted Barry Switzer, the former coach in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and

embraced the program's past successes and national championships. He actively

involved Coach Switzer in building relationships with his players, recognizing past

successes, and highlighting the prominence the program had experienced nationally.

This was his way of acknowledging past contributions and using them as the foundation

for future success. On a much scaled down level, but of greater importance in my view,

we were attempting to replicate the same acceptance of our seasoned teachers and

previous administration and build on that solid foundation. We had to honor our rich

history and look to the future for our continued professional growth.

What Occupied My Time during the Transition

The third research question posed was: What occupied my time in making the

transition? In my opinion the building of relationships is the catalyst for success in most

professional endeavors. In the age of communication, there are not many businesses or

professions where human interaction does not take place via technology or face to face.

This relationship building is a critical component to promote true, systemic

organizational change. Even in systems that are high functioning, the process of change

must be met with open arms to continue to excel. Education and business are forever

adapting and recreating themselves to fit the norms and wants of the people. Although

education seems to be more reluctant in the overall change process than the private

sector, the standards, legalities, and accountability measures dictated by the federal and

state governments are always being updated and implementation is a necessity at the

school level to meet these criteria. To better adapt to ever changing societal norms it is essential that the school is a model of continuing professional growth. Establishing collegial relationships where people feel confident to share their strengths and areas of improvement is a means to achieve professional growth. This collegiality will allow educators a better opportunity to meet state and federal criteria, improve instruction, and adapt to their cultural surroundings much like businesses and corporations have done. Building these relationships is time consuming. Trust has to be established on a mutual level among all members of the culture. Teachers, parents, students, and administrators must build these positive interactions with each other to open the doors for transformation. Great care was taken to arrange meetings and dialogue sessions that provided the opportunity for our staff members to get to know each other on a personal level. This takes an extraordinary amount of time, but the dividends are tremendous. When an administrator makes a continuous effort to hear all the voices that he or she represents, communities can be created that acknowledge and promote difference, work in more collegial ways, and create learning opportunities through instructional dialogue.

What Determined My Priorities

Another research question was: What determined my priorities? An administrator must take a rapid on-the-job course in change when in a leadership position. The nature of the principalship or other position of leadership presents opportunities to impact the culture on a campus with every interaction, memo, or statement the leader makes. Because the leader can affect the organization in a negative or positive light in a single

moment, or matter of minutes, the leader must make critical decisions in determining

which matters are of the highest priority. Placing emphasis on a concern or question that

is predominantly irrelevant to the rest of the staff can quickly swing the pendulum of

change in the wrong direction. Fullan (2001) describes changing the way we do things

in a social setting as reculturing. The principal is in a constant state of reculturing.

Using this criterion as a basis for decision-making, the campus principal must sift

through the varied needs of individuals and the organization to determine what requires

immediate focus and attention. At Glade Springs the decision-making filter that was

utilized was the answer to this question: "Does this decision benefit the child as a person

and student? Or, does it benefit only the adults or teachers?" These questions would be

the foundational basis for decision-making and in determining which concerns,

challenges, or needs had top priority.

Evidence in this type of prioritizing could occur in the middle of a discussion, or

be predetermined with a long term plan. There were many occasions when teachers

would make covert suggestions that "these kids just can't learn" or direct comments that

were in line with this manner of thinking. These conversations were redirected by the

administrative team at that moment to focus on the strategies of the teacher, not the

learner. The question would then become how we change our instructional strategies to

reach this child. What can we do to make this situation better? Other obstacles that

would require immediate attention would be grade level disputes or concerns with other

teachers on the campus. These concerns were encouraged to be voiced with all parties

present. The leadership team would arrange for all teachers involved in such disputes to

meet together without delay and to come to consensus on the area of concern. Problems and challenges would be addressed in a positive, direct manner, and handled professionally without the presence of meaningless banter, innuendo, or hearsay.

Evidence of long term planning to prioritize needs was found in implementing staff development, grade level dialogues off-campus, and in the preparation of possible teacher transitions to different grade levels. These decisions were based on the best interest of the student and establishing a positive collegial atmosphere that valued all learners.

An example of this long term planning was in the opening retreat at Glade Springs. Strategic efforts were made in securing Mr. Giddings, the former principal, to appear at our retreat session to provide support in the implementation of a new district procedure. This honored the experienced staff at Glade Springs, supported the new administration and district initiatives, and demonstrated our commitment to recognize the rich history of this campus and to continue the improvement cycle.

Barriers and Obstacles I Encountered

What barriers and obstacles did I encounter in attempting to cultivate a positive environment and an organization centered on learning? This was the fifth research question posed to help guide this autoethnographical journey. This question ties directly into the previous question regarding determining priorities. The opposing leadership styles I encountered at Glade Springs were a significant obstacle in my efforts to promote a school that focuses on positive parent interactions and culture. One of the

former principals used an video surveillance system to monitor parent communications (this was the red button I removed from under the desk). Another principal ceased to promote many of the campus initiatives implemented by his predecessor, yet did not replace them with new ideas or programs. These campus initiatives seemed to be petrified in time. The teacher-of-the-year wall was a perfect example of this cessation.

There were also personalities that were barriers to promoting a positive school culture. Certain staff members would attempt to sabotage the direction our campus was headed. These individuals would publicly question protocols, send out emails to the entire campus that addresses a particular concern, and do so in a manner that was not conducive to building mutually respectful relationships. The hostility and venomous approach by one or two individuals needed urgent attention. To provide an immediate response, I would adhere to the following protocols. During an all staff faculty meeting I would address the question publicly and then encourage the argumentative teacher to meet with the individuals involved with me present. I would many times schedule this meeting publicly to demonstrate that our leadership team would handle difficult situations and would not shy away from controversy. This public scheduling of an additional meeting with the participants involved would let the staff know that we were dedicated to all members of our staff and would support and work through those concerns or glitches. The same was true when a staff member would send out an all campus email. We would reply to that email in the all campus format on a one-time basis to schedule an appointment to discuss the point of contention.

These were the same behaviors I wanted teachers to model to their own students. If a child was behaving in a way that was not appropriate, our staff members should work through this from a teaching model, and not a punitive stance. Our leadership team would do the same with teachers that were not behaving professionally. We would work through the dilemma by professional means and would not approach the issue from a deficit mentality or punitive approach.

How I Used Accountability Productively

The final research question was: How did I use accountability productively? Due to the new TAKS assessment being in the trial phase for year one, the campus had the unique opportunity to begin laying the groundwork necessary for student success without the immediate pressure of campus accountability ratings. For Glade Springs Elementary this foundation needed to be strengthened by changing the belief system that was substantiated by a significant portion of the campus. Many in our faculty were suffering from the belief that all children do not enter our doors equipped with the background, social upbringing, and educational experiences to be successful students, and that it is not in their job description to provide these skills or attributes. The doctrine that was adhered to by a portion of the faculty was that students must conform to their classroom and their way of teaching. Children of color and students arriving from low-income households are naturally at a disadvantage in our school system due to an education system steeped in many of these traditional values. Our traditional system

is not designed to provide all learners with the tools they need to experience academic success. We also were experiencing this mentality at Glade Springs.

Teachers longed for the perfect class that came to their threshold with all the foundational skills needed to behave in socially acceptable ways (those of a white middle class family) and also the educational background necessary to make them great students. We had to step back from our panacea and realize that our job was to educate all children, and that students come to us from a variety of backgrounds and a variety of needs. The accountability system used in our state was measuring with the correct yardstick. However, it did not provide teachers and administrators with the "three rulers needed for support." Each campus and district has to formulate what this support looks like for these learners before true organizational change will occur and thus produce positive test results. We needed our campus to commit to the goal that we will be successful with racially and ethnically diverse students. We provided our staff with articles of research supporting that an equitable education should be available to all students. These articles were periodically placed in teacher mailboxes for voluntary reading. The thought was that if a core group of individuals would buy in to the belief system that we are obligated to provide our learners the instructional scaffolding necessary for academic success, then we could move our thinking forward. We also discussed this concept in small group instructional dialogues. The focus had to be on the belief system of the teachers before the test results would increase on a year to year basis.

Reaching out to our low-income communities was an instrumental change. We needed to reach out to these children with a different approach. Our campus historically had focused on the deficit features of accountability, and as Skrla (2002) pointed out, the negative pressure accountability places on the job security of principals. This mentality was the focus of our change processes at Glade Springs. Our understanding of accountability also shifted while we were doing the work. Accountability should not be synonymous with state assessments and the AEIS report. Accountability reaches much deeper than test scores and public recognition. Accountability is the effort teachers, administrators, and superintendents make in implementing and utilizing strategies in and out of the classroom that provide all students academic success and affords them an equitable education. It is providing our children an education that is democratic and ensures children of color, disadvantaged families, students with special needs, the affluent, and every child of every parent, the opportunity for a meaningful educational experience. These were Glade Springs' initial steps and efforts in using accountability productively.

Self Reflections

The demands placed on the modern day principal are increasing with great velocity. There is only modest research available that truly encompasses the challenges faced, both externally and internally, by the 21st century principal. One of these key areas is that of principal transition. What are the obstacles, pressures, and challenges facing a principal who is transitioning to a new campus in the same school district? We

must look at the nature of the principalship, through the eyes of the occupant, in order to further its development to meet the ever-changing needs of our society. Providing readers of this research an opportunity to relive the experience evokes their own professional growth and understanding of the complexities involved in the change process. An autoethnographic account seeks to keep the subject (or researcher), and the social context studied in simultaneous view (Ellis, Keisinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997). This type of self-study positions itself as hermeneutical phenomenological encounter with a particular culture. A self narrative presents the greatest opportunity to examine the challenges and experiences of a principal in transition and invite the reader into the setting.

On reflection, I realized that the experience of collecting, analyzing, and organizing the data greatly enhanced my own understanding of the culture in which I worked. Separating myself from the data for a period of time allowed me to take a more objective look at a very personal and intimate subject matter. The study allowed me to draw on my own personal experiences to perhaps assist others in their understanding of my particular context, in this case the campus of Glade Springs Elementary.

Recommendations

I would be intrigued to look further at autoethnographical works in the area of educator transition. What are the experiences of principals, central office administrators, and superintendents as they transition to upper level leadership roles and even retirement from the profession? This research has not only provided a deeper understanding of my

own experience for others and myself, but I hope that it enhances the acceptance of this form of qualitative inquiry for other professionals involved in educational research. As Harry Wolcott (2003) described nearly forty years ago in his description of ethnography, "researchers want to have a look around at what people in some other group are doing, or what people in their own group are doing, and sometimes even at what the researchers themselves are doing and feeling" (p. vii). It is in this vein that I hope my contribution supports the efforts of other researchers to look around at what they themselves are doing and feeling in a particular culture and relive these experiences to support their own growth and benefit others.

Epilogue

While transition is an ongoing process, the early phases of the transition are the most critical for a principal. The first few months of an administrative change are crucial in transforming and shaping a system. In my own transition story I was fortunate to have a preconceived vision of our journey's ultimate destination. However, I wasn't certain of the path that would lead to our success. There were certain behaviors I expected of our staff that were non-negotiable for me in the realm of school leadership. These fixed criteria were: (1) all children would be given every opportunity for meaningful learning; (2) staff members would treat all students, parents, and colleagues with integrity and respect; (3) as a school leader, I would provide an environment that promoted adult and student learning; and (4) every interaction and decision I made as

the campus principal would be treated with dignity, courtesy, and based on student learning.

Three school years after my initial inquiry into my experiences as a transitioning principal I have enhanced my theories and constructions of the principalship. For me the archiving of past thoughts, memories, and reflections proved to be a supreme form of analysis. Although our campus has many rungs to climb on the ladder of meaningful change, we have made great strides. Through improvements in our state assessment data (TAKS), we have increased our overall accountability rating from an acceptable status in the year prior to the administrative transition to consecutive years of reaching the recognized level as determined by the Texas Education Agency. This success is highlighted by the performance of 12 students, who did not meet the standards on the math portion of the third grade 2002 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test (TAAS); 11 of these children were African-American and economically disadvantaged. Ten of these students passed the more rigorous 2003 math portion of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). With the support of our central administration, the willingness of our teachers to try new approaches, and the reinforcement of our vision at Glade Springs, we were able to make incremental steps in the academic development of our students.

In our fourth year as the administrative team at Glade Springs we have seen our chief antagonist from three years ago become one of our strongest supporters. The "flamethrower" emails we witnessed in our first semester at Glade Springs dwindled to extinction after a few months. Through an insider's vantage point I have chronicled and

traced the experiences of my own administrative transition. The bumps, roadblocks, and emotional bruises encountered along the way have enabled me to grow as a leader and learner. Although the tangles I have encountered are many, they pale in comparison to the celebrations, successes, and learning I have experienced along the way. My hope is that this story, my story, has provided the reader a peek into the soul of a campus, principal, and system that was negotiating change. Through the structure of a story I want to provide current and future principals an opportunity to relive my experience and perhaps enhance their own practice.

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VITA

Carl Henry Dethloff
17334 Sioux Springs
College Station, TX 77845

Education

2005   Doctor of Philosophy
        Educational Administration
        Texas A&M University

1992   Master of Arts and Teaching
        Austin College

1991   Bachelor of Arts
        Kinesiology
        Austin College

Professional Organizations

Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development