Balancing the Role of the Principalship: Creating and Sustaining Equity and Excellence in an Accountability World

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A Dissertation Submitted to

The Faculty of
The Graduate School of Education and Human Development
of the George Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education

May 15, 2016

Dissertation directed by

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The Graduate School of Education and human Development of The George Washington University certifies that Arronza M. LaBatt has passed the Final Examination for the degree of Doctor of Education as of February 26, 2016. This is the final and approved form of the dissertation.

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Acknowledgements

"Are we there yet?" One simple question that is most often associated with a long car trip and small children in the backseat. For me, this has been the anthem from my husband, daughters, extended family, friends, and colleagues for the past seven years. I started this process to fulfill a personal and professional goal. It became a journey that has brought me so much more than another degree and one more title for my resume.

I want to acknowledge my friends and colleagues that have been a source of inspiration. Cohort 10, thank you for the comradery and friendly competitive spirit throughout this experience that challenged all of us to climb this mountain. I especially want to recognize Betty, Helen, and Anne Marie who completely understood the demands of my job and the balancing act of family, work, and school. Thank you Betty for all the rich discussions to and from class on those Friday and Saturdays. I could not have known that when we met at my interview for an instructional specialist position in your office 14 years ago, that you would become my inspiration to grow and learn as an educator and become my closest friend and mentor. You continue to inspire me each day and I am so proud and honored to call you my friend.

Thank you to Troy and Denise, the best gladiators to have by my side. Your deep knowledge of instruction, leadership, cultural proficiency, and equity assisted me in grounding the research in culture, practice, and leadership. Thank you for your friendship and support through this long and sometimes arduous journey. We met as colleagues, became friends, and evolved into family. Thanks for always having my back!

My sincere appreciation to Dr. Abebayehu Tekleselassie and Dr. Nicholas Paley. You always created an open and positive space for our cohort to engage in rich

discussions and explore the possibilities of our leadership practices. Your commitment to each of our success and us was evident in your interactions and the ease with which you practiced the art and science of teaching and learning in and out of the classroom. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to grow as a professional and a researcher under your tutelage.

To my participants, thank you for opening your schools and classrooms to my inquiring mind. You gave of your time and trusted me to tell your stories. I hope that I have done them justice and honored you and your work in the telling.

I have to acknowledge the members of my committee. Dr. Patricia Ehrensal, for your early participation as my advisor and introducing me to portraiture as a methodology. It provided me the voice to engage in this study. Dr. Jennifer Clayton, thank you for stepping in to serve as the chair of my committee. You believed in me right from the beginning. Thank you for your commitment and dedication to read my work, provide clear and specific feedback, and challenge my thinking. You have brought me to this day. Dr. Lionel Howard, I am grateful for all of the hours you have read my drafts and being my guide through portraiture. You have been consistent in your attention to the details and pushing my thinking to make clear connections between the data and my impressions. I know the final product is better because of your feedback. Dr. Daniel Dukes, thank you for always bringing a practitioner perspective to your critique of my research and writing. I appreciate the time you have spent reading my work and bringing me to this point. Dr. Jocelyn Drakeford and Dr. Kelly Sherrill, thank you for serving as readers on my committee, bringing fresh eyes, and insight on my participants and methodology through your questioning.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my family. Thank you for your patience, your support, the little snacks and coffee, and great big hugs and kisses when I was too focused and yes, too stubborn, to take a break. To my daughters, Alyx, Nia, and Brooke, this body of research is for you, and all the children like you, who show up and have experiences that fail to maximize your potential. For the times I rushed off the phone in the middle of one of your stories, brought my laptop to write at your competitions, and was just too tired to come up and tuck you in and snuggle at night, thank you for staying the course. You all bring me so much joy in the beautiful, spirited, and passionate young people you are and are becoming. Thank you for understanding the mission, believing in me, and trusting me every time I said, "We're almost there."

Mom, thank you for always having an encouraging word when I felt close to the edge. You have been the best role model, cheerleader, and supporter throughout my childhood and professional career. I do not know I could have achieved any of my goals without your support and love.

Last, but not least, to my husband, Brian, thank you for saying yes to my desire to achieve this goal and for all the times you had to take the girls to Friday night dance class, pack snacks and leotards, and be the only Dad there with all the women while I went to class. Thank you for almost always understanding the late nights, and time away from the family as I worked towards this goal. You are my rock and light that has kept it all together!

Since beginning this process, there have been important dates and little moments that I cannot recreate. As I focused on the next chapter, or reading and analyzing the transcript from the last interview, I know you may have felt abandoned and orphaned, but

know that I am forever grateful that each of you never gave up on me and encouraged me to forge ahead. So the answer to your question, "Are we there yet?" is "Yes, we have arrived!" And I am all the better for it since we all were on the journey together.

Abstract of Dissertation

Balancing the Role of the Principalship: Creating and Sustaining Equity and Excellence in an Accountability World

This study examined the interrelationships between principal beliefs and expectations on the principal's capacity to create the conditions for equity and excellence that result in increased student achievement for all students. The study population consisted of three elementary school principals with demonstrated success in increasing student achievement for all students in the selected schools during the fall and winter of the 2015-2016 academic year. Data included semi-structured interviews, participant shadowing, and artifacts observed or collected during the study period. Using the portraiture methodology, collected data informed the development of portraits of the participants to answer the research question "How do personal beliefs, organizational structures, and decision-making processes influence principal practice in leading for equity?" The study found that these three principals demonstrated democratic ethical leadership practices influenced by their personal and professional experiences. The research concluded with the construction of parallels between principal beliefs and the organizational structures and processes they employ to support equity and excellence for all students.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Every school has a story orchestrated through the decision-making processes, behaviors, and actions of its leader. The story of each school is unique and visualized through the images of its cast of characters, setting, and the forces at play that create the storyline. Creating the climate, structures and practices for academic success of all students in an increasingly diverse student population is a challenge faced by school principals (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Howard, 2010; USDOE, 2010). Alarmingly, national reports on education, including but not limited to academic achievement, discipline, suspensions, and graduation rates show disparities by race (Schott Foundation, 2009; USDOE, 2014). Educational disparities once examined by both race and income, show predictable trends by race that indicate income alone is not sufficient to explain gaps in student performance (Bankston & Caldas, 1998; Schott Foundation, 2009). In an effort to address the increasing disparities in student achievement, educational policymakers have contributed to a climate where school leaders are faced with the critical task of achieving equity-based educational excellence and balancing instruction that prepares all students for state criterion and achievement tests (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Shapiro, 2009; Valencia, 2010).

In the 21st century, educational theorists and practitioners have embarked on a re-conception of schools through the lens of social justice (Apple & Beane, 2007; Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Giroux & McLaren, 1992; Marshall & Oliva, 2009; Theoharis, 2008). The working definition of social justice considered in this study is the promotion of behaviors and distribution of resources that eliminates inequalities

and advances the rights and education for all children (Griffiths, 1998; Theoharis, 2008). A concern among advocates for social justice is that principals are not adequately prepared to lead and create schools that promote equity and excellence for all students in the face of increasing accountability pressures (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Spring, 2008). As the instructional leader, the role of the principal is to advocate on behalf of all students, to create a school climate and culture that ensures all students achieve at the highest levels, without oppressing or neglecting others (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fullan, 2005; Normore, 2004; Purpel & Shapiro, 1995; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

Educational equity and excellence and the concept of social justice sometimes intertwine as they refer to an ideal state in which academic performance is not predictable by race or ethnicity (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Valencia, 2010). However, the reality is that the lived experiences of students often differ from these ideals of educational equity and excellence. Although accountability has become an essential component of educational policy reform, there are no set standards for social justice in education (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). To better meet diverse student needs, educators need to rethink leadership practices and commit to ethically transformative leadership and strategies for social justice to create equitable outcomes for all students (Brown, 2004; Marshall & Oliva, 2009, Marzano, 2003; Orr, 2006; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

By focusing so heavily on standardized testing as a metric for accountability, and by attaching high-stakes consequences to the results of these tests, educational policy has created a narrow definition of educational success (Bogotch, 2002; Leithwood, 2001;

Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Shapiro, 2009). The overemphasis on 'teaching to the test' has led to narrower and weaker curricula. While these dynamics are affecting students nationwide, they have been especially damaging for students of color and students with disabilities (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Schott Foundation, 2009, 2013; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004). The unintended consequence of the increased accountability and narrowed curricula has been increased student disengagement and alienation for all students and racial disparities in academic achievement and discipline (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Leithwood, 2001; NCES, 2001). Institutional practices designed to address lower-performing students and discipline concerns may further disengage students, resulting in an increased achievement gap with the tracking of students in to lower-level coursework (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Shapiro, 2009). Instead of increasing student achievement for all students, the increased accountability may have contributed to less engaging and more rigid learning environments that do not best meet the needs of all students, particularly students of color (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The result is a school culture or climate that does not align with the conditions for social justice.

Studies indicated the variance in the knowledge, skills, and beliefs of teachers and administrators for equitable instruction and providing rigorous instruction and curriculum for all students impedes principals' ability to foster conditions for social justice (Blair, 2002; Childress, 2009; Collins, 2001; Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994; Lopez, Magdaleno & Reis, 2006; Norte, 1999; Sather, 1999; Theoharis, 2004, 2010; Walker & Dimmock, 2005; Ward, 2011). The enactment of federal legislation has increased accountability measures for principals to address the disproportionality in achievement, regardless of a student's race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (De Abreu & Elbers, 2005; Gardiner

and Enomoto, 2006; Lee & Wong, 2004; Taylor & Singh, 2005; Walker, 2003). To meet these accountability demands, principals must begin to engage in leadership practices that develop culturally responsive school environments that have a high commitment to improving achievement for all students. This study examined the connections between principal's beliefs and expectations and their social justice leadership practices that result in equitable and excellent schools.

Literature Gap

Past studies have examined institutional practices, such as multicultural leadership, culturally responsive teachers, and democratic learning environments that have contributed to a school climate and culture that result in social justice, but there remains a need to examine how leadership practices contribute to the attainment of equity and excellence for all students (Norte, 1999; Riehl, 2000; Walker 2003). Studies also have analyzed the influence of federal legislation and accountability measures on school practices and school operations without consideration of the efforts of the school leader to ensure sustainable implementation of equitable and excellent school practices and operations (Goddard, 2007; Lee & Wong, 2004; Taylor & Singh, 2005). Current research on social justice in education also focuses on the characteristics of principals identified as successful leaders for social justice, including arrogant humility; passionate visionary leadership; commitment to social justice; collaborative and empowering leadership; high expectations or beliefs; and positive relationships with students, parents, and communities (Canfield-Davis, Gardiner, & Joki, 2009; Theoharis, 2008).

The literature created a strong argument necessitating social justice leadership to attain academic achievement for all students. There remains a need to know more about

the decision-making process used by principals to identify and enroll others in the implementation of school practices and operations that result in equitable and excellent schools (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Riehl 2000; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2010; Walker & Dimmock, 2005). Educational equity is achieved through social justice in action. Social justice then serves as a broader context for equity and excellence with equity achieved through the distribution of resources in a fair and just way and excellence attained through the improvement of education of all students. Thus, an effective study of leadership for equitable and excellent schools must include an analysis of the characteristics and intentional practices and processes deployed by principals that explicitly create an equitable and excellence school context, while balancing the factors that influence or affect the context of the school (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability policies structures, and processes).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to capture the beliefs, structures, and decision-making processes of three elementary school principals that influence their principal practice and have resulted in educational equity and excellence for students in their schools. This study focused on addressing the following research questions:

1. What are principals' beliefs and decision-making processes, and the school structures that support equity and excellence for all students?
2. How do elementary principals balance the role and responsibilities of school leadership and negotiate the school context (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability measures) to support equity and excellence for all students?

Statement of Potential Significance

The development of highly skillful educational leaders committed to leading for equity is essential to developing sustainable change of school cultures that value all students as learners. Brown (2004) and Marshall & Oliva (2009) highlighted the gap between theory and practice or the transformation of the cognitive delivery of knowledge to the attitude and skills that effectively allow the principal to develop a sustainable culture of equity. This study will enable school leaders to closely examine the links between principal beliefs and expectations and the strategic leadership practices and principles of planning that address the political, social, and economic constructs of today's school. By critically analyzing the principals' beliefs and decision-making processes, the study provides insight on how school leaders balance and negotiate accountability measures in ways that facilitate equitable and excellent schools. This research explored the intentional processes and practices used by three principals to lead from a social justice perspective, promote, and sustain a culture of educational equity and excellence for all students.

Theoretical Framework

This research study utilized critical inquiry theory as the epistemological philosophy along with a constructivist and interpretative research design for data collection and analysis. Critical inquiry theory is a cyclical process of reflection and action focused on issues of power and oppression (Crotty, 2004). It explores the relationship between power and culture and questions the status quo of commonly held beliefs and values that contribute to institutionalized policies and practices that maintain the marginalization of specific populations Habermas (1973; 1987). Issues of oppression,

domination, suppression, alienation, and hegemony are often at the center of studies using this approach. Frequently, approaches to the research employ narratives and ethnographic studies.

Grounded in the ideas of critical theory, the collective work of Habermas (1987), Freire (1970), Giroux (1981), and McLaren (1985) provides evidence that the social construction of school environments can deemphasize dominative relationships and focus on the inclusion of the conscious and unconscious beliefs, behaviors, and values that contribute to equitable and excellent schools. Further, the organizational culture of schools contributes to the academic achievement of all students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Purpel & Shapiro, 1995).

Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theory of social reproduction focused on the replication of societal disadvantages and inequalities in school structures that perpetuate barriers that create inequitable experiences for students. Therefore, according to the theory of social reproduction, schools can create a culture for success or failure of students. While democratic theory addresses participation, critical theory sets expectations for true and honest communication responsive to public needs (Habermas, 1987). Thus, I thought it important to consider critical theory as this study questions the boundaries of the social structures that influence current administrative roles and practices.

Giroux (1981) and Freire (1970) addressed the separation of the individual from the sociopolitical and cultural context of the school environment, stressing the importance of the principal extending beyond his/her own boundaries to become equipped with the discursive knowledge of other cultures, languages, and social constructs in order to

effectively serve as an advocate for social justice and equity. Giroux (1981) and Shapiro (2009) both discussed the contradictory nature of schools where the prevailing forms of knowledge, values, and social relationships do not exist in the larger society, but are demonstrative of prevailing dominant economic arrangements; resulting in the silencing of the voices of students, their cultural heritage and values, by the social construction of schools. Additionally, Giroux (1981) and Shapiro (2009) called for increased pressure on schools to make learning more relevant and connected to the outside world based on student experiences and less result-oriented. They argued the importance of students understanding the social function of knowledge that is practical as opposed to technical knowledge, measured, quantified, and evaluated by intelligence quotients and scores to sort, regulate, and control students. In order to create and sustain schools that produce responsible citizens, these critical theorists charged leaders with the responsibility of recognizing and valuing the diversity of language, race, and socioeconomics rather than engaging in sorting and dominative patterns of interactions.

McLaren (1985) proposed schools potentially function as a means to empower students and sustain, legitimize and reproduce dominant values. Similarly, to Freire (1970), McLaren suggested that attainment of a better quality of life should not be exploitative of class, race, or gender. While the politics and setting of schools embrace a culture based on the social construction of children to dominant values, McLaren charged principals and leaders with the responsibility to demonstrate resistance to conformity and sustain their personal commitment, values, and beliefs to create and sustain schools that promote equity for all. Leaders for equity should question pedagogical practices and structures that devalue others.

Critical theory provides a framework for analyzing many sides of issues related to inequities associated with class, race, and gender. Habermas (1987) provided a basis for examining the relationship between technical and practical knowledge. His work influenced that of Freire (1970), Giroux (1981), and McLaren (1985) which examined elements that contribute to the social construction of schools that maintain the marginalization of students, as well as serve as barriers to creating and sustaining equitable and excellent schools. As this study focused on the decision-making processes of a leader successful in creating an equitable and excellent school, the analysis of the context of the school contributed to telling the story behind the success of the leader. Finally, the inclusion of critical theory was important to establishing a framework for analyzing the dynamic interplay between leadership practice and the organizational structure in an equitable and excellent school.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this dissertation considered factors that contribute to principal practice that lead to educational equity and excellence for all students. Research indicated that these factors contribute to how principals define their roles and engage in leadership practice that result in educational equity and excellence for all students (Canfield-Davis et al., 2009; Theoharis, 2008; Goddard, 2007; Walker, 2003). Leadership practice is a dynamic and responsive relationship that is at times bi-directional. The first factor, supported in research on social justice leaders and equitable and excellent schools is personal beliefs (Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Shapiro, 2009; Theoharis, 2004, 2010). The second factor, based on federal and state educational policy and national reports on student achievement related to race and

ethnicity, is accountability measures (Bogotch, 2002; Schott Foundation, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2010, 2014). The third and fourth factors, democratic leadership, and ethical-decision making are interrelated and form the basis for the structures and processes that contribute to the organizational culture for equity-based educational excellence and high academic achievement for all students (Apple & Beane, 2007; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Purpel & Shapiro, 1995; Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

Democratic leadership entails flexibility and responsiveness to change rather than rigid formal structures that do not take into consideration the diverse needs of students, particularly in diverse social contexts (Apple & Beane, 2007; Dewey, 1916). Parallel to democratic leadership is the concept that ethical decision-making derives from the ethical and moral values of the leader (Strike, 2007). Burns (1978) argued that leaders have to operate at a higher need and value level than those of their followers, transcending their self-interests to motivate and inspire others to act in moral and just manners.

Ethical leaders serve others, are just, honest, and build community to treat others in ways that are just and care for others. Therefore, the ethical leader is instrumental, through the demonstration of their beliefs, in constructing the school environment to meet the diverse needs of the students (Strike, 2007). Consideration of both democratic and ethical leadership is relevant to this study as the study was designed to establish the relationship between principal behaviors and actions and the construction of a school environment that balance accountability by minimizing structures of power and oppression to meet the individual diverse needs of students.

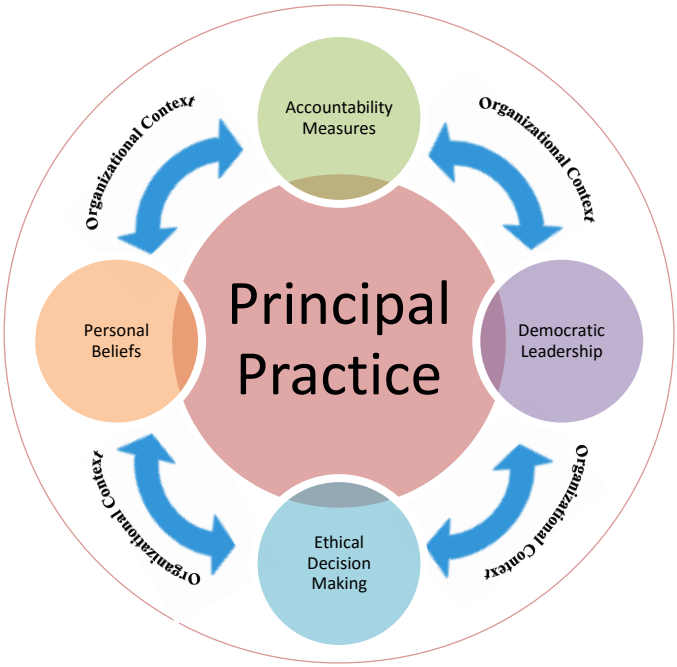

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework of Leaders for Equitable and Excellent Schools

The conceptual model presented in Figure 1.1 describes the research foundation that guided this study. The primary goal of this study was to elevate the intersectionality of principal beliefs and values with intentional structures and processes of principal practice that contribute to an organizational context of educational equity for all students. By examining principal practice, interviewing principals about their beliefs about instruction related to their leadership practices for social justice and educational equity and excellence, and analyzing the findings, school leaders will develop knowledge and skills to identify strategic planning, and implementation processes to support social justice, equity, and excellence for all students.

Methodology

The narrative research methodology is described "...as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (Creswell (2012, p. 17). To investigate how principals negotiate the complex organizational context of schools, a specific type of narrative methodology, portraiture, was used (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This research methodology focuses on gathering data through collections of stories, and reporting individual experiences. Portraiture produces a written description of an individual dealing with challenges to capture the essence of the experience by "portraying the individual in the job they do, the challenges they face, and how they are tackling them" (Bottrey, Ping, Wright, & Ngai, 2009, p. 84).

The selection of this type of narrative approach allows for the contextualization of the school context and provides the interviewee to engage in a reflective process with me on how they negotiate the organizational culture of schools. For the purpose of this study, the researcher sought to understand the process of leadership for equity through the perspective of the selected administrators along with artifacts and observation of each school's context. The use of artifacts and observations of each school's context provided data that was analyzed using a coding process to identify patterns of behavior that facilitate an understanding of how each principal enacted her role within the school context to cultivate an equitable and excellent school environment for all students.

Assumptions

The underlying assumptions of this study were that the selected schools and school leaders were committed to establishing a school culture that embodies equitable

practices, and that a relationship exists between the organizational culture, policies, and practices that contribute to high academic achievement across all student demographic groups. The assumption was that the participants were responsible for the success of the school in addressing disproportionality in student achievement and leadership of this work.

Delimitations

The research was limited to three elementary school principals whose schools have demonstrated a four-year trend of school improvement in which student academic outcome data was not predictable by race or ethnicity. Although accountability for academic achievement that is not predictable by race or ethnicity is not limited to elementary schools, principal leadership to influence institutional practices and climate differs in elementary and secondary schools. Setting a tone and developing a vision for student achievement and professional learning is present in schools that demonstrate high student achievement, K-12 (Leithwood, 2001; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Principals in elementary schools are more likely to engage in instructional actions that entail explicit steps to engage with individual teachers about their own professional growth as compared to secondary schools. A key finding cited in a study of elementary and secondary principals is that secondary school principals indicated that the competing interests of managing operations of the building leaves little time for instructional leadership (Brookover, et al., 1978; Leithwood et al, 2004). Instead, these secondary principals rely on assistant principals, department heads, and other teacher leaders to provide the intentional and specific feedback needed to influence equitable outcomes for

student learning (Leithwood et al, 2004). Infrequent provision of instructional leadership by principals, especially at the secondary school level, leaves little room for dialogue about teaching and learning between leaders and followers necessary to influence equitable teaching and learning practices that foster social justice (Leithwood et al, 2004; Marzano, 2003). The different leadership roles of principals in elementary and secondary schools, influences the transferability of this study in a secondary school where the principal may less likely enact a direct role in setting both the vision and accountability for actions that drive the conditions for social justice.

The study also was bounded to the role of the principal as opposed to that of a superintendent or assistant principal. The principal is the administrative leader at the local level. Although the superintendent has responsibility for establishing policy and procedure at a district level, local operations in the school fall under the duties and responsibilities of the principal. Similarly, the assistant principal shares responsibility for implementation of policy and procedures at the school building, but expectations of the principal limits their authority. The principal therefore became the unit of analysis in this study as they hold the power and authority for developing the capacity of others to negotiate the organizational space of the school.

Limitations

Participants were aware that interviews and shadowing of processes that contribute to a school culture that supports equity and excellence would inform the study findings. This might have influenced their behaviors and willingness to be honest about the processes each deployed in their role as principal. This awareness may have also limited the reliability of their responses. To alleviate this concern, I used a

confidentiality statement. Additionally, generalizability is not feasible as the study examined a small subset of principals.

Subjectivity Statement

The researcher is a resident, administrator, and former staff developer in the school district of the study. There was a concern for potential researcher bias, as the researcher was involved in designing, delivering, and monitoring components of professional development for leadership development programs in the school district. Portraiture, as a qualitative research methodology is a subjective process in which the researcher acknowledges the extent to which his or her perspective informs the vision of the subject (Dixson, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As an African American female, parent, and school district employee, my personal experiences in dealing with issues of equity created the potential for bias. To address this concern, I developed a "Researcher Identity Memo."

Trustworthiness

To limit researcher bias and increase the validity of the work, the study relied on multiple data sources and methods of data collection (Merriam, 2002). While the findings of this research contributed to an analysis of the decision-making processes, policies, and actions of the selected principals, and the context of the school environments, it also considered the analysis of other competing factors including accountability measures that focus primarily on student outcome data.

Definition of Key Terms

Accountability is described as providing a common set of explicit expectations for student achievement for all student groups that is not based on deficit assumptions; focuses public attention on achievement gaps; provides data transparency to multiple and varied stakeholders; and focuses district and school leaders on their responsibility for educating equitably all students and holding them accountable for achieving equity and excellence (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004).

Achievement gap refers to the disproportionality of student academic outcomes that are predictable by race, specifically the gap in achievement between African American and Hispanic students and their white and Asian peers. (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Cultural Competence denotes the will and the ability to form authentic and effective relationships across differences (Howard, 2006). It is about choice and skill. In the context of school, authenticity invokes trust in students and stakeholders and effective means that the relationships result in students learning and having access to successful endeavors.

Deficit thinking "blames the victim" for school failure instead of examining how schools are structured to prevent poor students and students of color from learning (Valencia, 2010).

Democratic learning environments derive from the policies and practices of a school or values and behaviors of an individual that allow authentic and effective relationships to occur in a culturally diverse environment (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Shapiro, 2009).

Educational equity is defined as the transformed ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every learner—in whatever learning environment that learner is found—has the greatest opportunity to learn enhanced by the resources and supports necessary to achieve competence, excellence, independence, responsibility, and self-sufficiency for school and for life (Skrla et al., 2004). It is the equitable educational treatment of all, regardless of race or class that eliminates the predictably of academic performance by race, ethnicity, or culture (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Valencia, 2010). As a result, equity in educational outcomes results when students of color succeed in any of a variety of measures relative to their representation in the student population (Bauman, Bustillos, Bensimon, Brown III, & Bartee, 2005).

Excellence refers to measurements of achievement for historically underrepresented students. Key characteristics include setting high expectations and goals for student learning and demonstrating a commitment to helping all students to achieve high standards of performance. The goal is to develop the talents of individual students to their fullest, and expect, and assist all students to push their personal limits to work to make the most of their talents and abilities. In addition to goals that are set at high expectations for success, adopted policies prepare citizens for skill development that will

allow them to be successful and competitive in the challenges of an evolving global society (A Nation At Risk, 1983; Valencia, 2010).

School context is defined in several ways in the literature. For the purpose of this study, school context is defined in terms of the following four dimensions: 1) ecology (physical and material aspects); 2) milieu (social dimension created by the characteristics of groups of persons); 3) culture (social dimension created by belief systems, values, cognitive structures, and meaning) and 4) social system (social dimension created by the relationships of persons and groups) (Taguiri, 1968)

Social justice will refer to the practices and structures that contribute to improved access of marginalized populations to various school programs and activities. Consideration for social justice and equity originates from various perspectives—political, economic, opportunity, and results (Brown, 2004; Marshall, 2004; Theoharis, 2008).

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter Two focuses on providing an overview of research on the political and social construction of schools and an examination of the leading for equity and excellence paradigm, including the impact of the organizational culture of schools and the characteristics of the leader on attainment of equity and excellence. Chapter Three describes the portraiture methodology that used to conduct the study, my rationale for employing qualitative methods, and an overview of the coding process. In Chapter Four, individual portraits of each principal describethe demographics of the study participants, their school contexts, and their principal practices in leading for educational equity.

Chapter Five provides a composite portrait of the study participants and the themes that run across the three portraits. Finally, in Chapter Six I present the summary of the findings; discussion of the findings; recommendations for further research; the intersectionality of equity, excellence, social justice, and democratic education; and implications for practice, and conclusions.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

> "Strong leadership sets the tone for the whole community. It creates the ethos that makes clear exactly what a school stands for and what it's trying to achieve." (Kelly, 2005b) as cited in Leadership and the Reform of Education (Gunter, 2012, p. 18)

Introduction

The context of each school is influenced by the vision and direction of its leader. As America's population has become increasingly diverse, principals face increasing challenges to meet the academic and social needs of today's students. Research that analyzes the intentional practices and processes deployed by principals that explicitly create an equitable and excellence school context in an era of accountability has become critically important, as educational leadership programs have not focused on the necessary knowledge and skills to lead instructional staff in the improvement of school-wide achievement. While this study focused on examining how a limited subset of elementary school principals engage in leadership practices to cultivate school environments that address the racial achievement gap, it is important in the literature review to develop a context for equitable and excellent schools including an examination of school leadership, staff, and organizational factors (i.e. policies, structures, and processes). These reviews provided the basis for generating the conceptual framework for this study that incorporated theoretical perspectives utilized in the development of educational policies and practices that foster equity and excellence in education.

This chapter provides a review of related literature fundamental to an examination of decision-making processes of principals that promote a culture of equity and excellence. Two major themes guided the review of literature: 1) an examination of elements of the changing narrative on the social construction of schools from one of

power and authority to flexible and dynamic environments that support equity and excellence for all students, and 2) an examination of the characteristics and leadership practices of principals that balance the high standards of accountability with creating equitable and excellent schools for all students. The literature review included searches for the following terms and phrases: leadership, school leadership, social justice leadership, educational equity, equity, cultural proficiency, closing the achievement gap, leadership for social justice, educational policy for closing the achievement gap, characteristics of leaders for social justice, conditions for social justice, and challenges to equity. The year bounding of literature included in this study was 1980-2015, with the exception of primary sources related to early educational theorists (i.e. Dewey). Research resources included journal articles, books, presentations, and national reports. I utilized Boolean searches and text archives, including JSTOR and ERIC.

Purpose of School

> What we now witness is that schooling with its attention to extrinsic results has become everything; education and its concern for our life's engagement with ideas that might provide insight into who we are and how we are living hardly exist. (Shapiro, 2009, p. 13)

Historically, the primary focus of schools was to establish social order and mainstream vast numbers of immigrant children into a common school setting to produce economically competent, democratic, and moral citizens (Dewey, 1916). These ideas reinforced the role of education as a study in control and power, constructed on relationships that emphasize structures that weed out undesirables (Dewey, 1916; Johnson, 1972; Spring, 1989). However, the landscape of schools has changed since 1945 when the central goal of American schooling emphasized was to ensure economic power (Spring, 1989). Along with the diverse shifts in political, societal, and economic

values that accompany increased cultural diversity, significant changes in educational legislation have increased accountability on state and local levels to close the achievement gap, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. To balance the challenging crisis of meeting high academic accountability standards for all students, principals must be able to lead for equity and excellence.

Schools are designed to provide a structure for delivering amassed knowledge to students. They are organized around specific interdependent tasks and the intersection of resources, knowledge, and management. Instruction consists of varied predesigned experiences to acclimate students to the cultural practices of society and develop their understanding of schemas, or rules (Sewell, 1992). Accountability for planning, communicating, coordinating, and evaluating all institutional processes lies with the principal (Fullan, 2005). Current standards-based education reforms and the *No Child Left Behind (2002)* (NCLB) require all children to attain minimal standards of proficiency. In schools, it is the responsibility of the administrator to select highly qualified teachers and staff and build their capacity to deliver high quality instruction to all students.

The leadership and management of institutional practices and policies create a pattern or structure that allows the organization to conduct, coordinate, and control its activities (Jackson & Morgan, 1982). Although the establishment of clear organizational practices and policies is important, constantly evolving organizational structures create a system where inflexible and rigid structures, practices, and policies minimize individuality, undermine creativity and ownership of growth, and contribute to a uniform approach to interactions and supporting individuals. Shapiro (2009) and Strike (2007)

argued that educational leaders must begin to shift their emphasis from administrative skills to being capable of articulating an ethical and social vision for their schools that speaks to the organizational culture they wish to create for everyone involved. The following educational discourses present the counter-narrative that frames thinking on the purpose of schools and education.

Democratic Education

Dewey (1916) emphasized democratic education as a backdrop for inclusivity, an educational process necessary for life, aimed at continuous growth and learning, reflective of the world in which it occurs, that serves as a liberator of the oppressed. Thus, schools that function from this perspective of education instead of schooling, empower socialized structures to create alternative outcomes for learners. Instead of confining the learning environment, social structures develop opportunities for recipients to construct their own learning of societal expectations. Particularly, the structure of democratic schools is not a limiting factor to exert power and authority, but instead allows agency to prevail over structure as the learner navigates the environment to make decisions. In a self-governing democracy, students who develop, as freethinkers are better prepared as citizens, to overcome structures that may inhibit them from engaging in social action and reform.

Apple and Beane (2007) also presented the case for democratic schools, alternatives to traditional school experiences tied to policies guided by high-stakes testing, strict regimes of accountability, standardized curriculum, and lock-step pedagogy (p. vii). Their major argument was that the alternatives offered by democratic schools contribute to a substantive and rich education, anchored in a concern for the dignity and

rights of individuals and minorities, a concern for the welfare of others and the "common good" that reduce alienation of students and teachers and mitigated the subjugation of traditional schooling described by Foucault (1991).

When education becomes an operationalized social construct, it can serve many purposes. In some cases, prescribed by the previously presented discourses, rigid structures of power and authority can allow for the mass dissemination of a common message through a similar lens. In contrasting settings, it can provide the platform for individuals to struggle with contradicting values and beliefs to make their own decisions for values and practices to become acceptable norms. The reality is that the school environment has become a strict and rigid social construct that discourages independent and freethinking that liberates youth to explore and create knowledge. Rather than creating a balanced environment, the school environment has contributed to the mass production of like behaved, like thinking, champions for a predetermined role in society.

Drawing from Habermas to examine Young (1990), educational administration provides a contrasting vision for the social function of education as one of hope and possibility. The emphasis on diversity rather than conformity supported three constructs: understanding the context, examining belief systems, and communicative action (Young, 1990).

Foucault (1991) examined the context through historical and geographical location that follows the individual and is accepted as truth. Habermas posited that through critical analysis of the context, an individual gains increased knowledge, enhancing the potential for skepticism or discontentment thereby influencing personal and social dynamics and relationships. This increased knowledge allows the opportunity

for the individual to enact agency over structure and amplifies the individual's capacity to favorably counteract the system and lead to communicative action to reconstruct the discourse (Habermas 1973; 1987).

Habermas (1987) raised four types of validity claims on the role of institutionalized policies and practices in schools that challenge the status quo of power and oppression: comprehensibility, truth, righteousness, and sincerity. The moral norm for engaging in discourse dictates that communication is free of constraint and coercion, factors prescribed in the power structure of traditional schooling, and involves all who are affected by the outcomes of the decision-making (Habermas, 1987). Further, he posit the normative ground rules for deliberation that is right and just provides that everyone must be allowed to express their attitudes, feelings, desires, and needs. The value of including Habermas' perspective in this study is that it adds to the discourse of social construction of schools the expectation for true and honest communication responsive to public needs that questions the boundaries of structures that influence the social construction of schools (Habermas, 1973).

Some institutions seek to promote an educational construct that is limiting and therefore reconstruct the bank of knowledge from which "subjects" can draw upon to experience the growth and new thinking needed for progress (Freire, 1970). This practice devalues the existing knowledge and skills of students and depicts them as empty vessels or blank slates waiting to be filled. This banking concept is one example of the deficit-thinking model, which at its core operates from the belief that students fail because of some internal deficit or deficiencies (Freire, 1970; Valencia, 2010). These types of ideals fuel the development of structures of oppression that cripple students' ability to extend

beyond their own boundaries and debunk the self-limiting experience. Advocates for social justice demonstrate the patience, passion, and persistence in addition to the knowledge, skills, and values needed to shift attitudes and beliefs of those who resist these tenets (Delpit, 1995; Purpel & Shapiro, 1995; Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Through advocacy, individuals may foster the conditions for social justice and equity in a way that engages resistors and does not compromise principles and beliefs of equitable change. Addressing the concerns and anxieties of resistors helps to identify the barriers to accepting change and provides the opportunity to implementation of new excellent and equitable practices that lead to increases student achievement for all students (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Inclusion of these perspectives is relative to this study because school leaders, who resist these tenets and become equipped with the discursive knowledge of other cultures, languages, and social constructs, effectively serve as advocates for social justice and equity. In democratic education, this model of inclusivity is associated with values, freedom, equality, and justice and fosters a shift in organizational culture that sustains student growth that lead to educational equity (Dewey, 1916).

Summary

Democratic schools serve as a vehicle for understanding the school environment that supports educational equity and excellence. A long-standing goal of American education has been to develop competent, civic-minded democratic citizens that take personal responsibility to counteract social injustices and inequities (Dewey, 1916). The literature on democratic education was included as it contributed to the context for leadership practices that focus on the equitable distribution of resources based on needs,

rather than perceived position. Organizational contexts influenced by principles of democratic education are equipped to respond to the diverse and unique needs of others in a way that diminishes inequities.

Economic Responsibility

Historically, education is the end product of several years of schooling culminating with the completion of a grade level or attainment of a certificate or degree. The perception is that the level of education dictates social and economic status, further contributing to the social environment of the individual. Spring (1989) proposed that public schooling served two purposes, education and national policy, and economic power. Relationships that emphasize structure and power to weed out undesirables construct the social environment of education (Dewey, 1916; Johnson, 1972; Spring, 1989). The ritualistic aspects of the education provided in schools closely reflect societal expectations and vary according to the social environment. These rituals and rules may be superficial or underlying and oftentimes, members are not cognizant that they exist, but follow them unknowingly. Coincidently, the existence of these elements influences the existence of the culture and subculture.

Spring (1998) posited that the really important and persistent issue is educational inequality. According to Spring (1989), U.S. public schools were established to reduce political and social unrest by teaching future citizens a common set of political values and patriotism, reduce social tensions by promising equality of educational opportunity, decrease crime by teaching morality and eradicate poverty by stimulating economic growth. However, the reality is that schools engage in institutional practices of sorting and separating students based on abilities, testing, and interests that contradict the

ideological framework of the educational system. Thus, Spring (2008) concluded that "intertwined worldwide discourses, processes, and institutions" affect educational practices and policies (p.330). He further argued the characterization of the complexities of these factors by "racism, eradication of cultures, language imperialism, inequalities…" (Spring, 1998, p.13). The relevance of Spring's perspectives in this study center on the institutional processes enacted by schools to foster conditions that promote or hinder equity and excellence for all students.

Foucault's work is relevant to this study as he focused on developing a body of knowledge centered on how various institutions, including schools, produces known and practiced discourses. Key to his work was the significance of historical or geographically specific descriptors that create a narrative or text for cause and effect. In addition, Foucault (1980) coupled instrumental and subjective reasoning to uncover the structures and rules embedded in discourse to construct and implement knowledge. Applying Foucault's theories to educational institutions, historical or geographically located biases and stereotypes contribute to creating the structures and rules of the school, possibly resulting in the disenfranchisement of students.

Foucault (1980) also postulated that a relationship exists between power and history. Individuals do not make their own history but are subject to the history and discourse created for them. Therefore, the individual is in a constant struggle against the power, structures, and rules placed upon them. In the context of education and schools, individuals seek practices, which allow them to have power over themselves and the structures that subjugate them. These ideas are similar to those of power, structure, and the conflict between structure and agency posited by other researchers (Bourdieu, 1989;

Dewey, 1916; Giddens, 1986; Johnson, 1972; Sewell, 1992; Spring, 1989). Foucault's perspectives are significant in this study, as the examination of the discourse of the leader's practice will develop a deeper understanding of how the leader acts as an agent for equity to debunk the barriers of power and structure that marginalize disenfranchised students.

The discourses presented thus far have presented the educational institution as a rigid, desolate place where structures and rules are in place to maintain a dynamic of structure over agency. There has been an emphasis on the social construction of children through conformity to societal expectations and the development of discourses that enforce separatist practices, and subjugation. The challenge of leaders is to respond to these issues. The following counter narratives provide a more social and cultural vision for creating the narrative of schools.

Summary

The social construction of education can create a system of oppression rather than one of shared values. However, education has evolved into a vehicle where diverse populations share values. The referenced literature emphasized the importance of considering the dynamics of power relationships when establishing the social constructs in a learning environment. If not considered, education will operationalize the resulting institutionalized structures of oppression that negate the value of diverse opinions as acceptable norms and behaviors. As educational organizations examine their effectiveness it is essential they re-evaluate and re-align their organizational structure to meet changing objectives.

Social Justice Education

Although there is a great body of research focused on the delivery of equitable educational opportunities for all students, researchers have used varying descriptions to define 'social justice' (Theoharis, 2008, p. 4-5). Social justice is frequently associated with aspects of treating all individuals with "fairness" and respect and the elimination of practices that promote the marginalization and exclusion of any ethnic group through "equality" and the right distribution of resources (Bogotch, Beachum, Blount, uitable, English, & Jansen, 2008; Griffiths, 1998; Marshall, 2004; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Shriberg, Bonnor, Sarr, Walker, Hyland & Chester, 2008, p. 455). According to Marshall (2004), this marginalization is also evident when examining the demographics of educational administration and existing national reforms. Many researchers have examined the issue of social justice through the lens of inclusionary practices for individuals with disabilities, students of low socioeconomic status, gender, race, and ethnicity (Brown, 2004; Schriberg et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2008).

As emphasized in the research presented earlier, education, and the opportunities it presents for today's students does not occur in a vacuum. Political, economic, and societal factors influence education and do not guarantee social justice outcomes. Development and implementation of effective social justice as an educational construct has been underdeveloped due to the complexities of the ideological theories of fairness that formulate social justice theory and its reliance on the predication that education and schooling are synonymous (Bogotch et al., 2008). However, a critical understanding of social justice as an educational construct situates the knowledge and skills needed by principals to recognize, name, and combat inequality in schools to provide educational

equity for all students. To have a common language for this study of equity and excellence in schools, it is important to ground this study in the larger context of social justice. This section illustrates the description of social justice in the research in two categories: leadership for social justice and conditions for social justice in schools.

Leadership for Social Justice

A social justice perspective contributes to the leader's ability to discern and negotiate inequitable power structures that exist in the organization, understand the leader's position and role in disrupting the unequal power, and act upon that understanding to foster culturally relevant pedagogy, anti-racist pedagogy, and intercultural teaching among others (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Teel & Obidah, 2008). The literature describing schools that demonstrate a culture of equity and excellence highlight the importance of school administrators with a strong desire to engage in problem solving with multiple stakeholders and utilize strategies and practices that value diverse perspectives in school-wide decision-making. Principals who lead for social justice must have the knowledge and skills to engage in strategic management and instructional leadership by assessing the needs of their school and deploying resources in such a way to attain racial and socioeconomic equity (Johnson, 2007; Norte, 1999; Orr, 2006; Theoharis, 2004, 2010).

According to Norte (1999), principals are responsible for establishing the priorities and a vision for comprehensive learning, the processes, and structures that will engage the community in the vision, and the appropriate staffing to accomplish the outcomes. Different studies cite specific strategies and practices successfully employed to guide school improvement and advance social justice (Johnson, 2007; Theoharis,

2010). These include the development and sharing of a vision that includes the themes that all children can succeed the existence of child-centered school environments, and the value of racial culture and linguistics. These leaders also serve as social activists and develop institutional processes that bridge home and school and incorporate history, values, and cultural knowledge of both students and staff. Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) also noted that it was important for principals to reframe expectations for all learners and foster a shift from a cultural deficiency model to one that all students can learn. The study highlighted the importance of building connections between schools and communities and the important role of professional development and growth in building the capacity of principals and staff as leaders for social justice.

Many researchers have examined the impact of personal beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions on the paradigms that principals utilize in their interactions with staff, students, and the community (Daresh, 2002; Kim & Carsco, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Waxman, Yuan-Hsuan, & MacNeil, 2008). Daresh (2002) posited the idea that the integration of personal and professional knowledge builds the capacity of the leader to act in a moral and ethical manner and effectively navigate the challenges of leading for social justice and equity. Kim and Crasco (2006) had similar findings when identifying best practices and policies for urban educational reform. Critical to the reform effort were the presence of a belief system that espoused the expectation that all students could learn, policy to support equity, professional development and teacher qualification and the enacted school curriculum and student support programs. These drivers constitute the systemic building blocks for urban school reform.

Waxman, Yuan-Hsuan, and MacNeil (2008) also conducted a study that explored principals' attitudes and perceptions related to their leadership functions. The questionnaire used in the study focused on a variety of topics including the strategies used to close the achievement gap in individual schools. The most prevalent strategies identified that effectively close the achievement gap included tutoring, remedial and pullout programs, and effective teaching strategies. Although these factors seem ordinary, the specific use of data to identify targeted students that would benefit from these efforts supports the concepts of equity and commitment to academic achievement, evident in principals that lead for social justice.

In addition, the capacity of educational leaders to motivate and inspire staff to have high expectations for all students is essential to creating and sustaining positive and safe school learning environments that foster high academic achievement for all students (Briscoe, 1991; Canfield-Davis et al, 2009; DeAbreu & Elbers, 2005; Orr, 2006). Principals for social justice therefore must be able to create a culture that accounts for the practices of a community, school, and family, and integrate this with the organizational structure of the school (De Abreu & Elbers, 2005, p.4).

According to Canfield-Davis et al. (2009), the willingness to engage in risk-taking or demonstrate courage is key to successful implementation of any initiative. The authors summarized a statement made by one social justice leader in which he shared that despite desiring a long, full life, he had to stand up for what he believed in, no matter the cost. This exemplified his courage and commitment to step through his fears to accept responsibility. Another way in which leaders for social justice have demonstrated risk-taking is through reorganization of learning environments and incorporation of cultural

tools (Briscoe, 1991; De Abreu & Elbers, 2005). The capacity to use research-based strategies and innovative practices that upset the status quo is sometimes a necessary risk to maximize student learning.

Conditions for Social Justice in Schools

Another critical element of social justice education is a deeper understanding of the unequal power structures that students experience in today's schools. Bourdieu (1989) provided a context for discerning the influence of structure over agency, positing that embedded in the tissue of everyday life are power relations. He proposed people interpret and live their everyday lives through the objective analysis of the structures which frame, limit, control and influence social life. Further, agency involves strategically engaging in and manipulating the rules of the social situation. Structures describe rigid molds that exist through the participation of the actors or players (willing or unwilling, conscious or unconscious) that enable and constrain the limits of behaviors and interactions (Giddens, 1986). Sewell (1992) added to this depth of context of structure by describing it as different levels of consciousness that guide our thoughts and actions. Agency, then explains the creation, recreation, and transformation of social structures relational to the capacity of agents to affect social structures due to the accessibility, power, and durability of the structure in question (Sewell, 1992). Bourdieu (1989) further postulated that the capacity to enact agency over structure is a gatekeeper to accessibility and success. Thus, the implicit structure and culture of a school establishes a climate to influence student academic and social success.

Attention to Bourdieu's perspective on structure and agency is relevant to this study as it emphasized the interconnectedness of how experiences, both conscious and

unconscious, within the existing structure of the world around us shape patterns of behavior. In this study, the goal is to unpack the nature of social rules, practices, and strategies and the intuitive, automatic way school leaders read and understand the social world in which they operate to make decisions to lead for equitable and excellent schools.

Another successful strategy for the advancement of social justice described by Johnson (2007) was the involvement of all staff, professional and supporting services in the development of a child-centered learning environment. Johnson also proposed that school leadership should consider management processes that promote system-wide awareness and engagement of the entire school community in common practice related to tolerance and social responsibility to promote an inclusive culture. This school-wide approach also entailed building the capacity of teachers to establish inclusive cultures in their classroom, the use of curriculum and instructional practices that valued ethnically diverse students and building partnerships with parents (Johnson, 2003, 2007). The findings indicate that the value the principal placed on shared roles and responsibilities and establishing processes to develop the capacity of staff to serve all students contributed to the capacity of the principal to more effectively serve as equity leaders in their buildings.

Ward (2011) conducted a qualitative study, interviewing 12 urban principals to gain an understanding of their perceptions of Urban Hip-Hop Culture including how urban principals selected teachers that demonstrate Urban Hip-Hop cultural competence. The results of the analysis produced four categories: (a) characteristics of Urban Hip-Hop culture (b) perceived cultural factors outside school, (c) effective urban teacher characteristics, and (d) selection methods. Relative to this research is the finding that

effective urban teacher attributes include the ability to build a caring relationship, effective transfer of learning, and belief in students. Further, the findings supported the work of other researchers that posit teachers must be aware of student's diverse and unique cultural backgrounds and have the ability to implement practices that indicate knowledge of students' culture, social class, and race to affect positive change in student achievement (Brown, 2004; Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994; Johnson, 2003).

Principals that lead for social justice have key responsibilities to challenge the status quo and exercise decision-making processes that mobilize their school and community to create a culture of equity in the school. Despite the headstrong attitude of these principals, they lead in collaborative and empowering ways. Staff input and facilitated school-wide shared decision-making were key elements of their leadership style (Theoharis, 2008). These non-obligatory, data-driven processes relied on the professional knowledge of staff and a shared vision of what is right.

The research of Delpit (1995) further expands on the idea of creating a school environment and culture that recognizes and develops the talent of staff, students, and the school community. She recognized the importance of culturally knowledgeable teachers (i.e. warm demander, great expectations, demonstrate care and concern, develop relationships with students built on trust, and encourage risk taking) in establishing a descriptive and structured environment for learning. Additionally, she acknowledged that schools have a responsibility to counter internalized racist beliefs students carry with them through school and life. She stated that schools must help students locate their brilliance by being aware of their intellectual legacy (e.g. African "philosopher", Asian "poet", Native American "explorer", Latin "scientist"). Thirdly, she posited that schools

should build on the cultural strengths of students instead of punishing them for their cultural tool kits. The school should be a nurturing and caring environment. Finally, schools need to incorporate student interests into instruction. This would facilitate students making a connection to a purpose for engaging in the learning activity.

Summary

Scheurich and Skrla (2003) posited the importance of leaders for social justice, equity, and excellence understanding that it is their "responsibility … sacred or spiritual responsibility—to create such schools…central to…dedication to equity for all people…" When describing social justice, creating organizational structures that mitigate barriers to success for all students is important. Defining social justice is a complex issue; yet the literature provides an overview of the conceptualization of social justice to provide a foundation for proposing a framework for analyzing the effectiveness of social justice leadership. The commonality drawn between social justice, equity, and excellence is that the shared focus is on historically and persistently marginalized groups (Theoharis, 2008). The research has focused on distinguishing between the profile of the social justice leader and the organizational structures and actions that contribute to social justice. Clear in the research is that social justice, with current accountability expectations, focuses on equity of outcomes with little attention to equity of access or conditions. However, there is an emerging pattern that the goals and expectations of social justice encompass access, outcomes, and conditions and that principals are responsible for creating the conditions in schools and classrooms to attain the goals of social justice.

Equity and Excellence

> "In striving for equity and excellence, we are aiming to create schools in which virtually all students are learning at high academic levels…that literally serve each and every student really well…with new ideas, new ways of accomplishing educational success…we can figure out how to create schools that are both equitable and excellent." (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p. 2–8).

Multiple and varied constraints to the attainment of equity challenge principals who must become equipped with skills in the domain of resource management and planning to meet accountability measures and attain racial and socioeconomic equity. The literature described effective schools as those that have the following: strong leadership, a positive learning environment, high expectations for achievement, order, structured teaching, and positive relationships with students and with parents and communities (Blair, 2002; Childress, 2009; Linton, 2011; Lopez et al., 2006; Norte, 1999; Sather, 1999; Theoharis, 2010; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012). These effective schools espouse the attitude that learning is for all and that the school's organizational structure and form contribute to student achievement (Lezotte, 2009). Additional research findings indicated that restructuring organizational structures to build school-community relationships required culture change (Skrla et al., 2004) and professional development on reflective practice (Brown, 2004). Briscoe (1991) concluded that key to the shift and change for school improvement is the leader's ability to create an organizational culture that capitalizes on individual's cultures. In the increasingly diverse populations of today's schools, a uniform, "one-size-fits-all" approach does not meet the needs of all learners. This section describes elements of institutional practices, leadership beliefs and expectations, and professional practices that conceptualize equitable and excellent schools.

Equity

In this study, I describe *equity* in the context of high expectations for achievement and access to meaningful and relevant learning for all students so that outcomes are not predictable by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, or disability. This definition is one that most closely mirrors the needs presented by an increasingly diverse student population and local, state, and national accountability measures. It also responds to the model of social justice described by North (2006) and Marshall (2004) that focused on behaviors and interactions in the classroom and emphasized the need to counteract the influence of dominant values and beliefs. Principals must create and maintain organizations that meet high measures of accountability from multiple sources and perspectives.

The organizational culture is the foundation for the behaviors of the people in the organization (Howard, 2010; Johnson, 1972; Morgan, 2006). Schein (1985) described culture as a group learning process intertwined with the identity of the individual and more often, with the organization. The organization's culture plays an important role in defining the image or brand of the organization. At the surface, observable symbols and stories, ceremonies, dress, slogans, and even the physical setting create shared experiences for members and define the organization's culture. However, the true culture manifests through the values, beliefs, and assumptions that guide decision-making, consciously and unconsciously (Bourdieu, 1989). As the organization faces internal and external challenges, it adapts based on the individual and organizational learning response. Within the organization, these combined elements contribute to the culture and the establishment of subcultures or groups within the culture. This contributes to

educational equity by creating the conditions for every individual within the system to achieve competence and excellence as described by Skrla et al. (2004).

An education system that puts into practice an implicit pedagogic action, consistent with the conditions for success aligned to the linguistic and cultural needs of the students demonstrates both academic and social success (Bourdieu, 1989; Dewey, 1916; Howard, 2010). Thinking of education, not as a finite process, but as a social function, Dewey (1916) celebrated the transformative power of the environment and its power in education. According to his perspective, the dedicated responsibility of chunking the complexities of societal expectations, eliminating unwanted or less desirable habits of action, and creating a system of balance that counteracts the challenges and roadblocks that might mislead youth from meeting societal standards is the charge of schools. These ideas reinforce the concept of principals as leaders for social justice that consider the diverse needs of all students along with those of the political, economic, and social context, in developing learning environments that ensure educational equity and excellence for all students...

An international study conducted by Goddard (2007), examined the equity practices of seven countries using a limited sample of principals from one urban region, representative of each country studied. The findings indicated that educational practices in most countries maintain the status quo despite the increasing ethnic diversity of the community. Goddard employed qualitative methods to analyze school policies, recognition of difference, and inclusion strategies of 18 schools in the seven countries studied. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with the principal,

observed the school, collected, and analyzed policy documents, and conducted individual and focus –group interviews with students, staff, administrators, and parents.

Goddard's study focused on an analysis of existing policies and practices and contributed to a body of knowledge on the use of equitable practices. The study did not address how principals engaged in reflective practices and problem solving to implement and monitor these equitable practices. What were some of the questions the principal asked in identifying equity practices? Who else was involved? Why chose specific strategies before others? One of the goals of this research study was to answer questions like these to inform principal practice in the goal of attaining equity in their organizational space.

A similar study of equity practices was conducted by Taylor and Singh (2005) to examine Education Queensland's implementation of *Queensland state education—2010* (*QSE 2010*), a policy initiative designed to address issues of educational inequality that have become evident as Australia's population has become increasingly ethnically diverse. The policy's goal was to better prepare Australian youth for the future of a globalized society and increased cultural diversity. The study concluded that divergent definitions of the terms equity, social justice, and educational disadvantage resulted in inconsistent implementation of the policy. An underlying theme that emerged was the importance of language as a conduit for ensuring consistency in the implementation of equity practice (Taylor & Singh, 2005).

Educational accountability policies are another way that states and school districts are approaching the attainment of equity. Oftentimes, high-stakes testing has been at the center of these accountability measures. They have resulted in changes in student and

teacher motivation. However, data have shown that districts that have enacted accountability policies have had variant success dependent upon the school capacity and social support thereby negating the theory that accountability policies ensure significant progress or setbacks in attainment of equity (Lee & Wong, 2004). The ability to meet the accountability measures stipulated by the policies was interdependent on the distribution of resources. The quantitative study examined the nature and variations of performance driven accountability policies across 50 states and interrelationship between policy, school resources, and academic achievement. The amount of data available on state policies and student achievement during the analytical timeframe study limited the study. It also was focused on performance driven factors and less directly related to issues of equity based on race or socioeconomic factors. However, the findings on the impact of policy on allocation of resources and student achievement are useful in making connections between school policies and practices, principal behaviors, and the principal's capacity to meet accountability measures.

A point highlighted in the research was the need for administrators, teachers, and parents to collaborate on organizational structures that acknowledge and build on the cultural and social capital of students rather than attempt to eliminate these differences for conformity to some predetermined expectations for achievement (hooks, 1994; Howard, 2010). The growing challenge of the educational system to provide quality education to all citizens has created a critical need for more comprehensive strategies for developing the capacity of school administrators to lead for social justice. The expectation for schools has shifted from providing a basic education to students to designing learning environments that accommodate diverse student needs, mediate and

manage conflict, and result in high academic achievement for all students (De Abreu & Elbers, 2005; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Riehl, 2000; Walker & Dimmock, 2005). Principals now have a responsibility to recognize and value cultural differences as part of the dynamics of effective teaching and learning (Blair, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Howard, 2010; Norte, 1999). They must also be capable of fostering a culture where all students, staff, and community members have the same expectation that all students can learn and succeed, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or existence of a disability (Blair, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Howard, 2010; Sather, 1999; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2010). Thus, as principals foster new meanings of diversity and engage in democratic discourse within the school community, the path to a more inclusive school environment is paved.

Excellence

Research on best practices and effectiveness that influence the educational outcomes of students in schools and districts with increasingly diverse populations often separate the competing interests of equity and excellence, deemphasizing discourses of social justice and equity (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). According to Purpel and Shapiro (1995), the discourse of schools is that success is weighted by the value of knowledge, experience, and language of the dominant white class and often emphasizes the connection between educational success and future economic and social opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Schools derive control and power in developing individual capacity to respond to changing cultural influences (Bourdieu, 1989). Thus, the organizational behavior prescribed by the organizational structure of schools continues to discriminate against the culture of the have-nots,

minorities, working class, and female students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Purpel & Shapiro, 1995; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995).

The Equity Scorecard introduced by Bensimon (2004) is an organizational learning tool that engages instructors, staff, and institutional leaders in a collaborative process of assessing gaps in educational outcomes and setting improvement targets to reach equity goals for racial and gender groups. It also provides an operational definition of *excellence* that consists of four elements: a focus on student intellectual and social development that appropriately matches the course of study with the educational context, organizational resources are utilized in a purposeful and meaningful way to create a learning environment that challenges each student to achieve at high academic levels and values their individual knowledge and contributions, cultural difference and educational experiences of learners are honored and values, and the community welcomes and engages all of its diversity in the service of student and organizational learning (Bensimon, 2004; Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman, & Vallejo, 2004; Bensimon, Rueda, Dowd, and Harris III, 2007). The achievement of excellence derives from high standards that ensure that all students grow to reach their highest levels year after year and are college or career ready as high school graduates. "Leaders will need to continuously stress the values of equity and excellence and ensure that it becomes part of their organization's vision" (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009, p. 54).

The issues and concerns of equitable instruction and providing access to rigorous curriculum for all students is one of international proportions. Educational leaders, at the local, state, and national level have been accountable for closing the achievement gap, and ensuring all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic

proficiency. Prevalent to this discourse is the pattern of persistent discrepancy in educational outcomes among historically, racially segregated groups, specifically, African American, certain Southeast Asian groups, and Latino students demonstrating low performance compared to primarily White and various other Asian American students who perform at higher levels (Howard, 2010). Historically, these underperforming groups are most likely to experience isolation, disenfranchisement, and institutional practices that limit their access to educational opportunities (Howard, 2010). An examination of changes in student enrollment in the United States revealed that the percentage of students in public elementary and secondary schools has become increasingly diverse with regards to race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Yet, given all factors of diversity and socio-economic status, the racial achievement gap persists, alluding to the fact that race is a determining factor in educational opportunities and student performance (Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

Federal legislation has created increased accountability measures and changed the scope of the responsibilities of superintendents and principals from management to instructional leadership, and leaders for social justice, equity, and excellence that are accountable for establishing and maintaining learning environments that foster a safe, positive culture where students can attain these higher academic standards. Research suggests that there is a relationship between leadership practices and the learning environment and student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Marzano, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Theoharis, 2010; Wenglinsky, 2004). School leadership has been described as providing direction and exercising influence for student achievement (Leithwood, 2001). As an instructional leader, the responsibility for setting

the vision for instruction as well as monitoring expectations and holding staff accountable to increased student achievement resides with the principal (Leithwood et al, 2004). Marzano (2003) suggested that through clear expectations, structures, and processes for professional growth, including observations and feedback, principals influence teacher practice and impact student achievement. In high-performing schools, leadership vision and practice exerts a strong influence on teacher practice, a strong predictor of higher student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Leithwood et al (2004) found that through the changing landscape of classrooms and schools, school leadership preparation programs may play a vital role in readying principals to balance the high standards of accountability with creating equitable and excellent schools for all students.

Since the enactment of NCLB, schools and school districts have increased the focus on results and higher academic achievement for all students. The current "ratcheting" upward of educational standards has made school an increasingly demanding and competitive place in terms of what it takes to be successful. This really means that success requires increasing amounts of time and effort in playing the "game of schooling" (Shapiro, 2009, p. 6).

For students, school has become increasingly focused on survival with success defined not by a learning or growth mindset, but instead is most assuredly tied to the student's ability to test well on standardized tests (Shapiro, 2009). Instead of students gaining access to a learning environment full of possibilities, educational reform and accountability measures have reduced the educational experience to a numbers game dominated by an instrumental mentality (i.e. grades, test scores, point averages, SAT results, and diplomas) designed to assess the effectiveness of the school and school

system (Howard, 2010; Shapiro, 2009). Thus, education is about processing information for tests instead of being a driving force in the development of creative, critical thinkers.

Given the diverse learning needs of today's students, this creates an additional expectation for administrators, teachers, and staff, to work together towards the common goal of increased student achievement. Effectively responding to the requirements of federal legislation and accountability standards necessitates a change in how principals create school culture and serve their communities. Principal practice must be reconceptualized and expanded to develop the principal's capacity as equity leaders to ensure that no child is left behind because of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. Changing demographics and transformation of mainstream values that exist in multi-ethnic schools demands the creation of schools dedicated to equity for all. Rigid accountability measures have charged schools and school leadership with a daunting task of attaining high academic performance for all students.

However, the reality is that the school environment has become a strict and rigid social construct that discourages independent and freethinking that liberates youth to explore and create new knowledge. Rather than creating a balanced environment, the school environment has contributed to the mass production of like behaved, like thinking, champions for a designated role in future society. The design of culture, rituals, and day-to-day activities influences the assimilation of youth to conform to a given standard and demonstrate learning and growth on a singular standardized task.

Lee and Wong (2004) concluded that racial and socioeconomic equity drives accountability reform. Defining excellence through standards and inclusiveness of all students helps to conceptualize social justice, equity, and excellence as it relates to

organizational practices that connect to instruction and student achievement. Through this study of understanding how principals negotiate the organizational space, excellence becomes an indicator of the culture of equity in the school.

Summary

The significance of these research findings is that the principal is essential to creating and sustaining inclusive environments and may be the most critical factor in addressing the challenges of a diverse population of students. Principals must become equipped with the discursive knowledge of institutional barriers presented by traditional school cultures. Principals who embody the characteristics of high expectations for all students, the vision, and courage to engage in change, and a commitment to developing and sustaining culturally responsive learning environments create the conditions for all students to attain academic achievement. School leaders that use this dichotomy to restructure schools foster inclusivity. The literature on the elements of equitable and excellent schools will inform the work of this study by contributing to the identification schools and principals to participate in the study as well as be assistive in the coding process to make connections among principal practice and beliefs, institutional processes, and their relationship to the culture of equity in the school.

The organizational culture of schools contributes to the academic achievement of all students. The literature included in this section of the literature review emphasized the importance of principals establishing learning environments that value the culture and values of its diverse learners. Schools that do not consider the inclusion of linguistic and cultural heritages of both the school and students may inadvertently operate from a deficit model that does not utilize structures and processes that increase the principal's capacity

to create a culture of academic effectiveness for all students. Principals must accept their role in the "game of schooling" is to create a culture for all students to experience academic achievement.

Conceptual Framework

This design of this research study analyzes the beliefs, structures, and decision-making processes that influence principal practice in leading for equity for three elementary school principals. The study attended to the leadership practices used by the principals to cultivate a school environment that addresses the achievement gap and allows the principal to negotiate variables that influence or influence the context of the school (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability measures). Local, state, and national educational reform and legislation foster the perpetuation of power systems that subjugate students, particularly African American, Southeast Asian American, and Latino students (Howard, 2010; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Schott Foundation, 2013). In addition, the organizational context of schools further exacerbates the system of haves and have-nots in favor of the dominant culture (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Ultimately, many principals, under the pressure to have all students attain high standards of performance on standardized tests, focus less on navigating the equity and excellence paradigm shift. Either intentionally or unintentionally, these leaders neglect to create a learning environment that bridges cultural and ethnic borders to engage students, staff, and their community in the type of organizational culture that allows all students, regardless of race, to experience high levels of academic achievement. Examining the leadership practices and school environments of schools that have attained equity and excellence for all students will help uncover principal beliefs and decision-making

processes that contribute to school structures. This will allow the opportunity to replicate intentional practices for leadership for equity and excellence.

Shapiro (2009) argued that principals have a responsibility to address individual student needs that "have for the most part been ignored or buried under the weight of accepted and conventional educational concerns…having to embark on a difficult path of reflection—one that demands courage, honesty, and imagination" (p. 78). To engage in this type of leadership, principals must reflect on their own personal beliefs, and professional experiences to mitigate accountability measures and challenge the organizational culture of schools designed for the social construction of students. Ethical leadership theory and democratic ethical leadership (DEEL) were considered as the theoretical frame for this study to better understand how principals lead this type of transformative change in schools to best meet the needs of students,.

Ethical Leadership

Important to this study is the conceptualization of how leaders engage in the process of leading equitable and excellent schools based on their ethical and moral values. The development of ethical leadership theories focused on socially acceptable values and morals dates back to Plato and Aristotle. There are five principles central to ethical leadership. According to these principles, ethical leaders respect others, serve others, are just, are honest, and build community. Ethical leaders must be sensitive to the needs of others, treat others in ways that are just and care for others. Shapiro (2009) put forth the idea of principals as decision-makers in schools that serve as "communities through which we may receive the recognition of our presence and affirmation of our value, in the world" (p. 72). Shapiro continued with the following statement:

> To recognize all within a community is to be cognizant of the different needs that each child or individual brings to the table. In this sense, communities are much more than declarations of words. They are places that share and distribute resources so that everyone, to the maximum extent possible, has what he or she needs to realize his or her full possibilities. Meaningful community, in other words, cannot be separated from social justice…At all schools there is the need to assure the availability of truly adequate educational resources to all students. The varying circumstances of each individual must be addressed so that no one falls short of what he or she needs to thrive… (p. 76)

Thus, it is important that principals, as school leaders, engage in ethical and moral decision-making and use their power to create opportunities for students to experience agency over structure. In leadership literature, transformational and ethical leadership are often used interchangeably as they share foundational concepts of moral values. Burns (1978) argued that leaders have to operate at higher need and value levels than those of followers, transcending their self-interests to motivate and inspire others to act in moral and just manners. These transformational leaders are concerned with the end values of liberty, justice, and equality. The limitation of transformational leadership is that it assumes that good prevails.

Sergiovanni (1990) expanded on the idea of moral authority as a basis of leadership that can transform schools into communities. Sergiovanni framed moral leadership into three intertwined categories: the heart, the head, and the hand. The heart represents what one values and believes, the head signifies the mindscape of how the world works, and the hand shows one's decisions, actions, and behaviors. Shapiro (2009) asserted that schools provide the social, moral, and intellectual support needed to challenge the dominant values and ethos of our culture. Based on these assertions, the leader is instrumental in constructing the school environment through the demonstration of their beliefs. The moral and ethical values held by the heart are then enacted in the

organizational structure, curriculum, and expectations for teaching and learning. Additionally, these beliefs influence decision-making processes, operational procedures, and practices of the school environment.

Sergiovanni (1990) and Starratt (2004) focused their work on the interrelationship between ethical and moral values, and actions. Starratt (2004) asserted that it is critical that educational leaders move beyond technical skills related to management of processes and student performance to focus on learning. According to Starratt, there are three essential virtues exhibited by ethical leaders: proactive responsibility, personal and professional authenticity, and an enabling presence that allows others to reach into their depths to soar to new heights and attain higher levels. Through a moral commitment to student learning that engages the whole school community, Starratt posited that leaders need to accept and confront the limitations of their leadership. They have an obligation to take control of resources and maximize their potential, acknowledge the enormous possibilities and finite limitations of actions, and transform individuals to deliver their best each day.

Schools are reflective of the nation's changing demographics and therefore face the same challenges of addressing a diverse population. These changing demographics significantly influence the nature of school practices and operations and the role of the school leader. Principals have long held the responsibility of school management, yet today's principal must master the craft of creating and enrolling others in their vision of school based on an increasingly diverse society.

The integration of personal and professional knowledge builds the capacity of the leader to act in a moral and ethical manner and effectively navigate the challenges of

leading for social justice and equity (Strike, 2007). Principals must be able to create a climate that accounts for the practices of a community, school, and family, and integrate this with the organizational structure of the school. To transcend the institutional barriers of schools, principals must become equipped with the discursive knowledge of the shared cultures of their students and community and move away from the banking concept to embrace education as a practice of freedom. The capacity of the principal to create and sustain inclusive environments may be the most critical factor in addressing the challenges of a diverse population of students.

Democratic Ethical Leadership

In this age of accountability and high-stakes testing, there is an increasing need for educational leaders who are ethical and supportive of democracy given the role of schools in developing productive and contributing citizens (Gerstl-Pepin & Aiken, 2009). Leadership in today's diverse, global classrooms face legislative mandates that focus more on test schools as indicators of school improvement and student achievement than any other conditions or indicators that exist in the learning environment (Shapiro & Gross, 2013; Starratt, 2004). According to Moore (1996), the challenge for democratic leadership is to establish a positive and lasting relationship between all individuals in the local context.

The dilemma of democratic leadership is that the institutional practices that prevail perpetuate the cycle of oppression for voiceless minorities and maintain the status quo. Dewey (1916) wrote about creating a level playing field and encouraging upward social and economic status through education. Instead, many school environments further subjugate selected student populations, ensuring the status quo. Individuals that

operate outside the norm are not encouraged to explore independent freethinking; instead, there is increased pressure to conform. There is inequitable distribution of resources to create the balanced environment that Dewey (1916) proposed. Therefore, youth receive minimal opportunities to develop the attitudes and dispositions needed to transcend between societal constructs and experience the freedom that Dewey hypothesized would come from being educated. Gerstl-Pepin and Aiken (2009) define the democratic, ethical leader as one committed to serving the common good, giving voice to multiple perspectives, engaging in actions to foster democratic cultures, and demonstrating courage to work against practices and policies that promote social inequities.

Three themes arose from the research regarding democratic and ethical leaders: an understanding of self as a racial and cultural being in connection with their own personal narratives and a sensitivity to the experiences and stories of others; a strong ethical stance connected to their beliefs driving their actions to facilitate collaborative processes within their local context; and an effort to balance ethical responsibilities to members of the community with democratic responsibilities and standardized accountability. Thus, democratic, ethical leadership is closely akin to the tenets of social justice and leadership for equity and excellence.

Dewey (1916) expanded on the idea that education is a social construct and the ideas presented in our own family traditions are integral to the shaping of our being. Accordingly, these concepts reflect individual values and expectations expressed through actions. In the role of the principal, the collective history of the principal's personal biography is situated in their cultural history and forms the context of the educational values they incorporate and build into their vision for students, staff, and parents. Dewey

suggested that education was not single directional but was an experience, not chartered with a defined goal, but with the aim of growth. When schools embrace the diversity of their members to allow for the array of voices present to contribute to the shared experiences, members of the environment liberated from the restraints of their own personal beliefs and limited experiences, attain higher levels of knowledge. Given the influence of these factors, there must be focused attention on the development of the principal's moral approach and identity to foster subjects that are advocates for the individual needs of students, particularly in diverse social contexts.

Some researchers have indicated that the principal's success as a leader for equity and excellence is interrelated to their ability to communicate and establish a climate and culture that eliminates the marginalization of a targeted population (Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994). Dewey (1916) emphasized democratic education as a backdrop for the idea of inclusivity, as an educational process necessary to life, aimed at continuous growth and learning, reflective of the world in which it occurs, that serves as a liberator of the oppressed. As principals foster new meanings of diversity and engage in democratic discourse within the school community, the path to a more inclusive school environment is paved. Despite limited and narrow curricula and social and political influences, principals must be sensitive to the institutional barriers that foster divisions of labor and leisure described by Dewey (1916) to engage in ethical and moral decision making. These constructs perpetuate systems of haves and have-nots (Darling-Hammond, 2010). They also prevent opportunities for teachers and members of the community to build and sustain positive relationships based on shared knowledge and vision.

Apple and Beane (2007) moved the concept of democratic schools forward, arguing that these schools are not accidental, but created by strategic modeling of democratic ideals through organizational processes, structures, and curriculum. Accordingly, education becomes a vehicle to ensure that diverse populations share values, the unintended consequence being the values of one population imposing on that of another. Thus, education in its capacity of social function can create a system of oppression rather than one of liberation and elevation, depending on what side of the value fence the recipient of education is standing. As a result, democratic schools may be places of tension and contradictions as advocates struggle to create environments that align to their values and beliefs. Ironically, policies that establish barriers to open access for all students govern public schools, created to provide access to education.

Summary

Dewey's idea of education empowers socialized structures to create alternative outcomes for learners. It does not confine learning to a set environment. Instead, it considers any social structure as an opportunity for learning to occur and that this learning then serves a social function to indoctrinate recipients with societal expectations. This is an example of the leader facilitating their vision of moral and just actions and influencing others to follow their example, also characteristic of transformational leadership. Apple and Beane (2007) posit that there are alternatives to narrow reasoning and that a commitment to these alternatives contributes to a substantive and rich education and reduce alienation of students and teachers. When education becomes an operationalized social construct, it can serve many purposes. In some cases, it can allow for the mass dissemination of a common message through a singular lens. In less formal

settings, it can provide the platform for similar values and practices to become acceptable norms. Ethical and democratic ethical educational leadership theories call upon educational leaders to become reflective practitioners and engage in authentic leadership geared towards valuing the diverse perspectives and experiences of others with whom they interact, including students, staff, parents, and community members.

When schools fail to embrace the rich diversity of its members and instead enforce rigid social constructs, the question then remains if education truly serves a social function as proposed by Dewey. Who are its benefactors and at what costs?

Literature Review Conclusion

This section opened with the statement that alluded to the influence of the vision and direction of school leaders on the context of the school. The political and social construction of American schools has created a system of imbalance that results in the devaluing of the rich cultural diversity that students bring with them and creates barriers to the attainment of academic achievement for all students resulting in a persistent racial academic achievement gap. Further, educational policies create additional constraints on how principals create organizational cultures that serve the best needs of all students.

The literature suggests that to lead equitable and excellent schools that address the racial achievement gap, principals must exercise democratic and ethical leadership; ensure that they lead with their heart, head, and hand; and create schools that reflect their beliefs that all students can achieve at high levels. In schools, principals daily engage in decision-making regarding curriculum, policies, and practices to support student success and adult engagement in the culture of the school. The goal of equitable and excellent schools is to promote a culturally responsive learning environment to serve the best

interest of all students. It is the principal's role to establish, communicate, and employ transformative steps and institutional structures, and processes that enable students, staff, and community to feel valued and inclusive in decision-making and experience positive results in relationships and student outcomes. Thus, studying principals and schools that have attained educational equity and excellence will help identify leadership practices that eliminate inequities and contribute to elimination of the racial achievement gap.

The major research question that guided this study was "How do personal beliefs, organizational structures, and decision-making processes influence principal practice in leading for equity?" This study focused on three elementary principals that lead from a social justice perspective to engage principal practices that ensure educational equity and excellence for all students.

I chose democratic ethical leadership as the theoretical framework as it is reflective of the ethical and moral imperative to engage in practices and structures that eliminate inequities. Principals that lead for social justice and promote educational equity and excellence, operate from their core values and sense of ethical leadership to motivate others to lead in moral and just ways (Burns, 1978; Sergiovanni, 1990; Starratt, 2004; Shapiro, 2009). In addition, the concepts highlighted in the section on ethical leadership theory established a construct for examining how principals engage in what Cardno (2007) described as dilemma management—the ability to achieve more than one objective, when the needs of the organization and the individual are in conflict.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methods employed to understand and document the leadership behaviors that promote a culture of equity and excellence. Included in the study is an examination of the beliefs and decision-making processes that contribute to the principal's capacity to create a school space that will sustain high student achievement for all students and an analysis of the school culture, structures, and processes that allow the principal to balance managerial and instructional leadership roles to attain high levels of academic achievement. This chapter addresses the rationale for the methodology, the selection of the participants, the data collection techniques, and the role of the researcher in exploring this topic. Discussed as well is portraiture as a qualitative methodology.

Research Design

The qualitative methodology selected for this study was a narrative approach. The narrative research methodology is described by Creswell (2012, p. 17) "...as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected." My research focused on analyzing the processes used by a principal that successfully negotiates the complexities of the organizational context of their school. This research methodology focused on studying three individuals, gathering data through collections of stories, artifacts, and reporting individual experiences. The specific type of narrative methodology employed is portraiture. This qualitative approach produces a written description of how an individual deals with challenges to capture the

essence of the experience by "portraying the individual in the job they do, the challenges they face, and how they are tackling them" (Bottrey, Ping, Wright, & Ngai, 2009, p. 84).

Portraiture: A Technique

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) described portraiture as a method of qualitative research that captures the "complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of the human experience and organizational life" (p. xv). Different from other positivist paradigms that focus on defining social problems, portraiture seeks to draw attention to the interaction of values, personality, structure, and history in context.

The researcher assumed the role of the portraitist. The role of the portraitist is to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the study participants, documenting their "voices and visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv). The portrait, shaped through the dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, leads toward new understandings and insights, instigating change. The portraitist is interested in developing the context for the story and searches for the central story through both empirical and aesthetic description. There are five essential features of portraiture: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Establishing the Context

The context—historical, personal, and internal sets the framework or reference point for the space, people, and action of the study (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Context influences the interpretation and conceptualization of the experience by the portraitist. It also influences how the participants express themselves based on how they interact with the defined context. The historical context establishes the institutional

culture and history, creating a picture of how the institution's structures and values have evolved. The internal context described as the physical setting, provides a framework for the macrosphere and the microsphere through layers of descriptions that help the audience to visualize the setting and terrain of the study. The personal context situates the portraitist within the internal context. This bracketing of the portraitist allows their reflections and interpretations to be a part of the story. To help establish the context, it is appropriate to examine documents such as reports, questionnaires, and surveys, lesson plans, meeting agendas and correspondence, and sample work products and portfolios.

Expressing Voice

In portraiture, the voice of the portraitist is evident in the design of the research framework, the types, and forms of questions asked, and the structure and tone of the narrative (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The portraitist must be cognizant of their voice and ensure that it does not overshadow that of the participants and the story waiting to be told. Voice then takes on multiple roles in the development of the portrait. It serves as the voice of the portraitist and reflects the observations and actions of the research participants, or actors, and setting. Through the modalities of voice, the portraitist creates images utilizing thick and thin descriptions as well as provides an autobiography of the researcher that informs interpretations and dialogue with the actors.

Navigating Relationships

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), the portraitist focuses on the search for goodness and the portrait is:

> …shaped through the dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image. The encounter between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and is crucial to the success and authenticity of the rendered piece. (p.3)

It is important that the portraitist can develop a meaningful relationship with the selected participants that would sustain the complex and dynamic process of navigating the boundaries (e.g. structure, time, commitment, intimacy) of the research study. The mutual investment in trust between the portraitist and actors contributes to the depth and reciprocity of the project.

Searching for Patterns and Emergent Themes

The portraitist engages in an iterative process of data collection, interpretation, and analysis to identify patterns and develop codes for emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). These themes arise from visible and audible text, the voice of participants, and in the thick and thin descriptions captured by the portraitist. Through interpretative analysis, the portraitist synthesizes, sorts, and organizes data to categorize information in the search for patterns. The portraitist must acknowledge that this is a fluid process and engage in reflective practice during data collection to maximize the opportunity for discovery of new themes and increased connectivity across multiple experiences. Ultimately, these patterns will then converge into themes that describe the lived experiences of the participants and contribute to the construction of the aesthetic whole of the portrait.

Shaping the Aesthetic Whole

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), context, voice, relationships, and emergent themes all contribute to shaping the story, the aesthetic whole. Critical to shaping the story is the portraitist's ability to weave these components into one whole through four dimensions: conception, structure, form, and narrative (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Conception describes the flow of perspectives and perceptions that

create the overarching story. The portraitist builds the structure through the narrative that describes the events and experiences that give rise to the emergent themes and patterns. The structure is the unifying framework of the story. How the portraitist carefully constructs story refers to the form. Together, form and structure shape the meaning assigned to the text. The language, the images, and metaphors used by the portraitist contribute to form. Finally, coherence refers to the orderly, logical relationships that the portraitist is able to create in the portrait. In other words, how well do all the pieces fit?

This type of methodology aligns with Foucault and Habermas' ideas that suggest the examination of historical and geographical location, along with a critical analysis of the context, results in increased knowledge of the relationship between personal and social dynamics and relationships. This knowledge can be useful in building the capacity to counteract systems of oppression that contribute to negative organizational cultures of schools. Additionally, the literature presented in Chapter 2 highlighted the importance of principals creating a space for learning that values and engages diverse perspectives; integrates practices and policies that model moral and ethical beliefs; develops relationships built on trust and high expectations for student achievement; and, challenging the status quo to exercise decision-making process to create equitable and excellent schools (Burns, 1978; Delpit, 1995; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1981; Sergiovanni, 1990; Schein, 1985; Shapiro, 2009; Starratt, 2004; Theoharis, 2008).

The components of portraiture as described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) were effective in capturing the beliefs, structures, decision-making processes that influence principal practice in leading for equity. Portraiture integrates the elements of context, voice, relationships, patterns and themes, and the aesthetic whole to

contextualize the environment. Analysis of these elements helped to make meaning of the story of three schools, through the actions of each principal and their journeys, to provide the social, moral, and intellectual support needed to challenge the dominant values and ethos of our culture.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to capture the beliefs, structures, and decision-making processes that influence principal practice in leading for equity for three elementary school principals. The research questions guided the critical inquiry analysis using portraiture methodology. This study focused on addressing the following research questions:

1. What are principals' beliefs and decision-making processes, and the school structures that support equity and excellence for all students?
2. How do elementary principals balance the role and responsibilities of school leadership and negotiate the school context (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability measures) to support equity and excellence for all students?

Role of the Researcher

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), the researcher, cast in the role of the portraitist, enters the lives of the actors, building relationships and engaging in discourse to discover "what is good here?" This definition of "good" evolved not from the perspective of the researcher, but from the examination of the context and through the multiple perspectives of the actors in the study. The portraitist is listening for the story and must be careful not to bias the authentic story with their preconceived bias. Thus,

portraiture brackets the identity, character, and history of the researcher as part of the portrait, discerning the researcher from the actors, in the telling of the story. A "Researcher Identity Memo" has been prepared as recommended by Maxwell (2013) to identify the goals, values, and interrelated experiences connected to the planned research that have informed and influenced the researcher.

Sample Site: Describing the Population

It is important to establish the context and provide descriptive details of the study site so the reader can make connections to the story. Creswell (2012) noted that in qualitative research, it is important to identify participants and sites that will best help understand the problem and research question. Schools identified in this study have reduced disproportionality in student achievement and shared commonalities across demographics and programming to provide a context for analyzing principal practice that contributed to equitable outcomes. This selection contributes to increased generalizability within a small sample size. To attain the proposed research objective, the context of the district and then the selected schools was a central consideration in the study. Criterion sampling contributed to greater quality assurance that all participants met the same standard.

District

According to the district's website, District ABC is a large urban middle Atlantic school district. One of the largest urban districts in the United States, there is huge racial and ethnic diversity as reflected by the student demographics. The number of students receiving special services, including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and special education services is commiserate with the diversity of the student socio-

economic status. Table 3.1 provides a descriptive breakdown of the 2014-2015 student enrollment demographics in ABC district.

Table 3.1

Student Demographics in ABC District based on 2014-2015 Enrollment

		% Racial/Ethnic Composition						
	%Total	AM	AS	BL	HI	PI	WH	MU
All Students		≤5.0	14.4	21.4	27.4	≤5.0	32.0	≤5.0
ESOL	14.6	≤5.0	≤5.0	≤5.0	9.6	≤5.0	≤5.0	≤5.0
FARMS	34.3	≤5.0	≤5.0	11.6	17.6	≤5.0	≤5.0	≤5.0
SPED	10.8	≤5.0	≤5.0	≤5.0	≤5.0	≤5.0	≤5.0	≤5.0

Note. Racial/ethnic composition figures based on Maryland State Department of Education abbreviations: American Indian or Alaskan Native (AM); Asian (AS); Black or African American (BL); Hispanic/Latino (HI); Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (PI); White (WH); Two or More (Multiple) Races (MU).

Principal Selection

Typically, it takes at least four or five years for complete institutionalization of a change into a district's culture (Brown & Spangler, 2006; Chrisman, 2005). Rotation of principals is one factor that makes it more difficult to pin point whom really nurtured any school improvement. School districts are notable for making change after change in their pursuit of educational excellence. When reforms fail, it is often because the adequate systems that ensure sustainability have not been established.

Therefore, participants selected for this study met the following criteria:

1. Elementary school principals within ABC public school district who served in their roles, in their current school, for a minimum of four years.
2. Student achievement data collected and monitored by the research office in District ABC was used to identify schools that demonstrated consistency in

reducing the achievement gap in reading and math among racial and ethnic groups, in all grade levels, over a period no less than four years.

3. Schools that reflected the district's racial and ethnic diversity and have comparable populations with regards to students receiving free and reduced meals, ESOL, and special education services.
4. Principals willing to be interviewed and shadowed at least twice during the 2015-2016 academic year.

The research office was contacted, and based on annual school performance data, elementary principals that met the criteria for participation in this study were selected. The selected principals were contacted and offered the opportunity to participate in the study. I scheduled interviews and observation/shadowing experiences shortly after obtaining participant agreement to participate in the study.

Data Collection Methods

Portraiture has been established as an acceptable methodology for the contextualization of organizational context and allows the actors to engage in reflection along with the portraitist on how they negotiate the organizational structure of schools. For the purpose of this study, the portraitist sought to understand the process of leadership for equity deployed by each principal through the principal's reflective process and triangulation with evidence of school practices and processes through the school's written policies and conducting observations of school context through classroom visits and walkthroughs.

As a qualitative researcher, I utilized the methods of interviews, field notes from the shadowing experiences, and artifacts in an attempt to triangulate the data. Consistent

with the portraiture methodology, I attempted to establish the context, voice, relationships with the participants, and patterns and themes to shape the story to be told about each of the principals involved in the study. Principal shadowing experiences provided an opportunity to observe the principal as each engaged in their daily interactions and school leadership practices. Transcripts and observations from participant shadowing along with document and artifact analysis allowed me to describe actions of the principals and the interdependency of their actions and decision-making on the school structure and processes that led to student outcomes (see Appendix D Interview Response Matrix and Appendix F Sample Observation Protocol). Figure 3.1 provides an outline of the research timeline and verification methods used.

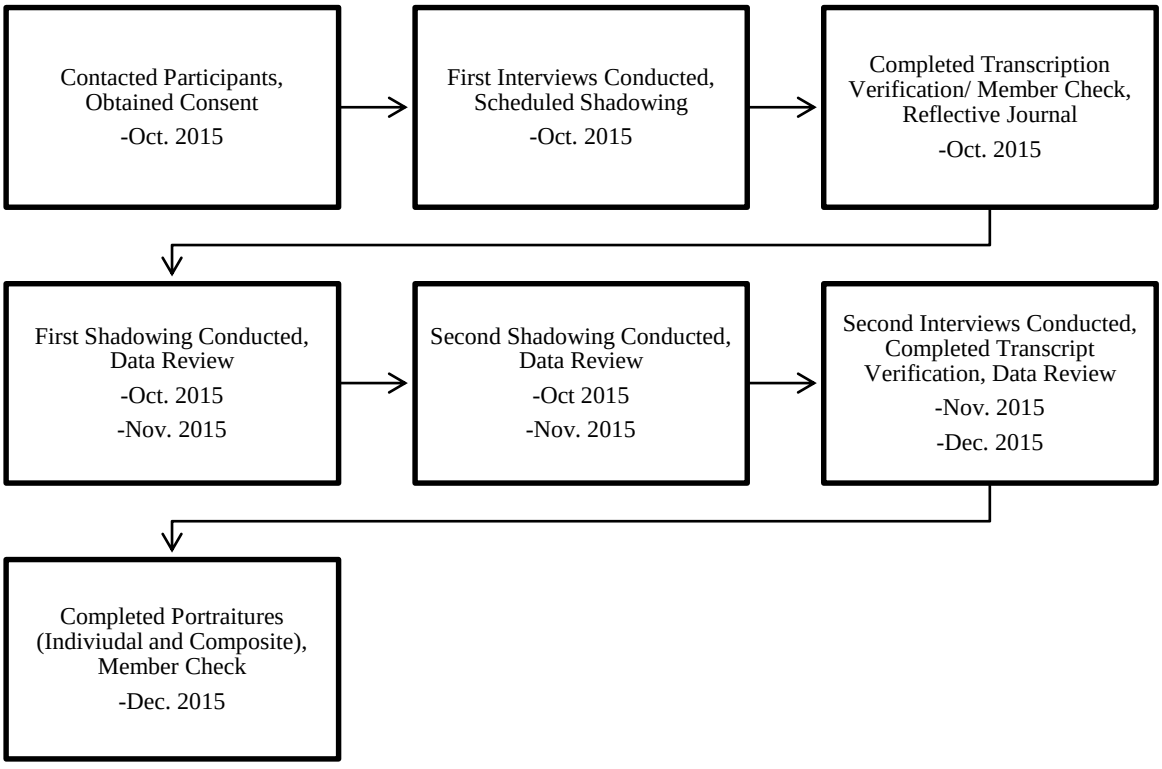

Figure 3.1 Summary of Data Collection and Analysis

To maintain confidentiality, I used pseudonyms. I included the physical setting and historical context for each principal and school in accordance with the portraiture methodology to provide a frame of reference for the action of the study (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Table 3.2, summarizing the methods of data collection used in this study has been included in this section. Triangulation of data from the methods of data collection contributed to the subsequent portrait of the leader for equity. Accord among the multiple data sources strengthened the internal validity of the findings reported in this study (Merriam, 2002; Saldaña, 2013).

Table 3.2

Data Collection Methods Guiding Research

Method	Description
Interviews	• Established a context for the study and factors that have contributed to principal practice. • Debrief of actions and behaviors from the shadowing experiences. • Debrief of document/artifact analysis. • Repeated interviews allowed opportunity to clarify and confirm information.
Principal Shadowing	• Observation of specific actions and interactions of the principal within the organizational context of the school. • Experience the culture that facilitates the principal's capacity to lead for equity and excellence. • Identify the actions the principal takes to negotiate the organizational space.
Document/ Artifact Analysis	• Analysis of varied documents and artifacts to identify intentional processes and structures that undergird the organizational context of the school environment (i.e. communication of key messages, monitoring and accountability documents).

Interviews

Data collection included a minimum of three semi-structured, open-ended question interviews with each principal. I arranged an initial schedule for the interviews

with each participant by phone or email. The initial interviews were conducted onsite based on mutual availability of the researcher and participants. All interviews began with a prepared statement that introduced the researcher, the purpose of the interview, and addressed any issues of confidentiality. I recorded the interviews with permission of the participant, while I captured key points as a reference. Interviews were recorded using an Olympus digital recorder and then transcribed with Dragon Dictate. My field notes and reflective journal helped to capture my impressions and experiences in the schools and the participants. I also used my notes to inform my protocol for the participant shadowing and refine my questions for the follow-up interviews and member check.

The interview questions were designed to be open-ended and fluid to foster an open dialogue with the principal. During the first interview, I realized that in order to engage in a more relaxed and open conversation, congruent with portraiture, I needed to be flexible with the order of presenting the questions. As participants became more comfortable in the interview, they would reveal responses to questions, prior to my asking them. If through the course of the interview, the participant revealed the answer to a planned question in her response to the current question, I accepted the response and did not pose the unasked question. Thus, as I conducted interviews with multiple participants, I was able to collect the needed responses without always posing all planned questions.

On average, in-depth interviews last from one to two hours (Creswell, 2013). Seidman (1998) suggested that 90 minutes is the optimal time for a qualitative research interview. Seidman (1998) also made an argument for repeated interviews and suggested that the first interview focus on the life history of the participant and the experiences that

shaped their current context. Repeated interviews create the opportunity to gain insight on the participant's present context and to clarify or confirm accuracy of notes (Seidman, 1998). I informed the participants I would attempt to conduct the interviews within a one-hour block of time to honor their time constraints, with the understanding that the time might extend to 90 minutes if needed and time permitted. The interviews ranged in time from 50 to 90 minutes. During the time between the subsequent interviews, I reviewed and analyzed dates and principal responses.

The conceptual framework used in this study helped to frame the interview questions. The semi-structured interviews consisted of questions designed to understand the principal's views and beliefs about school leadership and in a broader sense, views of the interrelationship between the principal's behaviors and leadership for equity and excellence; how each principal defined and acted upon roles and responsibilities as a school leader; and how each leader prioritized school issues, concerns, or needs to create equitable outcomes for all students. I also asked the principal to discuss the extent to which accountability measures and organizational structures influenced practices, behaviors, and the level of involvement in decision-making.

The following questions were included in the first interview protocol (see Appendix C for the Interview Protocol).

1. Describe your views on school leadership. What factors shaped your views? The intent of this question was to provide insight on the participant's beliefs about school leadership and their personal and professional experiences that have influenced their leadership practice.

2. What are your thoughts about the factors that contribute to student achievement and student growth?

   The intent of this question was to be open-ended and address part of my research questions related to the principal's leadership style and decision-making processes within the school context.

3. How do you foster change in your school in light of the mandates from school system, state, and federal government?

   The intent of this question was to get to the heart of my research questions related to principal leadership in the context of school accountability.

4. Describe the level of collaboration at your school. Describe the level of collegiality at your school. Describe the level of commitment to professional learning at your school.

   The intent of these questions was to uncover the principal's perception of the school context.

5. How does your leadership style influence your school's context (i.e. practices, processes, structures)?

   The intent of this question was to support the previous two questions and elevate the bi-directional nature of the influence between leadership style and school context.

6. In what ways are others involved in your school?
   a. How are parents/families involved in your school?
   b. How is the community involved in your school?

c. How do teachers, parents, and community members impact decisions made in your school?

The literature review highlighted the idea that principals who engage in collaborative leadership create conditions for increased student achievement for all students. The intent of these question was to expose the level of control in decision-making the participant shares with others.

7. Is there anything else I should know about your school and the factors that influence student achievement and growth?

   I offered this question as an open-ended summary statement that does not suggest any set answer or response about the participant's leadership or student performance.

Utilizing the following questions in subsequent interviews extended the principal's narrative from the first interview and engaged the principal in providing voice to the leadership practices they exhibited in establishing the context of their school. These questions provided an opportunity to help contextualize data collected from artifacts and the shadowing experiences (see Appendix C for the Interview Protocol).

1. When you assumed your position as principal of this school, what were your initial priorities as a school leader?
2. How did you decide on these areas of focus? What influenced your thinking?
3. In what ways were others involved in these decisions?
4. How are these decisions evident in the school context today (i.e. practices, processes, structures)?

5. To what extent have these decisions contributed to teaching and learning in your school? What data supports your thinking?

Principal Shadowing

Shadowing provided an opportunity for researchers to discover the day-to-day experiences, behaviors, and beliefs of participants in their own context (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Doing so, the researcher reflectson the observations of participants and then analyzes and interprets the field notes, verifying interpretations with the participants. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) stated that "the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method" (p.92). At each school site, the principal was shadowed for a period no less than 10 hours over multiple days, for a minimum of three hours per session. Shadowing dates and times also were established based on participant preference and researcher availability. Shadowing included instructional leadership meetings as well as observations in classrooms and other school spaces (i.e. staff meetings, classroom observations, school/community events, conferences, recess, media center, lunch) to provide multiple perspectives of the principal's behaviors and practices, school structures and operations, and contribute to establishing the school context.

Studying observational data collected from the shadowing in conjunction with the interview responses allowed further analysis of principal actions as they contributed to the school culture. This information supplemented themes that emerged from the interviews and document and artifact analysis. I collected field notes using an observational protocol including descriptive, reflective, and demographic notes

(Creswell, 2013). I also used photographs and schematic drawings when appropriate, to provide an additional perspective for the reader to conceptualize the context. An observation protocol sheet (see Appendix E for the Observation Protocol) provided the structure to capture interactions between the principal and students, families, and staff; and describe the context of the space, through observations and/or artifacts that may have contributed to the context.

As part of the post-shadowing protocol, I designed questions to focus attention on leadership practices aimed at accountability and creating an inclusive environment. This also provided an opportunity for the principal to engage in reflection on his/her decision-making processes. Additionally, the questions aimed to gather data on principal behaviors that contributed to the collegial and collaborative aspect of the school environment and illuminated how the principal might view the relationship between their behaviors and student performance. The data was collected using handwritten notes, digital images, and hand drawn sketches or schematic drawings. This information added to the rich and thick descriptions of the school environment and the roles of the actors, consistent with the portraiture methodology.

The types of questions and researcher-participant interactions incorporated into this study necessitated a close personal and professional relationship with the participants and knowledge of the school and district settings. The key to portraiture is the ability of the researcher to immerse themselves in all aspects of the research site in order to capture the essence of the characters and their experiences (Dixson, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Developing a relationship with school sites and research participants to conduct a qualitative research study of this type typically takes significant time (Fine et

al, 2000; Merriam, 2002). Having worked as an instructional specialist and administrator within ABC district contributed to my knowledge of the cultural practices of the district and the backgrounds of the participants in a way that randomly selecting participants from another district would not have allowed. My pre-existing working relationship and knowledge of the district's context and participants leveraged my ability to conduct the research in a non-intrusive manner in order to capture the information sought in the research questions. Dixson (2005) referred to the researcher's voice as the interpretative instrument. My intimate knowledge within the district was an asset to collecting the data. I accounted for the risk of bias associated with having a position within the district through the "Researcher Identity Memo" that captured my perspectives and voice so that my observations were more objective.

Document and Artifact Analysis

The use of relevant documents and artifacts further contextualized the organizational space and provided insight to spoken and unspoken messages and communication that described the interrelationships of the actors in each school. Documents and artifacts included letters, memoranda, agendas, announcements, newsletters, meeting notes and other reports, administrative documents, school climate surveys, and student performance data. These documents were available during the interviews and shadowing experiences, as well on the school and district website. As with the observations and interviews, notes were taken on the documents and artifacts and time was allocated to note key findings and summarize the purpose of the documents.

Data Analysis Procedures

This research followed the steps described by Creswell (2012) to prepare and analyze data that suggested protocols for the organization and reading of data as well as processes for coding, interpretation, and maintaining validity. Initially I planned to collect, review, and analyze data from the first participant prior to proceeding to the second and third participants. After the initial interviews and shadowing were scheduled, two of the participants contacted me to reschedule. The resulting calendar changes made it more feasible to review and analyze the data as each interview and site visit was completed. Thus, immediately after collecting data from each interview and site visit, the interview notes were transcribed using Dragon Dictate transcription software. I read notes from the observation protocol through at least three times before beginning the initial coding process for the participant.

After each data collection opportunity, the notes were organized in a data notebook and whenever possible saved in an electronic file by data category and date of collection. These data files include the interview note transcriptions, field notes, copies of all documents and artifacts, summaries and memos. A document summary form catalogued all documents.

Saldaña (2013) stated that participant activities, perceptions, and tangible documents along with the researcher´s comments in field notes and reflective, analytic memos are substantive material for coding. The specific data collected through interviews, shadowing, and artifacts were used to identify patterns and themes to help formulate perceptions of the actions of each principal that later allowed me to summarize immediate findings, generate questions for follow-up or clarification, and reflect on

emerging themes. After each contact point with the participant, I reviewed transcripts and descriptive and reflective notes from observations multiple times.

As early as the first interview, patterns and themes emerged in the direct quotes from the participants and I began annotating the transcript and organizing ideas and concepts. This was the initial phase of analysis of open coding and I applied this to subsequent interviews and observational notes from the shadowing experiences and artifacts. As a researcher, I utilized memos to position myself within the context and bracket interpretations of data during collection (Creswell, 2012; Fine et al, 2000).

Although I initially planned to be a passive observer during the shadowing experiences, the participants would invite me into their stories. I believe ultimately, the personal connections with the principals allowed for a more authentic lived experience because the principals felt comfortable being open and engaged in reflection as they went about their daily routines, contributing to rich and thick descriptions of each leader's context and practice. Thus, it was important to me as a researcher to bracket my interactions and bias from those of the participants. To identify the nature of my relationship within the participant stories, I first presented each principal's voice as a narrative journal and then isolated the areas of importance emphasized in their stories with the use of a final portrait.

The first step in developing the individual portraits was to review the entire body of field notes, interviews, and documents, chronologically to better understand the perspective of the participant. Soon after reviewing notes I conducted a member check (See Appendix F for the communication) with each participant to summarize and clarify events and actions, prior to beginning the coding process (Creswell, 2012). Next, I

highlighted any key words, phrases, behaviors, or topics that presented themselves. As themes emerged from the data, they were coded by the action and context demonstrated. This process was iterative throughout the study in order to identify emerging themes and patterns. I then focused on patterns of themes that emerged across participant interactions to identify common threads for the portrait.

The conceptual framework and research questions provided a guide for coding. The data was analyzed using a modified inductive approach based on themes cited in the literature related to service with a moral purpose, commitment to changing the organizational context, capacity building and accountability, and leadership practice. Induction is the use of specific data to identify patterns and themes that contribute to generalizations (Saldaña, 2013). I used the coded data to draw inferences from the data and interpret the actions of all of the principals.

I scheduled times to dialogue with the principals to address any questions as new points or findings arose. Follow-up interviews with the principal provided an opportunity to reflect on participant actions and the rationale for those actions. In creating the portrait, data analysis followed an iterative process that assisted in providing a detailed description of the physical and historical context, the voices, and relationships observed during the study and contributed to identification of emerging themes in the data. This information further assisted in constructing the aesthetic whole of how these elements work together in the organizational context. Thus, through induction, the patterns and themes that emerged in each individual portrait evolved into the creation of a composite portrait that recognized and incorporated the individual and collective narratives of the study participants.

The data is presented in chapter four through the development of the story of the lived experiences of the principals and chapter five – the composite portrait. The study has been prepared in a six-chapter dissertation to include my proposal, results, and analysis of the personal and professional experiences that contribute to an administrator's capacity to negotiate the organizational space of an elementary school in an accountability world.

Trustworthiness

The goal of this research was to create a portrait of the daily-lived experiences of elementary principals that promote a school culture of equity and excellence for all students to serve as a resource for other administrators as they address the diverse needs of their organizational space. The underlying assumption of this study was that the principal's beliefs and professional experiences builds their capacity to establish a school culture that embodies equitable practices and that there is a relationship between the culture and high academic achievement across all student demographic groups. I assumed that the leadership practice of the principals participating in this study is responsible for the success of each school in addressing disproportionality in student achievement.

As postulated by Dixson (2005), much of social science research documents failure, while the goal of portraiture is to find success. The challenge is to create an objective product from a subjective process. An element of the research design that contributed to its validity is the use of multiple data sources to construct the portrait. Dixson (2005) also wrote of the importance of listening and data analysis as essential components of this methodology. I collected data through principal shadowing

observations, interviews, and document and artifact analysis. To address any questions and confirm the accuracy of my interpretations, participants reviewed notes from these data, thus increasing trustworthiness by utilizing member checks. The rich and thick descriptions of the portrait contribute to contextualizing the organizational space and the role of the actor in that setting. This contributes to the authenticity of the study by providing enough information to the reader that they can conceptualize the story and create an image of the events and actor in the context-specific setting. Notes from my reflective journal further contextualize the authentic accounting of the actions of the leader. I highlighted themes that presented themselves across the interviews, participant shadowing, reflective journal, and other documents and artifacts to formulate the individual and composite portraiture.

My personal and professional experiences served as strengths and weakness to my ability to conduct an unbiased study of this topic. While my personal narrative contributed to a high interest and motivation to design experiences that create school leaders equipped to lead for equity and social justice, they also may contribute to personal bias. To balance this concern it was important to have a colleague serve as a peer reviewer to read the data and identify key findings. The reviewer and researcher discussed the emerging themes identified by each and engaged in dialogue on areas that diverge as a system of checks and balances. The reviewer provided an opportunity for additional insight and minimized the tendency towards personal bias. Additionally, the "Researcher Identity Memo" further reduced bias and provided the venue for bracketing the researcher from the dialogue of the story.

In addition, my academic and professional studies have provided multiple layers of opportunities at the local and district level to study and analyze feasible entry points for creating effective school cultures. This collective set of knowledge and skills was instrumental in identifying critical elements that prepare principals as leaders for social justice as evidenced by organizational cultures that provide equity and excellence for all students. Again, the reviewer provided an opportunity for additional insight and minimized the tendency towards personal bias.

Researcher Identity Memo

My interest in the topic of principal preparation to lead for social justice emerged from my experiences as a parent, public school teacher, staff development content specialist, elementary school assistant principal, and central office administrator in a large, highly diverse, urban the school district in Maryland. This topic is of personal and professional interest. I am aware that my previous and current work experiences bring possible bias to this study. However, I do not have a position of a supervisory or evaluative nature that would exert undue influence on study participants and their actions. During the course of this study, I kept my professional role separate from that of my role as researcher and I relied on participant's views, perspectives, and behaviors that were captured through the interviews and observations. During data collection, I conducted myself as a qualitative researcher.

As an African American female, I recognize the role of race and ethnicity in equitable access to education and resources. Growing up in Louisiana I was often the only student, or one of few, who looked like me in my gifted and advanced classes. During this period, it was evident that expectations and support structures that would

have contributed to positive learning environments for students that looked like me were not always in place. My mostly White female teachers and African American schoolmates treated me differently. It was my experience that the design of school culture did not provide access to rigorous coursework to African American students. As I reflect on the educational experiences of my three children, aged 13–26, I realize they share common experiences. From the personal perspective, there is a demonstrated need to equip school leaders with the skill set to cultivate school cultures that promote equity and excellence for all students.

Through my roles as a teacher, central services administrator, and school based administrator I have collected, analyzed, and monitored local, district, and national data that indicated student performance data is identifiable by race and ethnicity. Much of the academic and professional development that I have experienced in my capacity as an educational leader has focused on the development and implementation of equitable instructional practices and strategies. A district initiative that all students will meet standardized benchmarks designed to have all students college-ready when they graduate from high school drives my work. This places increased accountability on my role as an administrator to develop and monitor the instructional infrastructure that will support equity and excellence for all students.

My personal and professional experiences undergird my commitment and dedication to this topic. In addition, my academic and professional studies have provided multiple layers of opportunities at the local and district level to study and analyze feasible entry points for creating effective school cultures. This collective set of knowledge and skills were instrumental in identifying critical elements that will prepare principals as

leaders for social justice as evidenced by cultures that provide equity and excellence for all students.

Ethical and Political Considerations

This research was conducted within the parameters of the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that all parties involved were provided consent-to-participate (see Appendix A for the Informed Consent Form). Throughout this research process, I provided the participants opportunities to review data for accuracy (Creswell, 2013). The goal was to have the principal engage openly and honestly in the process. As a researcher, it was important to cultivate a relationship of trust and communication to assure the participant of my commitment to portray his/her story honestly. I shared the scope and purpose of this study with the principal at the beginning of the study and prior to each interview session. To ensure anonymity, I developed pseudonyms for each participant and all settings. Participants provided consent, prior to inclusion in the study. I shared notes and findings with the participant to confirm actions and interpretations.

Summary

This chapter described the procedures and theoretical framework used by the researcher to collect and analyze data to answer the study's questions. It included a description of portraiture as a qualitative method and summarized descriptive information on the selection of the participants, methodology for data collection and analysis, and the researcher's consideration for issues of validity and ethics and politics. Attention was also given to the role of the researcher as it related to the art of portraiture.

CHAPTER IV: PRESENTATION OF DATA

Introduction

Each participant's portrait begins with a brief introduction establishing the setting and context. Following the introduction, I provide voice to the portrait through textural and structural descriptions based on the interviews and shadowing experiences. The descriptions organized to tell the story of the experiences in a narrative form rather than chronologically. Organization of each narrative centered on the four themes elevated in the interview questions: beliefs and views on leadership, leadership and student achievement, influence of leadership on school context, and leadership and decision-making. I conclude each portrait with the emerging themes based on the interviews and shadowing experiences. The chapter concludes with a summary data analysis of the three portraits**.**

The purpose of this study was to capture the beliefs, structures, and decision-making processes that influence principal practice in leading for equity for three elementary school principals. The study focused on how the principal's beliefs and decision-making processes contribute to leadership behaviors that promote a culture of equity and excellence. This research elevated the interrelationship between principal's beliefs and behaviors, and the principal's capacity to create a school space that will sustain high student achievement for all students. The design of the research protocols and methodology focused on gaining insight on how three elementary school principals influence school culture, structures, and processes, and balance managerial and instructional leadership roles, to attain high levels of academic achievement. This study focused on addressing the following research questions:

1. What are principals' beliefs and decision-making processes, and the school structures that support equity and excellence for all students?
2. How do elementary principals balance the role and responsibilities of school leadership and negotiate the school context (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability measures) to support equity and excellence for all students?

Setting and Context

The study centered on three elementary school principals identified based on the selection criteria identified in the research design. Each of the three principals was open to the study and engaging in reflective questioning about their leadership practices. The three principals were purposefully selected because of: (1) longevity in their current schools, (2) the demographic similarity of the school's student population to that of the district, and (3) four year trend data that reflected a reduced disproportionality in student performance data in math and literacy in each school, and (4) willingness to interviewed and shadowed at least twice during the school year.

I submitted the research proposal and protocols to the district's research office for final approval prior to contacting any school administrators. Once approved, relevant school performance data obtained from the research office and district database contributed to identification of a pool of possible principals that met the four selection criteria. Six schools met the proposed criteria and I initially contacted three based on best fit with criterion 2 and 3. Only two of those schools agreed so I contacted a fourth school based on the criteria and this school also agreed to participate in the study.

It is important to note that I conducted this study in the school district in which I work, with approval from my doctoral committee. With 133 elementary schools within the district, there was minimal risk that these three administrators would be identifiable. In contacting each of the principals, I shared the informed consent form, indicated my role for the purpose of the study as that of a researcher and that their participation was voluntary, and would remain confidential. I also reiterated that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Interviews and shadowing of the three principals that agreed to take part in the study occurred during the fall and winter of 2015. The following table provides participant summary information.

Table 4.1

Participant Summary Information

Name:	**Hope**	**Cadence**	**Ivy**
School data	Enrollment: 306 Pre-K – grade 5 Autism Prekindergarten Language Class Resource	Enrollment: 466 Pre-K – grade 5 Autism Preschool Education Program Resource	Enrollment: 313 Pre-K – grade 5 Preschool Education Program Comprehensive Resource School/Community-Based
Administrative Team	Single Administrator	Principal Assistant Principal	Single Administrator
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Race	White	African American	African American
Years of Exp.	20 years as a principal	13 years as a principal	17 years as a principal
Years in Current School	6	10	13

Hope

Prologue

Hope, a White female, began her educational career 45 years ago as a special education educator. Hope is the daughter of immigrant parents who placed an emphasis on family, religion, and education. During our initial interview, she reminisced about her childhood and her mother's pride in her daughter's education. She knew at a young age that education was important to who you wanted to become and aspired to become a teacher. She has served in school-based and central office based administrative roles. Her educational career included classroom teaching, district leadership with performance and accountability for special education, and school leadership roles. Her first principalship was 26 years ago. This is her sixth year as principal in her current school. Hope is the single administrator in her building.

Introduction

Hope was one of three principals that agreed to participate in this study. Hope was very accommodating and responded in the affirmative within one day of receiving the email invitation in October 2015. We had a phone conversation and scheduled the initial interview to occur within two weeks of the agreement to participate. I met Hope during the previous year when the district was engaging in work around social-emotional learning and student engagement as part of the district's strategic plan. The district recognized Hope for her leadership and school's high scores on the Gallup Engagement Survey[1]. My sense during our phone conversation was that Hope was comfortable and

[1] Gallup Engagement Survey: A national engagement survey, Gallup's Q^{12} survey consists of the 12 questions that measure the most important elements of employee engagement and tie directly to performance outcomes.

excited about participating in the study. Her voice was light and animated, not at all tentative as we scheduled a time for my initial visit. Prior to ending the call, she expressed that she was looking forward to having an opportunity to engage in reflection about her practice through the study.

During the initial interview, Hope was friendly, open, and relaxed. Throughout the interview, she did not demonstrate any terseness in her voice and often would recline back in her seat to think before responding with a smile. She was very animated and expressive in her language, often chuckling or laughing over a remembrance as she responded to my questions. The following week two district led meetings for principals and central office leaders affected both our schedules. We agreed on a date for the initial participant shadowing that would occur two weeks later in late October 2015, based on the principal's availability. Subsequent data collection occurred in November and December 2015.

Setting/Context

Serenity Elementary School is located within a small, picturesque neighborhood in the western part of the county. The surrounding residences are single-family homes with well-manicured lawns and many trees providing shade. Driving up to the school, I observed people walking, jogging, pushing strollers, and walking dogs. It was very quiet and serene and it was easy to forget that less than a mile away I had turned off one of the busiest highways in the county. Just shortly, before I turned off the highway into the neighborhood, I passed two major intersections that housed a chain grocery store and other shops and restaurants. Nearby are also a Metro transportation station and several

housing complexes. However, once I turned from the highway into the neighborhood, all the noise and bustle seemed to disappear into the background.

On the date of my initial interview with Hope, it was a no work, no-pay day in the district. A statewide teacher's convention, closed schools that day leaving no students and teachers in the building. Hope and her administrative secretary greeted me warmly upon my arrival. As I signed into the visitor's log, I was aware the two were in conference addressing some business item. The front office was like many school offices with a counter for sign-in, a couple of desks for the secretaries and pictures and information posted on a bulletin board. There were informational letters on the counter top as well and chairs for visitors.

One notable difference to other school's I have been in was that the principal's office was not tucked away down a hallway, removed from the bustle of the front office, but instead, immediately behind the secretaries desk was a wall of glass with a door that opened directly into the principal's office. If you could imagine a grocery store commercial where the manager's office is all glass and you can see the entire store in the background, or perhaps imagining a fish in a fishbowl peering out, these were two images that came immediately to mind. It was a large office with a desk right in the center with two chairs for visitors. There were no curtains at the large glass window on the interior and there were windows facing out to the campus behind the principal's desk. It was a spacious area and felt warm and homey because of the pictures on the walls and shelves of family and friends, student messages, books, and awards.

While sitting in her office, I noticed several poster sized portraits of students on her wall and asked her about their significance. Hope shared that at the start of each

school year she identifies a group of students and requests these special pictures for her wall from the photographer who does the school portraits for the yearbook. She pre-selects the students for a variety of reasons and she relayed the story of each student, painting pictures of academic, behavioral, and emotional strengths and needs. She knew details about each child on the wall. She shared that throughout the year she monitors, checks in, encourages, and supports these students and builds relationships with them and their parents. At the end of the year, these students take home their poster and she begins the process again with a new group. This activity she shared, allows her to remain connected to her students and the importance of knowing the whole child in order to stretch them. Shortly thereafter, she outlined her schedule for the day, including classroom visits and goal setting with teachers, supporting services staff, and students.

Although Hope first walked me into her office, she almost immediately decided we should move to her conference room to be more comfortable. There was a large rectangular table in the center of the room with comfortable seating chairs at the table. On the walls were platitudes about hope and caring. Down the center of the table was a table runner, similar to what one might find in their own dining room on a festive holiday. On the table was a box of scones. The day before the interview had been Bosses Day, and Hope shared the staff had brought in treats for her from Panera bread. She was quite cheerful when she offered me refreshments stating that she had been holding back to wait for me. I thanked her and declined because I had shared a rare breakfast moment with my spouse that morning before coming to the school, but encouraged her to go ahead and indulge, which she did.

Before we began the interview, we casually chatted about how quiet the school was without staff and students, and some of the initiatives occurring in the district that she knew I managed. After a few minutes, we shifted gears into the purpose for my visit. I reviewed the focus of the study, confidentiality, and informed consent form, and reminded her that she could withdraw at any time during the study. She confirmed her agreement to participate and my use of the digital recorder during the interview. While the intent was to have a one-hour interview to honor the principal's time, the interview lasted 88 minutes. Hope responded to each question, sometimes directly, and more often through vignettes. Frequently, Hope would become engrossed in her story telling and I would employ probing questions to redirect her to the topic in order to obtain clear responses to the questions. Although the protocol design intended movement through the questions in a systematic manner, her responses were not always organized and as a researcher, I listened for clues within her responses to guide the conversation back to my pre-determined questions. Sometimes, within her vignette would be a connection to a question I came prepared to ask and I would use that comment to bring us back to the interview protocol. Though the interview lasted longer than planned, the time passed quickly as Hope shared her views and "story" as a teacher, parent, and leader.

Beliefs and Views on Leadership

"Leaders model the behavior they wish to see…they have to be visible." Hope recollected a parent conference in which the school nurse stated the student, with significant disabilities, could not attend the school because she was not changing diapers. Prior to moving quickly forward with the meeting, Hope replied, "Oh, that's the only reason? Then I can do that." Hope recalled that about two weeks later another staff

member shared with her that others in the building were still talking about how her actions changed the tone of the meeting. Other views about leadership surfaced during subsequent interviews and observations, which included consistency of expectations. Hope reflected that staff notes the things the leader attends to and assigns importance to those actions and expectations. A repeated phrase Hope used was, "it's the little things" that make a difference. She also stressed the importance of hiring the right people.

> One of the things about leadership, I really believe this, is taking the time to hire the right people. You can change people's behaviors. I do not know that you can change their values and their beliefs. Therefore, if you already have people that are sharing your beliefs of the bigger picture, what we want for kids, that just takes all the drama out of it.

She attributed her beliefs about leadership to her family and that her parents often served as a haven for others in the community and their extended family.

> I do not know, just growing up, Catholic school, my parents were different from each other. My father went to college and my mother was an immigrant from Italy and was very excited that here girls went to school in America. Both my parents came from Italy…But they spent time…always had somebody other than us…I just think they saw my mom and dad as stability.

She recalled an incident involving a cousin, kicked out of class for being a wise guy and a clown during his senior year in high school, came to live with them. Her father challenged him to achieve his goals. The teacher had written him off as never amounting to anything because in her opinion he did not apply himself. According to Hope, he lamented to her Dad saying,

> Uncle Jack, do you believe that? And my Dad says, yes. So he treats him the same as us and said what do you want to do and when my cousin says, go to college, my Dad says with a simple okay, I can help you go get where you want to go, but you have to study. So you can come live with us and tow to the line. He came and lived with us and it was just like so yeah, another brother living with us, with the same expectations and no nonsense. He made it through college. So I saw my parents from a young child changing people's lives.

From these influences, Hope shared her philosophy that she approaches leadership by modeling positive behavior and seeing the good in others.

> So I saw my parents do stuff as we grew up…Not that it was ever easy…Always volunteering…I'd say to my daughter when she was little, we're doing this…when we're all busy with things…these are the kinds of things they give of their time…I think who you surround yourself with shapes who you are …so I think surrounding yourself with people that are positive and also see the good in you and brought it out of you, and along the way you learn what to do and sometimes, what not to do.

As a result, one of the factors she stated she considers in hiring staff is their level of activism and volunteerism as a measure of how they give of their time within the context of a busy world.

We talked about school culture and Hope reflected on the school's experiences and recognitions with the Gallup Engagement Survey. When asked by the national organizers how the school had maintained and increased their high student and staff engagement scores, she shared she followed the guidance of the organization sponsored coach and focus on the practices yielding the highest results and then the areas that were not as high would take care of themselves, and it worked. She has taken that philosophy into how she creates a space for teaching and learning. Building on her strengths of hiring the right people and providing the opportunity for shared leadership, she has created a school context that taps into the leadership potential of others. Her philosophy is "There are many schools that will have openings, but if you come to Serenity and you really think you have the capacity to make a difference; this is the school for you."

Leadership and Student Achievement

At Serenity Elementary School, there is attention to goal setting that extends beyond the academic setting into the conditions for social emotional learning. Hope

described how staff works with the parent teacher association (PTA) to share practices used at school with parents and guardians to provide consistency in language and expectations. Teachers work with students to establish learning and behavior goals and then action plans to support achieving these goals. Strategies are used to motivate students to achieve their goals and recognize their progress, big or small. Hope articulated that it is not enough for the adults to know what is important; students also need to know academics are important "This is where we are. This is what we put in place." Hope described processes for communicating her expectations for goal setting and using data to set and monitor progress. She meets regularly with staff, attends collaborative planning meetings and student talk meetings where staff present the data on their students. According to Hope, a contributing factor to student achievement and growth is the level of commitment of staff, "they are assets…creating a sense of community in classrooms…and their expectations are embedded in the actions that create opportunities for better outcomes." The faculty and staff focus of the school's school improvement plan also stress deepening staff's pedagogical knowledge and skills and developing their capacity to address the social and cultural needs of students.

Hope also places an emphasis on setting clear behavioral expectations. The discipline committee is comprised of the guidance counselor, building services manager, physical education teacher, a grade level team leader, and the principal. During the monthly meetings, led by the guidance counselor, the team reviews discipline referral data by grade, race, teacher, time of incident, and type of incident. I observed this team for one hour as they reviewed the current marking period data, comparison data with the

same period the previous year, and efforts to support students who had repeated discipline referrals.

The discipline committee also problem-solved factors that contributed to the marked decrease in the number of referrals and elevated the practice of "filling buckets"[2] and implementation of restorative practices that hold students accountable to academic and behavioral expectations while building positive relationships between students and adults. At one point, noticing the positive results in kindergarten and grades 3 and 5, Hope asked the guidance counselor to remind her to recognize these students during the achievement counsel assembly. She stated, "We have to keep them on the right path." Throughout the discussion, it was evident that all members were familiar with the students being discussed and inserted narratives and anecdotes that supported the shared investment in positive outcomes for the students. Staff members indicated they felt that reviewing the behavioral expectations with parents at the PTA meetings and with all staff, along with student developed and delivered phone and e-mail messages had been instrumental to the decline in referrals.

I observed Hope as she worked with the staff development teacher (SDT), who is in her first year in this role, to review the status of the staff student learning objectives (SLO). Directing her comments toward me, the SDT shared that earlier in the year she provided professional learning to all staff on the SLO, met with staff individually to clarify questions, and reviewed each SLO prior to sharing them with the principal. Hope further emphasized the establishment of three criteria as part of the SLO review:

[2] See Rath and Clifton (2007), How Full is Your Bucket?: Positive Strategies for Work and Life for a detailed explanation of this strategy that focused on the idea that our lives and workplace productivity are shaped by our interactions with others.

inclusion of first quarter performance data, identification of student needs based on the first quarter data, and emphasis on collaborative learning as distinguished from cooperative learning. The expectation to submit an SLO applied to all staff, including the long-term substitute teacher on staff. At the time of this observation, all but three members of the staff had complied and the principal and SDT discussed a plan to have those three submitted within the next week.

During grade level collaborative planning meetings, teacher leaders were responsible for developing the agenda and facilitating the meeting. Hope would raise questions, offer suggestions, or probe thinking. Staff present in this type of meeting included the grade level team leader, other grade level teachers, the SDT, the reading specialist, and the principal. During the meeting, each classroom teacher came prepared with data charts that included math and reading performance for each student as well as the highlighted data for each of their targeted students identified in their SLO. Each member received copies of all documents discussed at the start of the meeting. Each teacher first reviewed the data on their targeted students, elevating the progress and areas of needs. Specific formative assessment data, aligned to data monitored at the district level was included in the update. The reading specialist, SDT, other classroom teachers, and the principal asked clarifying questions to better understand the individual student's story.

After discussing the targeted students of each teacher, the discussion moved to examining the progress of all students in the grade level. Again, there were prepared charts that identified where each student started the year, the goal for quarter progress, and the weekly status of each student. Students that were not on track to meet goals were

elevated for discussion as well as those who had exceeded the goal. The team discussed next steps for support to continue progress or provide interventions, After a brief discussion of upcoming parent-teacher conferences and assurances that the teachers had previously made contact with the parent/guardian of each student, there was an in-depth conversation around one specific student identified earlier in the data discussion as having made limited progress.

Hope pushed for a focused conversation on the academic progress, efforts to engage the parents, and shared some historical information on the family and home context. The teacher stated she had communicated with the father, who shared the academic concern, and planned to provide additional take home resources. Hope probed, "What kind of extra work, not busy work? … Make sure it's what she needs…Be thoughtful." When the topic of behavioral concerns surfaced, Hope again probed, "What are the targeted behaviors? … When did behaviors begin?" Prior to closing the meeting, the principal shared that the next meeting would include a discussion of an update on SLOs for the past quarter and where the team was with regards to implementation of social emotional learning practices. Hope asked probing questions to engage staff in reflective thinking to align their behaviors to common expectations for students. She did this respectfully and within the context of how staff and the school were meeting the needs of students and their families.

Maintaining connections with students is an important aspect of Hope's daily routine at Serenity Elementary School. Hope demonstrated a personal interest and role in motivating students and commending them for their success. She shared with me that a practice is to have the teachers identify students that have achieved the sight word goals

for the quarter. Hope will then have these students come to her in the office where she celebrates their accomplishment. I observed Hope interact with one of these students during my first shadowing experience. When he entered the conference room where we sat, she warmly greeted the student and asked if he knew why he was called to the office. She went on to say she had heard great news that he had learned some new words, and invited him to share the words with her. When the student shared three words with her, Hope smiled, clapped her hands, and said, "How wonderful was that! I'm so proud of you." She then proceeded to provide the young man with a sticker that she read aloud to him. The sticker stated, my principal thinks I am special. The young man beamed back at her as she placed it on his chest. As he turned to go back to class, she encouraged him to share with others why he was wearing the sticker. She later told me this practice helped her to know the students and also to encourage students to take pride in their success and continue to practice their sight words.

During one shadowing experience, Hope engaged in one-on-one goal-setting conferences with fifth graders. Hope indicated she meets with each fifth grader to identify, monitor, and reflect on goals for the year. I observed her meet with three students. She utilized a goal sheet that included demographic data, student grades, and allowed students to reflect on strengths and opportunities for improvement. She pushed students to establish academic as well as personal goals and specific strategies that would assist them in attaining these goals. Hope also aligned the goals to the school improvement goal of writing. Some of the questions she asked students included, "What do good writers do?" and "What would your teacher pick for you?" in reference to the skills students should develop to attain their goals.

During these sessions, Hope was engaging and focused on the students. She welcomed each student into her office with a smile and inquired about how their day had progressed before initiating the conversation about their goals. When she asked a student a question, she waited patiently while they answered or thought about their goals without pressuring or showing signs of impatience. The students appeared relaxed and comfortable as they talked with Hope. The exchanges did not appear forced or contrived. At one point, Hope stated, these opportunities with her students were the "bright spot of her day…as busy as I am, this is the really important stuff!"

Influence of Leadership on School Context

"Every year is different, all these little things happen…I have my work cut out for me." Hope stated, "Managing change is like having windows that allow the leader to control, to a degree, what the focus will be." Each year, all staff engages in goal setting. Hope indicated that when staff seems to struggle with expectations, she uses data to create the sense of urgency and challenge existing practices. There is an expectation that staff participates and invest in ongoing professional growth, including sharing learnings with colleagues at faculty meetings. Hope fosters shared ownership of developing staff capacity to engage in new practices. The school's mission posted on their website emphasized respect and cooperation, commitment to professional learning, and engagement of students, parents, and community members in supporting students in the attainment of their full potential.

During staff meetings, she shared she does not take the lead in answering all questions; instead she works with the leadership team to empower them to have shared leadership in setting the context for learning. Hope engages in professional learning with

her staff so she and her leadership team share common knowledge and expectations for teaching and learning. She often anchors new expectations in current practices and when possible, participates in efforts that extend to schools within the high school articulation pattern so that staff and students see the connections with practices in other schools. She indicated this strategy helped staff see what was important. Another important strategy she discussed "keep your finger on the pulse and keep it moving and everybody moving and learning from other people. That is the whole thing everybody, in every school needs to do, what you believe is right. We don't have time to disorient our youth." A few times during the interview, she spoke to these actions as being the "Serenity Way."

During the discipline committee meeting, in addition to the referral data, other topics included the bus evacuation drills and safety patrol training, and a review of the union sponsored restorative practices session the leadership team and Hope had attended. Hope asked the guidance counselor to provide an update on the four sessions attended by some members of the team. Conducted over a two-week period after school, each session cost participants $24.00 and was voluntary. During the initial interview, Hope mentioned the staff interest in attending this course. It was interesting to hear the staff perspective on what they found of value and was ready to implement in their school, especially since this was a voluntary experience.

The guidance counselor reflected that the course validated the school's journey with restorative practices, introduced new resources and materials, and that many of the strategies shared with the team aligned to efforts the school had implemented over the past year. Hope asked, "How will we bring this back to staff?" She went on to make a connection between the restorative practice philosophy and the importance of students

owning the responsibility of their actions. The meeting concluded with the guidance counselor restating the next steps for referral processes, supporting expectations in the cafeteria, and implementation of restorative practices from the workshop. Throughout the meeting, I observed Hope provide recognition to staff for their individual and collective implementation of key practices and recognition of successes. Although the guidance counselor facilitated the meeting, Hope asked questions for clarification or to engage voices to ensure all members contributed to the dialogue.

During my observation of Hope and the SDT, Hope asked a series of questions that framed the importance of clarity with staff regarding expectations for the SLOs and identification of professional learning needs for staff that meet the needs of students. She used phrases such as "…as much as it takes…in the heat of the battle we need to be on the same page." Throughout the discussion, Hope articulated the idea that there was a sense of urgency for alignment of instruction to ensure student growth and increased student achievement. An example of this occurred when at one point she stated, "We have to be clear on the criteria for success. Where we put emphasis is important for the future." When the SDT shared a proposed schedule for follow-up with staff based on the feedback from the principal, Hope strategically asked questions about specific staff to determine how the SDT would differentiate support for these individuals. Hope noted that one grade's plans were not specifically targeting a group of students reflected in the school data as not on track to meet the student performance goals. Hope asked the SDT, "How will you support this team in developing and monitoring clear and specific outcomes for their most needy students?" Hope also asked the SDT how she would support some individual teachers, with known resistance towards change, in revising and

focusing their SLOs. At the end of the meeting with the SDT, Hope clarified that she was concerned that some of the staff had developed plans not aligned to the school improvement goals and not specific to the needs of the students who had not been served well. Her questions to the SDT were to ensure that in the follow-up with staff, the SDT targeted her support to staff in a way that would yield positive outcomes for students.

I also observed Hope as she organized her day by having the secretary bring in observation sheets that included equitable practices and class rosters. The class rosters included each student's name, race, and gender by teacher. Hope explained that when she visits classrooms she has a focus. First quarter she looked for specific instructional practices. Second quarter she is specifically looking for equitable practices, one of which includes calling patterns. During an informal, unannounced visit to a classroom, she noted with checks, the students called, and the number of times the teacher called each student. When we returned to her office, she summarized notes on the feedback sheets and then asked the secretary to make copies and provide the feedback sheets to the individual teachers.

Leadership and Decision-Making

"One of the most important things that I didn't even know I was doing…get the people involved, especially if it's something big…I think it's important to involve everybody." Hope provided examples of collaborating with the PTA on the reading program, establishing a welcoming and inclusive school culture for students and families in the Autism program, and providing the building services manager the opportunity to orchestrate and lead the energy team at the school. She shared stories of families and students who have passed through the Serenity community and other schools she led in

years past, that when she sees them in passing, stop to share with her their successes and want her to know the impact of her leadership.

During the shadowing experiences, Hope never directed the SDT, but instead established a coaching stance. She asked, "Based on your review of the SLOs, where do you see the need for differentiated support?" Later, when discussing specific grade level and content teams of teachers, Hope demonstrated her knowledge of the strengths and needs of individual staff members, highlighting individuals with similar needs and stressing the importance of providing them with the opportunity to experience modeling from other staff that were meeting expectations and standards. She stated this, not as fixing them, but instead she stated, "…it's important for them to hear 'good ones' …important for them to see it wasn't easy, but that others still struggle, but came through, …need to see struggle of others…"

The SDT and Hope discussed staff professional learning needs and specific grade level teams. As a result, the pair selected one grade level team who had engaged in critical reflection around their data to identify an instructional focus to share their process at the next faculty meeting. The SDT agreed to develop a schedule that allocated 10 minutes to provide specific feedback to each staff member on an individual basis and to begin to develop a running list of the resources, print or staffing, that would assist staff in meeting their goals. In Hope's words, "We want to keep the burden off them [staff]. I think we are in really good shape for mid-year. We've got good people."

I observed Hope as she met with supporting services staff to review their professional development plans. I observed her meet with an instructional paraprofessional educator and a building services worker. Her interactions with each

aligned to their identified goals. She asked questions to clarify the goals, provided specific feedback, gave an opportunity for staff to give input and ask questions, and established agreements for monitoring and accountability for herself and staff. Hope treated each staff member with respect and dignity and provided a copy of the signed plan at the end of their meeting. She escorted each staff member into her office, introduced my role and me, and asked permission for me to remain during his or her conversation. During her review with the building services worker, it became evident that the employee had been negligent in her duties during a fire drill. As Hope discussed the need for the employee to learn the necessary protocols, she never raised her voice or became short or impatient in her tone. As the employee offered excuses, Hope remained calm, listened, and then reiterated her expectations.

During the grade four planning meeting, Hope met with the classroom teacher and SDT to discuss student progress and the teacher's SLOs. The conversation focused on data the teacher presented, which outlined identified targets and student progress towards those goals. While Hope asked some specific probing questions, the SDT facilitated the conversation, and maintained a master copy of the teacher's SLO updating it throughout the conference. Hope framed the discussion by stating, "SLOs are about what we're doing to improve teacher practice, not about what we're doing to students." Examples of her probing questions included, "How does [student] current reading level compare to the previous quarter? Have you communicated with his parent? What is your major concern with his progress at this point? What steps have you taken to confirm this is his area of need?" As with the supporting services staff, she articulated next steps she wanted to see in the teacher practice and asked for input. Hope appeared comfortable with having the

classroom teacher and SDT identify next steps and goals. During the meeting, members of the grade level team directed most of the conversation, and Hope interjected only when she felt the actions offered by the team were not specific and targeted. For example, as noted earlier, Hope challenged the thinking of one teacher to ensure that the work was not busy work or extra work, but thoughtful, intentional work, based on student needs and worthy of student time.

During the interview, Hope shared a pivotal moment that clarified for her the importance of shared leadership when she and her leadership team met to review their individual and collective leadership profile data. She reflected that she had reviewed the data earlier and was somewhat worried about discoveries related to two of her leaders that were opposite in profiles. She opened the meeting with "I think there are a lot of good things here, now we need to think about how we move this forward." According to Hope, she was surprised when the two leaders took control of the dialogue and began to problem-solve how to present this new information to the rest of the staff. Hope's reflection about the influence of her leadership style on the school context was that she had created a safe space and the conditions for leaders to share leadership in delivering messages. Her job, she reflected, was to tap into individual expertise and allow others to show their leadership skills.

A Portrait of Hope

Hope's beliefs and decision-making processes and school structures that support equity and excellence included a focus on what she believes is right by students with an emphasis on the social and emotional needs of students and modeling expectations. Hope set clear expectations in a warm and embracing manner. She modeled the positive

behavior she wished to see and emphasized the use of data to inform practices and processes. During the participant shadowing experience, Hope reviewed and analyzed data, clarified expectations for staff professional learning, and modeled expectations consistent with those shared during the interview. During grade level team meetings, where staff reviewed reading, math, and behavior goals for their students, Hope tapped into the leadership of the team leader and allowed the team to collaborate and brainstorm practices to support struggling students identified in their SLOs.

She balanced her roles and responsibilities for accountability and addressing the other needs of students by facilitating collaborative processes. She participated in various meetings facilitated by other teacher leaders, including the guidance counselor and staff development teacher. Decisions resulted from collaboration with others through shared leadership and included staff, students, and community. At times, Hope was directive, providing non-negotiables, and other times her comments tended to elevate points around specific students and provide additional historical context. Hope primarily participated in staff discussions through a coaching stance, tapping into the expertise of the SDT or other teacher leaders and staff, while setting clear expectations for providing differentiated professional learning and support to identified staff. In my opinion, as a principal, she could have demonstrated more presence in the planning and facilitation of these meetings. Yet, she demonstrated in the meetings that she did have a finger on the pulse.

There was a strong sense of community buy-in and attention to people, and social emotional learning to create a positive, safe space. This I attributed to her focus on consistently monitoring progress and adjusting strategy as appropriate to improve student

academic and behavioral goals. Hope commended staff and students for their work, celebrated their success, and challenged them to do more as informed by the data. Hope visited classrooms to collect data to inform practices and model with students, practices embedded in the school culture. Through the hallways, students and adults greeted her warmly. She made meaningful connections with students as she visited classrooms, taking the time to ask questions about their learning and their day, and validating their ideas and perceptions. She also modeled the expectation of motivating and engaging students when she interacted with students to acknowledge success and encouragement to set new goals. These behaviors aligned to the literature related to building on the cultural and social capital of students to attain equity.

Hope achieved intended outcomes through goal setting; with clear action plans and monitoring that attend to the academics and the individual needs of adults and students. My only concern was that I did not see Hope demonstrate a depth of pedagogical knowledge in her feedback and leadership to balance her emphasis on supporting and attending to the other needs of students. Instead, instruction seemed to be led by the specialists on her leadership team. Still, her leadership practice has resulted in high levels of staff, student, and parent engagement and increased student achievement, measurable outcomes in equitable and excellent schools.

Cadence

Prologue

Cadence, an African-American female, has been an administrator for 13 years. This is her tenth year as principal in her current school. Cadence is originally from the New York Metropolitan area. She began her professional career as a Crisis Counselor,

with a degree in Sociology. She transferred to teaching through an alternative certification pathway. In her first teaching position, she served as a special education teacher in a large urban city in Maryland before coming to this school district. Unlike the other two participants in this study, an assistant principal supports Cadence.

Introduction

Cadence agreed immediately upon receipt of the email invitation to participate in the study. After a few email exchanges, we identified a date for the first interview, which occurred the following week in early October 2015. I met Cadence two years ago at a farewell party for another district colleague, who at the time was my direct supervisor and previously supervised Cadence. During that informal gathering, we chatted about our personal and professional lives and realized our spouses worked in the same profession. My interactions with Cadence since that time have been driven by the nature of our work. Cadence served in a leadership role in the principal's group that meets monthly throughout the year to discuss data and issues to inform their work, problem-solve, and invite district leaders to share and clarify information from central office. Cadence has invited me to present at these meetings around selected topics (i.e. safety and security, professional development, curriculum) and has consulted with me on policy and compliance issues in the context of my role in the district.

Our interactions have been professional, positive, and collegial over the past two years since our original introduction. Cadence appeared enthusiastic about participating in the study when I arrived for the first interview. As we chatted about district priorities, she reminded me that she also earned her doctorate during the past year and felt a kinship

to where I was in the process. She conveyed she was happy to be a part of the study and have an opportunity to reflect on her work and grow as a leader.

The initial interview went quickly, about 35 minutes, and afterwards we established dates for two participant-shadowing experiences to occur over the following weeks in late October 2015. Cadence was planning a teacher observation and post-observation conference on the first of those shadowing dates and wanted me to be present for those processes. She shared that she would obtain permission from the teacher prior to my arrival since this would be a personnel matter. During the initial shadowing, I was able to witness the observation, post-observation conference, and shadow Cadence as she joined a special education IEP meeting.

Setting/Context

Situated irectly on a street that is a main thoroughfare for the area is Busy Bee Elementary School. It is about four miles from Serenity Elementary School, yet the sights and sounds are worlds apart. The school is less than a mile away from a busy intersection with a strip mall consisting of a chain grocery store, small shops, and ethnic restaurants. Directly next to the school is a county maintained park. There are small, older, single family homes located across the street from the school. I drove down the road about two miles and noted that the homes were older with larger lots and spaces. There is a local developer with signs on the other side of the park with a newer model home already constructed. The road in front of the school was very busy with cars, trucks, and commercial vehicles whizzing past.

I had to park my car next door in the park's parking lot as the school had few parking spaces and they were all full. As I parked my car, I noticed, many of the cars had

bumper stickers with the school's name and inferred that staff and visitors frequently park there because of the limited space at the school. Walking up the steps from the park to the school grounds, I noticed the building and the campus. Busy Bee Elementary School is an older school, with an air of freshness that greeted you upon arrival. There is a small parking lot and bus loop at the front of the building. Typical to many schools, as you approach the front of the building you see a flagpole. Something not so typical was a huge, brightly painted boulder. There were messages of hope, love, and caring with a rainbow and large red heart. The sun was shining brightly across the front of the school and almost beaming down to the location of the rock. I smiled and wondered, "What's the story with that rock?"

When I entered the building, I could see staff and students in the hallway and there was a student sitting on a bench in the main office. Front office staff was assisting other visitors so I signed in and stood by watching their interactions. The office is a crowded space and you are almost on top of staff once you enter the room, yet there seemed to be a quiet hum to the interactions, despite the busy street out front. When it was my turn, staff located Cadence by calling her on the short-range radio as she was elsewhere in the building. Staff offered refreshments and escorted me to her office to wait for her arrival.

Cadence's office was warm and inviting. She has an L-shaped desk with a computer and shelf to one side. On the shelf were books and pictures. One book was entitled "Family." Behind her desk is a bank of windows that face the front of the building. I sat at a small conference table for Cadence to arrive, and observed through the window the huge rock noticed on my entrance to the school. Pictures of students,

staff, and families; cards from staff and students; student performance data; a Governor's Citation; schedules and other informational flyers about events in the school and community covered a long rectangular bulletin board on the wall behind me. One of the messages there was "What mindset are you?" and another was about teamwork. On another wall was a large decorative item that spelled out the word vision. Diplomas and degrees earned by Cadence and a poster that heralded the ABC's of Life surrounded the word "vision." Figure 4.1 provides an image of the poster.

Figure 4.1 Image of Messaging the Leader's Vision

Another wall had the following quote:

> "You can be the reason some student gets up and comes to school when life is tough. You can be the reason some student 'keeps on, keeping on' even though her family is telling her she can't succeed. You can inspire your at risk students. Remember that as long as you are a teacher, that even on your worst day in the job, you are still some student's best hope"~ Larry Bell.

Cadence arrived, shortly after staffed led me to her office. She apologized for not being in the office to receive me and shared she had been needed in a classroom to help with a student. After reviewing the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and consent agreements, we quickly launched into the interview protocol. Cadence was thoughtful,

reflective, and concise in her responses. She often asked, "Did I answer your question?" at which point I would respond that her responses were answers and that whatever she responded would inform the portraiture about her as a leader, there were no right or wrong answers. At some points, Cadence would ask if other respondents had shared a similar response. It seemed as though she did not want to give the impression that she was doing anything differently from other principals. However, when I would not confirm or deny how her responses compared to those of other participants, she would continue to respond to the interview questions and maintained positivity throughout the session.

Although the first interview was short, it did not feel hurried or rushed and even though she seemed to want to check her responses against others, she was comfortable with me and approached the interview with honesty. It was at the end of the interview when she shared her personal journey, successes and challenges, through her doctoral process and asked me about my personal timeline for completion. I sensed that she commiserated with the challenges of working full-time and balancing that with the role of the researcher. This may have played a role in her flexibility with her calendar and accommodating my participant shadowing experiences over the next few weeks.

Beliefs and Views on Leadership

Cadence shared professional development experiences, district policies, and her intrinsic motivation, drive, and commitment to best serve students and families shaped her beliefs about school leadership. She described herself as a collaborative leader. She believes it is important that leaders have a vision and that their vision is communicated and visible in the leader's actions. "Leaders make the impact in terms of how students

are responding to the instruction…the social skills they learn and hear and some of the actions and activities they are engaged in." She works hard to be visible in the school at all times and ensure consistency of instruction, alignment of the school's practices and expectations to the district's framework, and that staff are equipped to do their job. The school's vision statement also espoused this belief, emphasizing that the goal of staff is to provide students with the academic and social skills training necessary to flourish and become productive members of society.

Cadence emphasized that in addition to a committed belief to do what is needed for students to achieve, it is important for staff to have sound knowledge and practice to support students. Her expectation is that staff examines student data and monitor progress across the continuum of student needs, including struggling and advanced students, and beyond testing to see the individual students and their social and emotional needs. Cadence espoused that it is important to align her school's structures and processes to those of the district.

> My role is looking at those strategic frameworks from the system…we have to make sure that whatever our vision is, it is directly aligned with what the system vision is because you know…everything overlaps and plays into each other very nicely…as principals we are closest to the work.

Through her role, Cadence feels charged to model behaviors for staff, communicate expectations and beliefs, and prioritize messages and expectations in a way that allows staff to have direction and purpose in their actions. The action plans for supporting literacy, mathematics, and cultural proficiency indicated clear expectations, processes, and responsibilities for staff and leaders. They also reflected multiple levels of engagement and structures for collaboration among staff. Cadence strived to have a

school culture built on trust, that when she makes a decision outside the collaborative structure, staff is clear on the rationale. She described this as the "Busy Bee Way."

One afternoon when we returned to her office after dismissal, Cadence asked the administrative secretary to have the Autism specialists report to her office for their scheduled meeting. It was 3:45 p.m. The team of three specialists, one new to the county and to the school, arrived around 3:50 p.m. Cadence shared the purpose for the meeting was to touch base as it was the end of the quarter, the team had implemented some new strategies based on the data and summer planning, and she wanted to know how they were feeling about the upgrades they were implementing. She was specific in questioning the specialists in the effectiveness of the paraprofessional educator assigned to work with students. Her questions surfaced strengths, progress, and areas of support. She asked probing questions to get at instructional practices and concerns related to materials, resources, scheduling, and collaborative planning.

> Let us debrief the quarter. How are you feeling about the new schedule with the paraprofessional educators? What supports do you need at this time to meet the professional learning needs of the new paraprofessional educators? Besides the operational procedures of recess and monitoring behavioral expectations, how well are they [paraprofessional educators] implementing small group reading with the students? Do you see a need for any additional professional learning for the paraprofessional educators or materials for the students?

She followed up with one specialist to probe further around specific concerns with an individual paraprofessional educator at which time she provided specific directions for next steps to differentiate support and document accommodations to build the capacity of the paraprofessional educator to meet expectations.

Leadership and Student Achievement

As we walked through the hallways as part of my shadowing experiences, Cadence chatted about some of the students in the class we had visited, but also picked up stray paper in the hallways and lost clothing to place them near open classrooms. My perception was that Cadence is very proud of her building and her staff and is not above pitching in and helping to maintain a positive and welcoming environment. Along the way, we would stop in a few classrooms. Some were empty and she just looked around, made a quick note or nodded and moved on. In others, she would walk over and just chat with a student or make eye contact with the student and/or teacher. There seemed to be a purpose to each visit and some unspoken communication between Cadence and her staff around the purpose of the visit. It appeared to be mutually satisfying and there were smiles and sometimes-quiet laughter as we left the rooms. Later I would learn these were check-ins for particular students and staff to support behavioral, academic, and sometimes, social-emotional needs of the adults and students. These strategies also aligned to those identified in the school's school improvement plan.

During my initial shadowing experience, Cadence and I joined a parent-teacher meeting in the principal's conference room. The conference room itself was rectangular with a long conference table in the center and two doorways, one directly from the principal's office and the other into a short hallway that led back to the front office. One wall had windows facing the front of the building; underneath the windows was a table with a computer. The second wall housed a row of lateral file cabinets. On one of the two remaining walls was a white board and the other had a bulletin board. The bulletin

board continued the theme from the principal's office of staff pictures, school community information, and platitudes about vision and teamwork.

I also noticed that plastered across the white board was a top row of charts titled reinforcement, engagement, communication, organization, and upgrades. The charts had columns labeled with T, P, and S. When I asked Cadence about the charts, she indicated these charts represented data work conducted during pre-service and the first weeks of school to guide teaching and learning in the school's autism program. She shared that staff identified the titled areas for observations and using a staff developed instrument, conducted classroom observations to capture teacher (T), paraprofessional educator (P), and student (S) behaviors. Based on the observed behaviors for reinforcement, engagement, communication, and organization, Cadence shared the team had identified upgrades for the instructional programming.

Underneath those charts were a series of charts that displayed a six-quadrant grid with the same question in the center of each. Each quadrant of the grid was labeled with a grade level, Kindergarten through grade 5. The question in the center of each chart was "How does this data reflect (or not reflect) the progress we have made towards closing the racial achievement gap?" These charts were a result of the entire staff examining school data and then responding the center question for data at each grade level. Some of the comments on the charts included: "Achievement gap not met. 6/7 Hispanic." "Achievement exists in 3rd grade." "5th grade data supports closing the racial achievement gap☺" "Achievement gap not made – however there is student growth! Individual students making growth but still not meeting benchmark." Cadence shared that staff used data and staff reflections to revise and enhance the school's improvement

goals for math, literacy, and cultural proficiency; develop professional learning plans to meet those goals; and inform the work of each grade level team.

According to Cadence, the charts will remain posted throughout the year as the leadership and grade level teams monitor the implementation of the school improvement and professional learning plans. My perception of the charts posted in the conference room used for multiple purposes and open to staff, families, and community members is that the school's culture is one of transparency. The observation data, staff reflections about the data, and implications for their work to close the racial achievement gap were visible for anyone using the room. The comments were open and honest and pointed to the work the school was engaged in to meet the needs of all of its students.

The teacher of one of the classroom we visited interrupted our conversation about the charts to update Cadence on an incident between two students. Cadence listened, asked a few clarifying questions, and inquired if the teacher was providing the information to inform Cadence, before the teacher took action to address the issue, or if this was an issue that the teacher needed the principal to address. The teacher thought there were some elements she could address, but also asked the principal to speak with the students. After providing the teacher with directions for next steps for each student, Cadence excused herself to meet with the first student.

While I waited in the conference room, dismissal for the day began. Over the speaker, someone began announcements, reminding students to pack up their belongings so they would have everything needed to complete evening activities. The speaker wished students well on the trip home with hopes to see them back the next morning for another great day at Busy Bee Elementary School. Over the next 10–15 minutes, buses

were called and the chatter of small voices and shuffling feet could be heard in the hallways and exiting out the front door. During this time, the teacher we observed earlier arrived for his post-observation conference. Cadence had not returned by this time so we politely conversed about working in the district and shared information about our families in the way two people who do not know one another chat non-committedly while waiting for a shared acquaintance.

When Cadence rejoined us, she apologized for the delay, thanked the teacher for his patience, and reiterated for his benefit that I was there to shadow her, not document his observation. I also thanked him for allowing me to observe his classroom and reassured him that I was only there to shadow Cadence for the purpose of my research study on leadership. Cadence began the post-observation conference by asking the teacher how he felt the lesson went. Throughout the conference, she took copious notes. Her questions centered on steps the teacher took to identify students in the small group we observed and the alignment of observed teacher behaviors to district and school expectations for reading instruction, running records, and classroom management. She questioned, probed, and commended the teacher on practices she observed. She also asked questions about what occurred before we arrived for the observation and what his next steps were after we departed.

During the classroom observation, I noted that Cadence observed the teacher, but also took note of student actions and behaviors. She interacted with a few students individually to ask them about what they were learning, answered questions from one student who needed support, taking notes as she walked along. My sense was that she regularly visited classrooms as students did not seem bothered by her presence and a few

were impatient for her to move along from another student to approach their seat so that they could engage with her. She smiled, nodded, and leaned in close to students to point something out on their paper, ask a question about work on their Chromebook, or applaud their work product.

In the post-observation conference, Cadence referred to the observation and asked the teacher about three specific students. Her questions led me to believe that she knew the students intimately and was actively monitoring their engagement and progress. For example, "I noticed John was much more focused in the reading group compared to last year. What have you found most successful?" She also asked about two other students that were working at their desks when she walked around the room. "How did you assess Kelly and Jesse? May I make a suggestion?"

As the teacher and Cadence continued to discuss one student in particular, I realized that during the articulation meetings for this academic year, Cadence intentionally placed the student with this teacher, as she knew this teacher's demeanor and instructional practice would best match the students' needs. She commended the teacher for the progress she noticed in the student's academic and behavior data and attributed it to the teacher's expectations and instructional practice. The conference concluded with the teacher having engaged in reflection and receiving feedback in a respectful and dignified manner.

When I accompanied Cadence as she conducted a walkthrough of the building, she carried a clipboard that identified look-fors: small group instruction, whole group instruction. She shared that this first quarter, she and the assistant principal were looking for and providing feedback to teachers about practices in both areas. During the second

quarter, their planned focus will be on small group instruction, specifically. The walkthrough lasted one hour and we visited classrooms at all grade levels and went outside for a few moments during recess. In one hallway, she introduced me to a pair of teachers; one whom she laughingly shared was pretending to be retired. The staff member retired the year before but shared that she was visiting on this day to confer with a student, now in the fifth grade, that she had mentored for the past three years. According to the retired staff member, she knows how important it is for this student to have relationships and she planned to continue mentoring him through fifth grade, because next year in middle school would be tough.

After a few minutes talking with the two teachers, Cadence moved down the hallway to speak with the instructional data assistant (IDA). After brief introductions and an acknowledgment of the IDAs skill in collecting and presenting data for analysis, Cadence inquired on the progress of a project given to the IDA to match student data and profiles with their images. The project was almost complete and the IDA shared she had a few pictures on new students to include before completing the database.

At another point, we stopped in a classroom where the retired teacher we saw earlier was speaking with the two grade five teachers about her mentee. The grade five students were at recess. I observed the principal join the conversation as they discussed the progress of the student as compared to previous years, changes in the home context that might contribute to current school challenges, and identified two immediate strategies that might best meet the student's needs. As the students returned to the classroom, Cadence and I exited the room. In the hallway, students greeted Cadence with

smiles and waves. She pointed out one student who had experienced a recent family tragedy and shared efforts of the school and community to support him and his family.

Student work adorned the hallways and each classroom we visited. Doors were open, and students and adults could be seen and heard, engaged in "school talk." Cadence stopped in each classroom. If a classroom was empty, she stopped, looked in briefly, and kept moving to the next room. In classrooms with students she lingered, spoke with a few students, sometimes asking what they were learning and other times simply observing behaviors and taking a few notes on her clipboard. Other times when we entered a room without students, she would quickly check in with any staff that was present asking, "How are things going?" or "Did that work out?" in reference to some previous issue or concern.

Influence of Leadership on School Context

All staff at Busy Bee Elementary School are expected to model collaboration, collegiality, and commitment to professional learning. Cadence acknowledged that staff have very busy lives outside of school, but is clear that it is a learning and growing school. She takes care to orchestrate the professional learning required to move the work of the school forward and then provides opportunities for staff to pursue learning that is of personal or professional interest. In one of our interviews, Cadence shared the following,

> So here are a couple things. If I tell them that it is an option to have professional development about this, I will get maybe 1 to 2% of the staff wanted it. If I say that it is a requirement, then they all come right, for some level of professional development. I do not necessarily see them not necessary committed, but it is almost like if you provide the option, it must not be that important for me to attend. I do get a lot of staff members that will say to me, you know I saw this piece on cultural literacy and I want to find out more about it, could I visit another school? If it is an option, I will get a very small percentage and I know they need

> it and vice versa. If they see me encouraging them to attend something or if I say, you know, I really went to this professional development, and I really enjoyed it and it relates to whatever it is, then I encourage more to go. They have a tendency to want to go and I say, you know, we can get funding around it because many of these are on their own time and a lot of time, it is a huge time commitment after work hours that can be difficult. I do some outreach and say you know how you want to go to the workshop on Autism and sensory, you know, could you tell me a little bit about it, and as we have this discussion, I think this will be really good for the staff to hear. I know that my leadership matters around even when they are going to professional development on their own and I think that this would be beneficial for the staff. I can provide that encouragement.

She noted that staff has a tendency to share professional learning with a colleague or within a team, but need encouragement to share with those outside the team or whole school.

Cadence stressed that collaboration is important in sharing practices and planning, that she saw the school as very collaborative in terms of decision-making, but that she was pushing for collegiality. This she saw as an area of opportunity to expand and deepen the conversations around sound research-based practices with staff and with parents and the community. Cadence stated,

> It is important for staff to not only engage in conversations around teaching and learning with each other but engage in conversation with the school community because I really think they need to hear more of what you're doing as a teacher and the reasons why you're doing it…parents have more question when they really don't understand that side.

Through this emphasis on collegiality, Cadence revealed that she is working to establish a shared context for teaching and learning between school-home that will support student achievement and growth.

When I returned for my first participant-shadowing visit, Cadence was in the building on rounds. Staff recognized me from my previous visit, welcomed me in, and escorted me to her office to wait. Shortly after I arrived, Cadence joined me. The school

had just returned from an evacuation due to an odor in the building. Fire and rescue had cleared the evacuation and she had made a quick run through the building to ensure that all students and staff were okay. I asked if maybe we should reschedule, but Cadence quickly assured me that there was never a time that was not busy and that she was happy to proceed. I surmised this meant that the normal nature of a school operation means always expect the unexpected and any other day could bring another event that was unplanned.

After a quick check-in, the ESOL teacher joined us where I observed Cadence and the teacher engage in planning for an ESOL parent night. I think the planning went longer than anticipated because Cadence looked at the time and announced we needed to run to the classroom for a scheduled teacher observation. As we walked through the hallways to the classroom, we discussed the planning meeting and feedback for the ESOL teacher to inform her continued design and planning for the upcoming event and establishment of ongoing relationships with the parents of her ESOL students. I noticed that it was a well-maintained older building. Murals and student artwork, work products, and positive messages decorated the walls. We could hear teachers and students in classrooms asking questions and engaged in conversations. As we walked through the building, Cadence would stop in doorways where we observed students seated on carpets listening to stories and at desks working on Chromebooks or reading quietly.

During one shadowing experience, Cadence left me in her office for a moment to check in on a special education IEP meeting in progress in the conference room next door. I heard her ask if it was okay for me to join them as I was shadowing her. The parent and staff gave permission and we joined them in the room. I was going to sit in a

chair on the side of the room, but Cadence invited me to sit next to her at the table in an empty seat. The team, which consisted of the special education teacher, speech-language pathologist, counselor, and classroom teacher, was listening to the parent provide an update on medical report from the student's physician. The conversation continued to flow as we joined the room. The staff listened and questioned respectfully and the parent expressed how pleased she was with the progress of her child since the beginning of the year. Cadence asked few probing and clarifying questions and checked perceptions with the parent and staff. She seemed comfortable with the staff leading the meeting as she made no effort to begin facilitating the meeting upon our arrival, but sat quietly for the first five minutes before interjecting with any of her own clarifying questions or asking to see a student work product the team discussed. When the meeting concluded, the team debriefed Cadence on the meeting and one that occurred earlier which we did not attend. Staff shared that there had been some challenges at the earlier meeting, and the special education teacher and classroom teacher announced with smiles that the principal should be proud of the special education teacher for her demeanor during the meeting.

For my understanding, Cadence shared that during this current academic year, part of the professional growth for the special education teacher is to work on neutrality and non-verbal expressions when in challenging situations. Others in the room were aware of this particular area of growth and with smiles and laughter affirmed that the special education teacher had maintained a calm demeanor during the particularly challenging meeting. The staff and principal were comfortable discussing the incident and providing feedback to the teacher in my presence, although it was my first time

meeting any of the staff members. There was a sense of camaraderie and respect among the group.

During shadowing experiences, Cadence responded to emails, made phone calls to other district offices to schedule agenda items for an upcoming elementary principal's meeting, and reconnected with students who had experienced challenges during the day. She excused herself to dismiss students for the day with an announcement that simply stated, "We've come to the end of a wonderful day at Busy Bee Elementary School. Please put away your books, pack up all your belongings you wish to take home with you, and have a wonderful and safe afternoon." She invited me to join her for dismissal as she greeted parents in the car pool area and waved students home. Cadence also used this time to connect with parents that arrived for dismissal and to bring in items for an event planned at the school for the following day. Of particular interest to Cadence were parents of students receiving ESOL services. Cadence would stop them and ask, "I'm going to see you at the ESOL parent night, right?" She would remind them of the event, share that there would be food, and respond in the affirmative to inquiries about bringing their children with them. A few parents she approached and asked for their help as interpreters. From a distance as I observed, there was a smile and almost a small skip in her step with each yes. When she would return to where I stood observing, she would say, "Yes! That's one more."

Leadership and Decision-Making

Cadence encouraged activities that engaged all students and families. She sees herself as a "catalyst." One example she shared was how she has worked with the PTA president to identify strategic opportunities to invite minority parents to be a part of

decision-making, working with the PTA executive board to cultivate that group of parents, providing babysitting and adding interpreters and food. She acknowledged that there are gaps, but that she is striving to create a sense of community and cultivate a vision of the school where others are involved. During one of our interviews, Cadence stated,

> I would say that there are some missing links and we are at the very basic level of getting a community thinking about like even some of the things that they like to do. This is really about my parent community, inviting them in. I find myself saying, so tell me how that decision, our work today makes it more inclusive?

She shared she finds herself spending more time than ever explaining the vision of the school as an inclusive community, communicating through websites, printed documents, and face-to-face conversations and soliciting input through surveys and structured and unstructured focus groups. Cadence shared there has been great successes with business and community partnerships and keeping a focused lens on student voice.

When I arrived for the second observation, Cadence was having a lunch bunch with four grade 2 boys, three White and one African-American. The group sat around the small conference table in her office eating lunch. Cadence had an open journal in which she occasionally jot down notes. I learned that the purpose of the lunch bunch was to problem-solve some recess issues the boys were having that the parent of one of the boys brought to the attention of Cadence. As I observed from my seat near the principal's desk, she listened to each student, asked questions about how the actions and words of other students made them feel, and urged them to think about the situation from the perspective of the other individual. At one point, she drew a diagram in her journal that depicted an inner and outer circle and asked the boys how it reflected the current recess situation. The boys were able to articulate that this was how some of them felt, "on the

outside" and they problem-solved how to make everyone feel included. If someone was not speaking, she encouraged him to contribute to the discussion, often saying when a shoulder shrugged, "Use your voice." When one of the boys introduced the word 'inclusive', Cadence applauded him on his use of a 'college' word. She shared how proud it made her to hear him using his vocabulary.

At one point, to stress her concern with their behavior, Cadence used the phrase, "That's not the Busy Bee way." Throughout the conversation, she engaged the voices of each student and checked in to make sure they all agreed about what they were hearing from each other. At the end, Cadence gave her expectation for next steps that included an immediate next step for recess that day and a promise of a check-in with them the next week to see how things were going. She had the boys clean up their lunch things and walked with them to the door, thanking them again for joining her for a lunch date, emphasizing that no one was in trouble, just problem-solving.

Cadence excused herself to check on a staff member working next door. I could hear from the conversation that the principal was inquiring on the health of a family member and expressing concern and support to the staff member as they managed a challenging situation. Later, the staff member joined us in the principal's office, and I learned it was the pupil personnel worker (PPW). During their brief meeting, the two discussed and scheduled future meetings that were flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of the PPW and the operating schedule of the school and school teams. The criteria that guided the scheduling were when teams met, the availability of attendance, academic, and discipline data. I learned that Busy Bee Elementary School did not require a high demand of the PPW's time, but the plan between Cadence and the PPW was to

have regular, intentional times that they came together with staff to discuss students and their needs. The schedule would allow the PPW to join teams during their data discussions, problem-solve around specific students, and implement and monitor interventions throughout the year. The two scheduled times for the PPW to join staff through June 2016.

Cadence frequently would boast of a staff member's skills with a student, technology, or instructional practice. In one classroom, she took the time to acknowledge a presentation the staff member had recently done. In another setting, she introduced me to the reading specialist as she acknowledged her contribution to the grade level collaborative planning session that had occurred earlier. In particular, she thanked her for framing for staff the importance of them sharing ownership for all students, not just those on their class roster. She emphasized how important it was that the idea had come from the reading specialist and that it was not her [Cadence's] voice, but that of the team's colleague. Cadence further recognized the reading specialist for the depth of knowledge and skills she brings to provide differentiated support for the staff as they plan for their students. "I so appreciated you elevating the importance of the daily reading groups and monitoring student reading levels at the meeting." Then Cadence stated to me, "She attends the district training, brings it back, and has a way of working with even our newest and most experienced staff to enhance their practice. It's just magical." She shared these acknowledgements with the reading specialist and again with me in the hallway.

As we returned to the front of the building, the special education resource teacher I had met on a previous visit approached us. She briefly described a situation with two

students that she felt warranted a phone call to the parents. In addition, she had clarifying questions about a newly implemented district policy and regulation. I observed Cadence listen attentively to the staff member; ask a few clarifying questions, and then state, "What do you think you should do?" Cadence demonstrated that she had trust in her staff member's knowledge and capacity to address the situation. She validated the decision that the staff member made and then offered to support her with the next steps. Later in the afternoon, the staff member joined the principal in the front office to make the two phone calls and debrief the incident and her decision-making processes. During this time, Cadence was supportive and encouraging. She allowed the staff member to process aloud without interruption, asked few questions, and then together, developed a plan of action for continued follow-through to guide the staff member in the event of a similar situation. When the staff member left the room, she made the required call to central office to document the incident that had concerned the teacher, per district policy.

A Portrait of Cadence

My interpretation of Cadence was that she implemented school structures based on her beliefs that leadership practice is an art, informed by professional learning and the leader's capacity to model and communicate expectations. She emulated flexibility and adaptive approaches to creating inclusive environments emphasized in the literature related to attaining equity. During my visits with Cadence, she attended special education IEP meetings, visited classrooms, conducted formal and informal observations, provided feedback to staff, and met with small teams and individual teachers. Cadence demonstrated shared leadership and collaborative practices with students and adults. In meetings, she never sat at the head of the table; instead, she used the round table in her

office or sat in a chair on the side of the rectangular table in the conference room. Her role in these meetings vacillated between coaching and directive. At the special education meeting, she acknowledged the deep work of the classroom teacher and other team members as well as the advocacy of the parent and progress of the student. Cadence met with the ESOL teacher to plan for a Parent Night. It was a collaborative meeting where the teacher presented a proposal and together they identified improvements for the agenda and strategies to increase attendance and provide babysitting and food that might help families with attendance on a school night.

Cadence balanced her roles and responsibilities for accountability and addressing the other needs of students and adults. She engaged in practices that built on cultural and social capital with students and adults, a key factor in attaining equity. Her focus was on instructional practice and actions that make a difference for students. As she walked through the halls, she carried an observation checklist on a clipboard and captured notes to provide feedback as she went about her day. She greeted students and adults by name and personally handled stray pieces of paper and articles of clothing. Vacant and occupied classrooms received the same level of care. In vacant classrooms, she peeked in and looked around. In occupied classrooms she would walk in briefly, scan the room, and sometimes walk over to two or three students, answer their questions, or ask a few of her own.

Cadence is also data driven, and models and implements practices and structures for accountability towards excellence. During the formal observation of one classroom teacher, she made notes in a journal, walked around the room, asked individual students engaged in an independent assignment about the work, and assisted a few students in

completing their work. She spent approximately 40 minutes in the classroom before leaving to continue walking around the building and peering into each classroom along the way. During the post-observation conference, she first asked the teacher to provide his perspective on the instruction she observed and then provided specific feedback, including strengths and areas of growth. She acknowledged the teacher's success with one specific student, encouraging the teacher to reflect on the strategies he used to yield the positive results. She spent significant time asking probing questions about the teacher's guided reading instruction and data collection, a focus tied to the school's improvement plan and a district initiative.

A meeting with the Autism specialists yielded data to inform professional development and support for one of the paraprofessional educator. Cadence was clear in her expectations for instruction and gave specific directions to the specialist on next steps to support the paraprofessional educator. She met with the pupil personnel worker (PPW) to develop an ongoing schedule that would provide an opportunity for the PPW to collaborate with staff to identify strategies to support students.

During dismissal, Cadence actively sought ESOL parents in the parking lot and encouraged them to attend the scheduled ESOL night. When speaking with the parents, she encouraged them to come and to others she asked if they would mind serving as interpreters for other families to enhance their access to the information.

I observed Cadence engage in positive interactions with staff and when faced with challenges, staff was comfortable problem solving with Cadence. When she encountered adults, she would always engage them in a brief exchange in deference to personal welfare or professional tasks. At one point, a teacher with a serious concern met her

about one of her students. Cadence stopped immediately to problem-solve with the teacher and then followed up with her at the end of the day, providing support with phone calls and ensuring that the staff member addressed all mandatory compliance steps to resolve the issue and was equipped with recursive knowledge to address similar situations in the future.

Throughout my experiences with Cadence and in reviewing the interviews, principal shadowing, and artifacts, Cadence's beliefs translated to leadership practices supported by the literature related to democratic ethical leadership.

Ivy

Prologue

Ivy, an African-American female, an administrator in the district for 17 years, is in year 13 as the principal in her current school. Ivy also taught six years prior to coming to the district. Originally, from New York State, Ivy recalled an experience with her high school guidance led her into choosing a career in education. The counselor stated that she should choose a career she loved doing. At the time, she loved shopping and working in a day care. In high school, she worked in a department store during the week and a day care during the weekend. She shared her memory of an interaction with a high school physical education teacher that occurred when she was 16 that influenced her decision to become not only a teacher, but also an administrator. As Ivy shared, when the teacher realized she lived in an affluent neighborhood and was the daughter of a dentist, he stated, "I knew you were different" to explain her social behavior and high academic performance. Even at a young and impressionable age, Ivy reflected this statement affected her and she realized the power teachers had to influence the lives of students that

looked like her. It was then that she shared with her parents that she did not want another child to feel the way she felt in that moment and knew she wanted to become an administrator and lead a school where teachers with similar beliefs expressed by her physical education teacher would not have the opportunity to negatively impact students.

Introduction

Ivy is a single administrator in a small school in the northern part of the school district. Ivy and I confirmed the date and time for my first interview via email. Although I had been introduced to Ivy the previous year at a Latino Coalition celebration, she and I had never really worked closely together prior to this research study. When I first emailed Ivy with the informed consent and invited her to participate, the email went unanswered for a week. My impression of Ivy is that she is a quiet and reserved individual and most likely a procedural administrator, one that follows the rule to the letter including specific protocols for responding to correspondence, so I was surprised that she had not responded, even to decline.

During the following week, I was working with a colleague on an unrelated task and they mentioned that Ivy had been out with an ill family member. This colleague has staff that works in Ivy's school to support professional learning aligned to the school's cultural proficiency goals and we were compiling implementation data for a report to the interim superintendent of schools. Knowing that Ivy had likely missed my email, I decided to send her a follow-up email and ask if she was interested in participating in the study, reinforcing that participation was voluntary. The next day, Ivy returned my second email, indicated that she had just returned to the building from leave, but that she would

contact me the following week to schedule the initial invitation, which we subsequently scheduled for the third week in October 2015.

During the first interview, Ivy was initially reserved, providing brief and concise responses to the questions, but seemed more relaxed as we began to discuss the work. Before we began the interview protocol, we discussed the district meeting for principals and central office administrators we both attended the day before. We identified some common points of resonance from the guest speaker who focused on the importance of cultural proficiency and shared some common observations of perceived disengagement from colleagues who also attended the session. Ivy had some procedural questions about a district initiative I manage and had presented at the previously mentioned district meeting that we discussed as she made some notes for herself. Before beginning the interview protocol, I reminded Ivy of the confidentiality, informed consent, and right to withdraw. She consented to participate, but had one more question, "Tell me again how schools were identified for participation."

Ivy was thoughtful and measured in her responses. She frequently asked me to repeat the questions and would jot down words and phrases prior to responding. My sense was that she was carefully considering her responses prior to sharing her thinking. I was not sure if this was unwillingness to respond, being uncomfortable in my presence, or if this was her manner of processing and thinking. The interview lasted 40 minutes. At the end of the interview, we identified two subsequent dates for the participant shadowing. Ivy was accommodating and intentional in identifying times for these visits. One of her interests was to have me attend a leadership team meeting and the other was to attend on a date when she had a staff meeting. We scheduled the shadowing

experiences to coincide with those structures and allow me an opportunity to shadow her during the instructional day. We scheduled the visits to occur during early November 2015 but due to scheduling conflicts occurred in November and early December 2015.

Setting/Context

Striving for Success Elementary School sits at the intersection of a quiet street with a major thoroughfare to its rear. The other cross street is not as busy and there is a traffic light at the corner nearest the visitor parking lot. The community, once considered a rural area of the county, hustles and bustles with a nearby commuter train station, two major grocery store chains, three Starbucks, several small shopping centers, and a large sports complex within 5 miles in any direction of the school. The school is one of six elementary schools that serve this thriving and growing suburban area of the county.

On the morning I arrived for the first interview, it was a bright sunny day. A few students were still arriving and the crossing guard was happily engaging adults and children as they crossed the intersection to access the school grounds. The parking lot had plenty of open spaces so I was able to quickly park to cross the lot and walk up the front steps to the school. From my parking space, I could see the playground with equipment and a side window that provided a view of a hallway. There was a curved driveway up to the front steps for busses. I heard the crossing guard cheerfully tell one student, "Have a great day!"

When I entered the building, there were a few staff members receiving preschoolers in the entryway. Front office staff welcomed me and once I signed in directed me to a bench where I could wait for Ivy. I could see and hear the principal was engaged in morning announcements, stating, "To help everyone reach their full potential,

the staff at Striving for Success Elementary School will keep students focused on the following expectations: I am respectful, I am responsible, I am SAFE ….. That's the Striving for Success way!" A student and Ivy shared the responsibilities for the morning announcements and provided reminders for the book fair and other after school activities.

When Ivy finished announcements, she asked me for a few more moments as she attended to the needs of a parent who was waiting to see her. In the front hallway, I marveled at a large mural painted on the wall of diverse community served by Striving for Success Elementary School. While I waited, I observed parents bringing in students and positive interactions between the front office staff and students that arrived late to school. Parent volunteers arrived and given assistance with sign-in. Others received assistance with emergency forms and other school-related forms. Shortly thereafter, she returned and walked me to her office down the hallway.

Ivy led me to a small cozy office with a desk and small conference table. A glass window faced the hallway and we sat at the table to begin our interview. On the wall behind her desk were numerous pictures and data charts. One picture showed a smiling, smartly dressed Ivy and her alter ego looking bedraggled and disheveled. The caption underneath read, "Ivy in the morning and Ivy after a long day". When I commented on the photo, she shared that often when students first come to her office to problem-solve the picture serves as an icebreaker to discuss how we handle difficult days and challenges.

Beliefs and Views on Leadership

Ivy shared that her upbringing and the positive and negative interactions she experienced from her own teachers served as a "springboard for wanting the best for

every child and parent." As a school leader, she strives to serve as a role model for instruction, a coach, and a problem-solver. "Leadership matters and everything that happens in a school building" is tied to the leader. She shared that instruction, relationships in the building, and the work staff collectively engage in are instrumental to creating a comfortable, engaging environment for learning. These beliefs were also reflected in the school's school improvement plan that listed that leadership would use a variety of measures to monitor progress toward goals, collaborate to problem solve, strengthen relationships and provide a productive learning environment, and utilize a variety of media to communicate the school's mission, expectations and instructional practices to parents, students, and various stakeholder groups. When these factors do not come together, Ivy suggested that such dissonance is a challenge leaders must address.

> The work that we do, all those things that must come together in order to have a building where people are comfortable coming to work, where the learning is focused and engaging, and realizing that it's not always so, and when it's not, what we have to do in order to get it there. That is definitely a challenge of leadership. But also, I see that school leadership is training other people to be leaders.

Further, she reflected that this currently is a difficult and lonely job, especially as a single administrator.

When I arrived for the first observation, Ivy walked me into her office to collect her keys and radio. I noticed at this time and during subsequent observations, whenever we left the main office area, Ivy would secure her office by locking the door. I wondered if this was for privacy or safety and security but due to her stoic nature, did not feel comfortable inquiring. We visited the cafeteria where Kindergarten, grade 1 and grade 3 students were having lunch. It was a bright, loud affair with students chatting, eating, and getting up for basic supplies (i.e. napkins, utensils). On the way into the cafeteria,

we noticed a group of boys who should have been in the cafeteria. The students who came up to her for hugs, or to ask a quick question, greeted Ivy warmly. Other staff was assisting students in the cafeteria with utensils, yet students seemed to enjoy the opportunity to have Ivy come over and interact with them. She commented about a few of the students whose "stories" I knew due to the nature of my job in the district and made note of their progress and resiliency.

Our visit to lunch ended abruptly when Ivy received a call to report to the office to return a parent call. As we entered the office, the secretary handed Ivy a packet containing an appeal letter for a suspension issued to a student who was physically aggressive with a staff member. Ivy had anticipated this step due to earlier parent interactions, but as she noted, this student had received a number of supports to address behavioral concerns. We spent the next 45 minutes in Ivy's office, and I observed her responding to parent emails and calls. Ivy emphasized the school's expectations along with staff expectations for appropriate student-to-student and student-to-staff interactions.

When we returned to the cafeteria, it was during the grades 2, 4, and 5 lunch. Students were very animated when Ivy entered, asking excitedly if they were going to play kickball. Ivy shared she often plays kickball with the fifth graders as a way to model appropriate play. This strategy diminished recess issues and allows her an opportunity to build positive relationships with students. When we joined the students at recess, she had made a return trip to the office to change her shoes, engaged in friendly banter with a PTA officer about a staff/PTA kickball challenge, and interacted with students in the hallways. She also managed a brief check-in with the resource teacher about the parent call I had observed earlier. Ivy played with the students the entire recess, pitching the

ball and refereeing the game. She took time to check in with a few students whom she later identified as the student from the appeal letter and the parent phone call. She seemed well at home with the students and they were happy to have her with them.

Leadership and Student Achievement

Ivy emphasized that hiring the right people is essential to ensuring student achievement. She coupled that idea of hiring with giving teachers the opportunity to influence others, utilizing all leaders to give feedback, and implementing structures to examine student data. In Striving for Success Elementary School, Ivy has implemented bimonthly data meetings that provide the opportunity for staff to analyze data at the grade level for a broader view and to drill down to the individual student. In addition to data-driven conversations, her expectation is that staff engages in conversations to understand the individual student context and personal story. She stressed the importance of knowing "where they come from…their background in order to figure out who that child may come to this day…present themselves every day …where do we go from here."

A strategy she implements during the hiring processes is to have candidates bring in data from a current classroom position and talk about their guided reading instruction, including their steps for planning and instruction. Ivy stated that staff knowledge and skill with instruction and using data is essential. The other part of the story is having people to implement the components of instruction and those needed to work with families. In her words,

> I try to get specificity in their responses to my question because you know; there are times in the past, many years ago, where the questions to me that we had were more surface level. We have gotten so much better over the years to ask more specific questions where we ask people to bring the data in from the current position in a classroom and talk about it. Where we ask people to explicitly talk about, you know, their guided reading instruction and how to go about planning

> for that and describing, the lesson they did that particular day, because if you don't have teachers that know the various components of a guided reading lesson then you know that there is a lot of work to be done and you would be surprised at how many people really don't know all the various components. Of course there are those people who know the components, but maybe just don't implement them and those people you need to work with but at least knowing they have the skills, they have those components, is more than half the battle.

She talks about her students and families in staff interviews and if the candidate gives her a blank stare, she takes it is an indicator that, through no fault of their own, Striving for Success may not be the best fit for them. At one point during the first interview, I asked Ivy the following question as she spoke about her hiring process: "I did want to go back to what you said about hiring excellent teachers. So as a leader, how would you describe that excellent teacher you are looking for?" Ivy stated,

> There are so many who really just have no clue, or even when we're talking about race and equity, and we have had a focus on race and equity for a number of years here at Striving for Success, and we ask specific questions, you'd be surprised at the blank stares we get. We ask specific questions and we try to expound on our questions to help them to give us a more comprehensive response, and some of the offbeat responses we get from more seasoned teachers, who have been in schools for a long period of time. And so, just knowing that due to no fault of their own right necessarily, but that they really do not have any real background for race and equity, how can they work with our children?

This value around equity surfaced in the school improvement plan, which lists as one of the faculty and staff foci, the intentional use of equitable classroom practices.

In the course of each shadowing experience, we went on a walkthrough in the building. We visited several classrooms. During classroom observations, Ivy observed instruction and checked in with students. Some rooms we stopped in, Ivy would ask students a few questions, and then we would move on. Others she would stop longer and take notes. Frequently she would ask students, "What are you doing?" or "Let me see you do it."

During a stop in the music room, we listened to the second graders perform and she commended them on their selection and then reminded them of behavioral expectations for an upcoming field trip. A visit to one of the kindergarten rooms included a data discussion about the progress of students on reading data. Ivy stated, "I am very proud of the work this teacher is doing. Many of her students have met the end of the quarter reading benchmark already. All of her students are making great progress." When we visited the specialized programs, Ivy revealed she often chooses to visit these programs at snack time to observe students using their technology tools to interact and communicate. Ivy later shared that she had concerns about the teacher's practices and the level of engagement and rigor for students in one of the classrooms we visited. She stated,

> The teacher in the classroom we just visited is new to our building. I have noticed when I visit his room that he often is not implementing the curriculum or delivering similar content to his other teammates. Frequently when I enter, he is at his computer and the kids seem to be on their own. When I ask them what they are working on, it is not very clear.

In this room, she took notes on student and teacher behavior, class set-up, and checked in with several students.

Prior to entering one classroom she stated, "I need to check on my friend." When we entered, she went over to a student, took a seat, and began to work one-on-one with the student on math concepts. We remained in the room approximately 15 minutes. Other students continued their work and the classroom teacher did not appear deterred from her focus and the students she worked with. Ivy's presence in the room, and for the extended time, did not seem haphazard, but instead, it was treated as this was expected, the principal stopping in and providing one-on-one support to a student, giving him praise

and encouragement and sticking with him until he completed his tasks. In each room we visited, Ivy acknowledged and greeted students by name. Ivy quietly redirected students who were off task.

As we walked through the hallways, Ivy interacted with students and adults, including PTA members, the building services manager, and other staff. Every few steps she stopped to assist someone needing to follow-up on a phone message or other feedback they had received from parents and Ivy. Some questions she was able to answer immediately, others, she asked that the individual come see her later, or promised to follow-up with them.

At the end of one afternoon shadowing experience in classrooms, we returned to the office to retrieve materials for the leadership team meeting after school when a staff member indicated that a concerned parent was there to speak with Ivy. Although the meeting was not scheduled and we were on our way to a scheduled meeting with teachers, Ivy asked the parent to accompany her to her office to discuss his concerns. It was clear he was upset and after explaining my purpose in being at the school, she asked permission to have me present for the discussion. The parent asked if I could leave the room and I did. After a brief consultation with Ivy and the attending staff member, the parent exited the office and seemed to be satisfied with the outcome of his meeting as he strode calmly through the office, acknowledging staff with a smile and a nod or wave as he departed. Since it was now dismissal time, Ivy managed phones in the office since the second secretary had left work early due to illness.

Around 4:00 p.m., we left the office to report to the media center for the leadership team meeting. The area was set up with small tables. On each table were

specific reading data and table tents with data reflection questions. Large chart paper posted around the room displayed the questions. Ivy opened the meeting by reflecting on the learning from the previous meeting and reminding staff of their commitment to introduce race and equity at each meeting. Ivy shared that the conversation on this day would expand on the previous reflection activity of "Are you comfortable talking about race with adults? Are you comfortable talking about race with students?" She facilitated staff reading an article taken from the local newspaper that spoke to the importance of addressing questions about race that come from children to minimize the sense of taboo and asked staff to reflect on implications for their role as educators. Ivy allowed time for staff to process and reflect with each other.

The reading specialist led staff in a data analysis session using the guiding questions on the table tents and charts: "What are the characteristics of students who made progress and of those who did not? To what extent have specific programs, interventions, and services improved outcomes? Where are we making the most progress in closing achievement gaps? Why?" Staff reviewed and analyzed data, K–5 through the lens of race and equity using these guiding questions and the reading specialist asked each table group to share their findings with the entire group. While the reading specialist facilitated this part of the meeting, Ivy sat with one team and participated in the analysis and discussion. There was open dialogue and often times, the reading specialist had to pull the entire group back together as they were so engrossed in their discoveries and conversations. When asked to share responses, many different voices were heard, an indicator that there was a level of comfort in sharing thoughts and ideas. Prior to my attending the meeting, Ivy shared that she, the reading specialist, and staff development

teacher collaboratively plan for these data meetings and assign roles based on the data and information that will be shared, analyzed, or discussed. This particular meeting, the groups were focused on reading data; therefore the reading specialist led the data discussions.

The data that staff reviewed aligned to district data targets for reading performance and there were some academic strengths and concerns noted by staff. Ivy shared with staff that the district targets were shifting and becoming more rigorous due to the new state assessment, but that the school improvement plan was not changing and that the strategies would remain in place. "Stay on course." This seemed to quell the rising anxiety around some of the data points. When staff raised concerns about the possible impact of technology on student performance, Ivy acknowledged the concerns and asked that staff provide her feedback and solutions on how to address the concern. After spending time discussing data findings in the small table groups and sharing with the whole group, Ivy charged members of the leadership team with taking the information back to their respective teams and sending proposed solutions to her prior to the next meeting.

Influence of Leadership on School Context

With limited resources and budget funding, and as a single administrator, Ivy reflected that she prioritizes critical messages that she brings back to staff. This way she strategically times when she introduces new work or changes "because things are coming at us constantly, constantly, and even though our heads are constantly spinning" we have to get the job done. Ivy shared that she is always transparent with staff when there are non-negotiable mandates and uses structures and processes to navigate the line of when

and how to implement mandates that may distract from work that is in place and proven effective.

Ivy's perspective of collaboration, collegiality, and commitment to professional learning at Striving for Success Elementary School was that each practice was evident in existing structures for peer observation and learning from one another. She sets clear expectations and instructions for collaborative planning and that it is the "Striving for Success Way" for teachers to engage in common work together to achieve goals. The school improvement plan also identified collaborative planning processes that focused on staff meeting to problem-solve for targeted individual student needs through data monitoring and analysis, documentation of student interventions, and culturally responsive instruction.

Ivy described herself as being as hands-on as possible with staff and "well organized so that everyone is aware of the expectations in place for them when they come to the table…it's all about the kids and the question always comes back to how does this impact kids." She emphasizes the importance of staff engaging in peer observation as part of the evaluation system and when new staff comments that this may not have been a practice in their previous school; her reply is "it is part of our culture here." Ivy shared this helps her as a leader to validate the strengths in her staff and provides staff an opportunity to validate preconceived notions about the teaching and learning practices of their colleagues.

Her goal in these actions is to model shared leadership, build teacher capacity, and provide opportunities for professional growth. At the same time, Ivy shared the importance of staff and community knowing her expectations so she clearly documents

them in letters, emails, and newsletters, conversations with staff, observation feedback, and post-observation conferences. Her summative comment on the topic of leadership and the school context was "I can't underscore the importance enough of the shared leadership portion of our expectations here at Striving for Success because again, with fewer resources, we have to share the wealth, so I have to be pretty clear."

Leadership and Decision-Making

Ivy described parent involvement as occurring at various levels that have changed over time due to changing financial times, family structures, and the changes in the neighboring community. She reflected that she has always looked at parent involvement through the lens that we all have something to give; it is really about finding the right entry point for every family. Ivy described a variety of partnerships and relationships with a local church, businesses, senior citizens, and community and civic organizations. One example is a mentoring program for girls sponsored through a partnership that several members of her staff have also supported. The program originated in Striving for Success. It has followed the girls into the middle school. Ivy shared that the program has allowed her to foster relationships that are more positive with her students and their families. She stated,

> We have been doing some mentoring with girls and it really has fostered a more positive relationship with myself and the girls we select. With the family, I see that I have a different connection with them. I see them outside of school and on the weekends when you are conducting a workshop and that type of thing. This year we meet on Saturday's for our middle school model. I see the girls that stick with the program are mostly my families, and it is because of that relationship that we have built. You know with a majority of our girls, especially those who are African-Americans that relational piece is so important, especially for our kids and our families and I think that that definitely makes it different.

Students, families, and staff see the benefit of developing these relationships and the dividends are that they are connecting inside and outside of school. This she compared to having credit in the bank. She proudly shared the recognition of Striving for Success by their partner for the commitment and excellence staff demonstrated in the implementation of the program. This was another example of Ivy's commitment to addressing the cultural needs of students to ensure academic success.

Ivy reflected that it is important to create a sense of urgency and a solid foundation for teaching and learning. Data are important and that these are not make-believe children. She related this to her father thanking her and her teachers for the work they do each month when he receives his social security check, because in his viewpoint, looking to the future, without an education, the students of today will not be the productive citizens of tomorrow. Ivy articulated this in the following way,

> I expect excellent teaching and learning every day. Coming to Striving to Success is not a walk in the park like one of the schools where all the children come in every day, no matter what you do…the data is not reflective of the really hard work that we are doing. You know it is really not, so we have to focus...

Ivy was very excited when I arrived for one of my shadowing experiences as her school had been selected the #1 public elementary school in the state by a national organization that provides rankings on more than 120,000 K-12 schools. The rankings result from key factors such as the strength of academics, quality of teachers, diversity, as well as the overall quality of the school district. The day was also special because it was a school spirit day. Many staff and students were dressed in school colors or other school paraphernalia to show support for the school. Later in the morning, announcements included recognition of the award and enthusiasm for the spirit day.

The first formal meeting of the day involved a check-in with the guidance counselor on holiday support for school families in need. The topics included gift-giving, support from staff and community members, and processes for maximizing support to a number of families with diverse needs. There were times when Ivy was direct about her expectations and other times when she pushed the counselor to stretch the current structures to be more innovative in identifying strategies to have more supporters for the holiday outreach services. Ivy demonstrated an extensive knowledge of her families and communities, who had non-school aged siblings and those with older siblings at the middle and high schools. She was able to review the group lists to provide additional insight to the guidance counselor for next steps.

Throughout the discussion, she communicated a key value that the school respected its families and was engaged in partnership. Caring, did not equate to charity, and she was clear in her intent that the school and parents were in partnership. As she reflected,

> It is important that the parents have a role in the gift giving…they might not have purchased the gift, but they should have the opportunity to gift wrap…leave them with some avenue for feeling they were part of giving their child a special holiday.

This sentiment reemerged later in the day when she spoke with a parent on the phone about subsidizing the cost of a field trip. Where some schools may have waived the cost for the field trip, she shared that it is important for the parent to know they are also able to provide for their student and that they have a stake in the child's future. Therefore, in the cost of the $13.00 field trip, Ivy asked the parent to contribute $4.00 and the school would fund the balance.

During the observation, Ivy handled many such phone calls, specific to events and activities as well as follow-up on parent concerns about instruction. She returned one phone call to media about the award and gave a statement that elevated the great pride she has for her staff, students, and community. She shared her excitement, but gave credit to her staff, stating, "We definitely have excellent staff focused on instruction and building relationships." Concerning her students and community, she reflected, "Students have an interest in learning…Supportive family and community…great combination."

A Portrait of Ivy

Ivy's routines included instructional observations, leading professional learning, and building positive relationships with parents, staff, and students. In exchanges with students, staff, and parents, Ivy focused on instruction and developing positive relationships for increased student engagement and achievement. As she visited classrooms, her focus was on teacher and student interactions and behaviors. She frequently checked in with students to ask what they were doing and how it connected to the learning outcomes posted in the classroom. Through the hallways, in classrooms, at lunch and recess, it was notable that Ivy was highly visible and connected with adults and students in her school and community. These practices aligned to her expressed beliefs that leadership sets the stage for the learning environment and her role in ensuring the necessary structures are in place to optimize student achievement. It was evident that she paid attention to the details and was monitoring implementation and impact on student learning and achievement as she went through her day. These behaviors parallel those

cited for leaders for equity that expand leadership practice beyond the academics to develop social and cultural competency.

Ivy exercised skill in balancing her roles and responsibilities for accountability and addressing the other needs of students by optimizing resources and providing opportunities aimed at engaging shared ownership. In addition to collecting data on classroom instruction, Ivy also worked one-on-one with students in classrooms without a paraprofessional educator to support struggling students. Not having the extra human resources was not a factor to deter Ivy from supporting student in attaining excellence. She demonstrated this same level of focus when she encountered staff and adults in the hallway with questions or concerns. Some she addressed immediately. With others, Ivy provided a time for follow-up or asked the individual to work with the secretary to schedule a time. She allowed the same level of deference to staff and parents.

Ivy was clear in her expectations for commitment to student success through the lens of equity. She used relative content and student data to focus the conversation on what the students of her school need from adults. When she was not facilitating the learning, Ivy actively engaged as a participant along with other teacher leaders, modeling her expectation that everyone has a level of responsibility for the success of the students.

Ivy demonstrated shared leadership and collaborative practices with students and adults. Her interactions with students, staff, and parents, whether face-to-face, or on the phone were positive and solution oriented. When supporting staff with an upset parent in the office, addressing PTA concerns, or responding to emails or phone calls, Ivy demonstrated patience and active listening, providing opportunities for collaborative discussion and dialogue.

Ivy presented as a leader who was in touch with her school and its community, yet she rarely smiled or seemed relaxed. My perception was her affect resulted from serving as a single administrator and Ivy felt the burden of success was hers alone. As a result, even as she established structures for collaboration, she was transparent that she had some non-negotiables, always in the best interest of students. Perhaps this transparency allowed others to see and hear her commitment to students and contributed to her success in creating equitable and excellent outcomes for students.

Conclusion

Each portrait is a snapshot of the beliefs, expectations, and practices of the participants as the identified and engaged in their role as school leaders. Although none of the participants identified themselves as social justice leaders or leaders of equity in their responses, their stories created a picture of who they are as leaders, their triumphs and struggles, and how these perceptions informed their school context, including practices, structures, and decision-making processes to contribute to equity and excellence for all students.

In the next chapter, I present themes that emerged from the participant interviews, shadowing, and artifacts as illustrated in the portraits. I will present similarities as well as disconnects among participants. Finally, I analyze these themes through the frame of the research questions.

CHAPTER V: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This qualitative portraiture explored the relationships between the beliefs, expectations, and leadership practices of three elementary school principals to address the following research questions: How do personal beliefs, organizational structures, and decision-making processes influence principal practice in leading for equity? What are principals' beliefs and decision-making processes, and the school structures that support equity and excellence for all students? How do elementary principals balance the role and responsibilities of school leadership and negotiate the school context (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability measures) to support equity and excellence for all students? In Chapter 4, I presented individual portraits for each principal based on the data collected and analyzed from the interviews, principal shadowing experiences, and artifacts obtained during the study. In this chapter, the major themes from an analysis of the individual portraits are presented to provide a cross case, portrait analysis to better address the research questions.

Patterns and Emergent Themes

The following five patterns and themes emerged through the interviews and participant shadowing experiences as contributing factors to school leadership that support equity and excellence for all students: personal and professional authenticity, hiring the 'right' staff, accountability, enabling conditions, and prioritizing messages and expectations. I present each theme with documentation from interviews and observations to create a portrait of a leader for equity and excellence. Table 5.1 lists the major themes and sub-themes.

Table 5.1

Major Themes from Analysis

Theme	Sub-Themes
Demonstrating personal and professional authenticity	Core values evident in expectations Commitment to continuous improvement
Hiring the "right" staff	High expectations Pedagogical knowledge and skills
Ensure accountability	Establish and model clear expectations for changes in adult practices that lead to improved student outcomes Create structures for monitoring progress towards goals
Establish conditions for shared ownership	Foster collaboration, collegiality, and commitment among staff Develop intentional structures and processes that engage diverse perspectives in decision-making Elevate inclusive practices for decision-making in all aspects of the organizational context
Minimize distractions through beliefs	Focus on what is right Model, model, model Prioritize and communicate next steps

Demonstrating Personal and Professional Authenticity

The portrait of each principal depicted the integration of personal and professional knowledge in the leader's practice as they acted to navigate accountability measures and establish an organizational culture with elements of equity and excellence. Each of the principals communicated their values and vision for instruction during the interviews and observations. During participant shadowing, principals treated staff, students, and visitors with care and respect. Each principal communicated evidence of personal beliefs through verbal and non-verbal messages they presented through the setting of their

schools and offices, school structures and processes, and interactions with adults and students.

Core values evident in expectations. Principals described their views on school leadership (i.e. their role and responsibilities as principal) and factors that shaped their views. Two of the three principals mentioned their family backgrounds as influential in their views and practice as leaders. Each of the principals indicated that it was essential to model their vision, values, and beliefs in their day-to-day actions and establishing the school context.

Hope's leadership beliefs reflected the core values of family. Hope stated, "…just growing up…I saw my parents from a young child changing people's lives." She commented, "The leader models the behavior they want to see." "I think another thing is you have to be visible." She also commented, "If it gets my attention, they [staff] know it must be important." In her leadership practice, there was an emphasis on parent and community engagement and developing a strong school culture through relationship building.

Cadence shared the influence of her professional knowledge and experiences and intrinsic motivation, a drive and commitment to students and families. She commented, "Leaders communicate their vision and apply it in their own actions." "A school leader has to be present in everything that's going on in the school." The exchanges observed in the principal shadowing experiences aligned to her commitment to being in classrooms, focusing on instruction, and building relationships with students, staff, and adults.

Ivy indicated that her background shaped her views. She remarked, "My own upbringing and experiences in my interactions with teachers in a positive and negative

way, I am using that as a springboard for wanting the best for every child and parent." She also stated,

> I look at leadership as obviously being a good role model for the instructional program, but I also see myself as a problem-solver…instruction drives me…have to have relationships that define how we do things together and have a building we are comfortable coming to work in where learning is focused and engaging.

These values were evident when I observed her facilitating and participating in professional learning with staff, problem-solving in hallways and classrooms, responding to parent concerns, and engaging in a game of kickball with a group of fifth grade students to model for them collaborative play and decision-making.

Commitment to continuous improvement. By shadowing the principals, I observed how the principals applied their personal and professional beliefs about school leadership in establishing the school context. Hope participated in team meetings where others facilitated agendas they planned, engaged in social emotional learning practices to recognize staff and student efforts, and shared her knowledge of students in team meetings and interactions. This aligned to her espoused belief in shared leadership and ownership for students and the importance of building relationships.

Cadence conducted classroom observations, participated in team meetings, and met with staff individually to provide specific feedback or clarify expectations and processes, demonstrating her professional knowledge and high expectations for adults and students. Ivy balanced leading and facilitating meetings to deepen learning and reinforce research-based practices, with classroom visits and responding to student and adult needs. Their actions supported the idea that it is important to have clear expectations for actions to challenge the organizational culture and meet the diverse needs of students and adults.

Hope, Cadence, and Ivy visited classrooms and conversed with students about learning, engaged with staff about expectations, and demonstrated knowledge of instruction and individual needs of staff and students as they engaged in their leadership practices. These practices affirm the literature on leading equitable and excellent schools that focus on student achievement and addressing the needs of a diverse population of learners. The difference among the leaders was that Hope placed a greater emphasis on relationships and the caring aspect of the school culture. In contrast, Cadence and Ivy, while demonstrating relationship building, exhibited a more hands-on approach to leading for accountability and norming of structures and practices in their schools. My impression was that there was higher level of synergy in staff and community engagement in the school culture observed in their schools.

Hiring the "Right" Staff

According to the research, leaders for equity and excellence lead based on their ethical and moral values as demonstrated through their actions that respect others, serve others, are just, are honest, and build community (Shapiro, 2009). Sergiovanni (1990), Starratt (2004), and Shapiro (2009) also wrote that ethical leaders must be sensitive to the needs of others, treat others in ways that are just, care for others, and expand their practice beyond the technical aspects of teaching to focus on learning, engaging the heart, the head, and the hand. In this study, all of the principals expressed the need to hire the "right" staff and held themselves accountable to their personal commitment, values, and beliefs that their responsibility was to hire the staff committed to the success of all students. Through their moral and ethical convictions, each principal placed an emphasis on pedagogical practices and structures that valued diverse learners and used strategies to

build the capacity of staff to create optimal conditions for all students to achieve competence, excellence, independence, responsibility, and self-sufficiency for school and for life. Skrla et al (2004) would describe this as educational equity, the transformation of systems and individuals to operate habitually to ensure every learner has the greatest opportunity to learn.

High expectations for students. Principals shared that one of the most critical factors to all students achieving at high levels was the presence of staff that held high expectations for all students and were committed to knowing their content and their students. Participant shadowing of team meetings, classroom observations, and post-observation conferences yielded staff were provided specific feedback, asked probing questions to uncover misconceptions, and pushed to problem-solve solutions that created equitable outcomes for students. Staff was open and responsive to each principal's leadership approach to achieving school improvement goals. During shadowing experiences, I also observed elements of staff and the leaders demonstrating deep knowledge of student's historical context and needs and incorporating strategies that acknowledged individual student needs.

Responses from the question, "What are your thoughts about the factors that contribute to student achievement and student growth?" indicated that hiring practices were a critical factor in creating the conditions for all students to achieve. Hope commented on goal setting and shared ownership for academics and knowledge of students. She emphasized the importance of committed staff, stating,

> You have to take the time to hire the right people. You can change people's behaviors. I do not know that you can change their values and their beliefs. So, if you already have people that are sharing your beliefs of the bigger picture, what we want for kids, that just takes all of the drama out of it. You have to have the

> people that are willing to do the extra things, and care, and that the kids know that, hands down.

Pedagogical knowledge and skills. Cadence remarked on the importance of knowledge of educational research-driven practices and structures for examining data and monitoring progress, but more importantly, she stressed belief systems. Cadence said, "I think it's really the person in their present moment and how they feel about the student learning is going to drive learning for students." "It is my responsibility, and anybody that I'm responsible for developing is doing what they need to do to make sure that students achieve…to support student learning for students and that is for all students, not just students struggling but students who are advancing as well, I have a firm belief around that." "No stone should be unturned when it comes to individual students."

Ivy also commented on the importance of having structures for staff to examine and analyze data, develop an understanding of the individual student context and personal story, and teacher beliefs. She reflected, "The teacher is the first thing and I take my role back to leadership is hiring staff members and ensuring student achievement." "Teachers have the opportunity to impact others." Ivy also shared she has enhanced her interview process to go beyond answering standard questions. "We ask people to bring data in from a current classroom and talk about it. When we ask people to openly talk about, you know, their guided reading instruction and how to go about planning for that and describing…you'd be surprised at how many people really don't know…can't get at that with the surface level question." During the leadership team meeting, the thoughtful and specific questions staff engaged in around the data supported this commitment to data analysis.

All three principals indicated in their responses the importance of having staff with professional expertise and high expectations for students, the ability and the will to engage all students in learning. The difference between Hope, Cadence, and Ivy was the emphasis on instructional practice observed during the principal shadowing experiences. In classroom visits, Hope focused her attention on student engagement. The tool she used during the informal classroom visits focused on the implementation of equitable practices. Cadence and Ivy observed for pedagogical implementation and equitable practices. They focused feedback with a checklist and incorporated more written and targeted feedback. In instances where the instruction or classroom environment did not align to their values, written feedback identified follow-up steps. In subsequent visits to the same classrooms, I observed evidence of change in practice, with the exception of the one classroom where Ivy had previously noted her concerns. The literature supported the use of clear and consistent practices consistent with linguistic and cultural needs of students to demonstrate academic and social success (Bourdieu, 1989; Delpit, 1995, Dewey, 1916; Howard, 2010).

Ensure Accountability

Another important aspect of leading for equity and excellence shared by all three principals was accountability. Generally, according to the literature, principals serve as the critical factor in setting the vision for instruction, monitoring expectations, and holding staff accountable to increased student achievement (Leithwood et al, 2004; Marzano, 2003). Each principal engaged staff in developing a Baldridge-guided School

Improvement Plan [3]that focused on math, literacy, and cultural proficiency goals. During interviews, each principal spoke to the power of consistency in expectations and having specific structures and processes for staff to collaborate, analyze student data, and meet school improvement goals. During participant shadowing, I observed evidence of these expectations.

Establish and model clear expectations for changes in adult practices that lead to improved student outcomes. Principals responded to the following question, "How does your leadership style influence your school's context (i.e. practices, processes, structures)?" Hope said, "I wouldn't want everybody to be like me... I am proud of me, but I would not want everyone to be like me. I look at other people's strengths and fill in the gaps." " Each year, I say to my staff, I would like you either to do goalsetting with your SLO or a portfolio." Hope also stated that staff said she never imposed ideas on them. Her response was, "Yes, I did, all the time…I think it's important to involve everybody. I used data to help others see my point of view and buy-in to the idea." The literature highlighted the need for administrators, teachers, and parents to collaborate on organizational structures to design learning environments that recognize and value differences as part of the dynamic of teaching and learning.

Cadence claimed, "I see them [staff] actually modeling, [my behavior] that warms my heart because I want to see somebody doing something right and they believe in me enough, you know, I hope that I played a role in it." In reference to her collaborative

[3] Baldridge-guided School Improvement Plan: A model for continuous improvement based on seven criteria: leadership; strategic planning; student and stakeholder focus; measurement, analysis, and knowledge management; faculty and staff focus; process management; and performance results. The goal of this initiative is to identify the elements of school improvement and organizational development that required in every school in order to promote high levels of student achievement.

actions as a leader, Cadence stated, “I see that they are willing to do it [collaborate] in small groups very naturally, I see that all the time.” According to Burns (1978), leaders transcend their self-interest to motivate and inspire others to act in moral and just manners that result in liberty, justice, and equality.

Ivy responded, “As far as the processes I have in place and in my leadership style, I think they kind of go hand-in-hand. I try to be as hands-on as possible with my staff, and try to be organized.” “ Everybody is aware of the expectations that are in place for them when they come to the table…this is all about kids…Ivy is a person where the question always goes back to how does this keep kids at the forefront.” The literature supported the idea that in equitable schools, all members of the community share the same expectations for student learning and success to result in high academic achievement for all students.

Hope, Cadence, and Ivy modeled the expectations for staff, provided support to reach goals, and monitored staff progress through observations, conferences, documents, and evaluations. Ivy exacted her role as a manager of processes. She was clear and precise about her processes and expectations and there was little evidence of flexibility as anticipated from the literature on leaders for equity. In contrast, both Cadence and Hope enacted their leadership with less formality and more emphasis on the interpersonal relationships and dynamics of building community.

Create structures for monitoring progress towards goals. During participant shadowing, the three principals participated in team meetings where staff reviewed and analyzed data, discussed professional learning needs, and planned for opportunities to engage adults and students in the school environment. Hope provided next steps to the

discipline committee as they continued to provide interventions and monitor student progress and engagement. Cadence met in teams, small groups, and individually with staff. She gave feedback to the ESOL teacher to prioritize and organize content and market the ESOL parent night for maximum parent participation. She provided specific feedback in a post-observation conference and during a meeting with her Autism specialists; Cadence articulated her interest in quality instruction and provided specific next steps for staff to take in order to support the professional growth of one of the team's paraprofessional educators. Ivy participated in the data discovery and then provided explicit next steps to staff.

As supported by the literature, specific structures for monitoring progress towards goals that are inclusive of academic, social, and cultural differences of students are key to the achievement of excellence (Leithwood, 2001; Bensimon, 2004). This is an area where Hope's commitment to the social and emotional needs of students outweighed her investment in academic growth. She demonstrated a high level of care for students and staff and her interactions were always warm and cheerful, regardless of a discussion around discipline data or academic growth in a team meeting. In contrast, Cadence and Ivy demonstrated more of a balance in their attention to the academic, social, and cultural needs of students.

Establish Conditions for Shared Ownership

Democratic, ethical leaders are committed to serving the common good, demonstrate a strong ethical stance connected to their beliefs that drive their actions to facilitate collaborative processes, and balance ethical responsibilities with democratic responsibilities by demonstrating courage to work against practices and policies that

promote social inequities (Gerstl-Pepin and Aiken, 2009; Apple & Beane, 2007; Starratt, 2004). As the principals shared their stories, three themes arose: collaboration, shared leadership, and an emphasis on differentiated professional development and growth. Information on collaboration, shared leadership, and professional development and growth came from several questions. The first set of questions asked principals to describe the level of collaboration, collegiality, and commitment to professional learning in their respective schools.

Foster collaboration, collegiality, and commitment among staff. All three leaders elevated the importance of an inclusive environment, consistent with the literature. Hope responded that she fosters collaboration by,

> I put it out to the leadership team first so we can help everybody else, shared ownership…we study…we have it under our belt…if there are any questions, leadership can take it first…you need a good core of people behind you…we have it under our belts…If it doesn't work, we'll do it again until we get it right.

Cadence commented,

> Ensuring that we have our personnel that are equipped to do the job is very important. Ensuring that all aspects of that person, from your secretarial staff inviting parents and meeting with students sometimes for the first time they are in their classrooms or arriving to the class, and relating information between the public…they are also involved in that vision.

Ivy indicated that,

> Staff engages in peer observations and professional learning…common work. As part of the planning process, the reading specialist, the staff development teacher, and myself, work and plan together and are part of the grade level meeting. It really is a collaborative effort where everyone contributes to the conversation, we honestly do.

The practices and beliefs identified by these principals reinforce the literature on equity and excellence in that there was a focus on the interrelationship between decisions,

actions, and behaviors and collaborative processes for assessing gaps and setting improvement targets (Sergiovanni, 1990; Bensimon, 2004).

Develop intentional structures and processes that engage diverse perspectives in decision-making. Another question asked, "In what ways are others involved in your school?" Hope responded, "Everybody is an asset…I think it's important to invite everybody." "The building services manager is in charge of the energy committee and we meet with master teachers...It's been powerful to see him become more assertive through the year." She also shared that through the PTA, the school developed and implemented an accelerated reader program to provide reading enrichment and motivate students to read more. Her interactions with staff, students, and community all emulated her espoused beliefs around taking care of others, a tenet of an ethical leader.

Cadence claimed, "I am the catalyst." This is relevant to the literature that indicated leaders for equitable and excellent schools take charge for constructing the school environment that engage the whole community to deliver their best each day. For example, she shared that she invites her parents and community to be part of the shared decision-making, running committees, event planning, and working with the PTA to identify strategic opportunities to invite parents in the minority [not traditionally engaged] to become connected to the school. She also described efforts through media, print, surveys, emails, and phone calls to cultivate interest and communicate the vision of the school.

Ivy shared, "I look at parent involvement in various levels so that parents feel like they are part of this." She acknowledged the challenges of her school community and has fostered relationships with local organizations to develop mentoring programs and obtain

resources to support students and their families. This was an area of strength for all three principals.

Elevate inclusive practices for decision-making in all aspects of the organizational context. Staff members had the responsibility for agenda setting and facilitation of grade level and IEP meetings. During the post-observation conferences I observed, principals asked open-ended questions that allowed an opportunity for staff to be reflective and proactive in identifying strengths and areas of growth. There were opportunities in the school schedule for staff to engage in collaborative planning, data analysis and peer observation. Either through scheduling or additional funding, staff was also encouraged to pursue professional development and share best practices with colleagues. There were also structures that allowed parents and community to engage in decision-making and contribute to the school context. Each principal at some point described these actions as "It's the (school name) Way!"

The level of involvement in designing and implementing these practices differed among Hope, Cadence, and Ivy. The literature supported the idea that equity is best achieved when the leader designs an organizational context that embodies clear practices and policies with the capacity to evolve in response individual and organizational needs (Shapiro, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Ivy, in contrast to Hope and Cadence, was less flexible in her ideas about the implementation of practices. This behavior presented itself as early as the first interview in her tentative approach to responding to the questions, mirroring the need to check her responses against the norm. This discomfort with stepping outside the parameters may also contribute to her leadership style creating

formalized opportunities for inclusivity within her control as opposed to the more open and flexible invitations noted in the leadership practices of Hope and Cadence.

Minimize Distractions through Beliefs, Values, and Expectations

Hope, Cadence, and Ivy indicated that it was important to balance the amount of information given to staff and that timing was critical in the process. They all mentioned they align mandates to existing practices and structures in their school context. During participant shadowing, principals provided evidence of clear messaging through the alignment of feedback on teacher practice and focus on reading instruction and data monitoring to meet school improvement goals.

Focus on what is right. Faced with competing interests from the district and state, each principal communicated the importance of setting the stage for staff to remain focused on the needs of the school and balance the mandates from other interests. During the interviews, principals were asked, "How do you foster change in your school in light of the mandates from school system, state, and federal government?" Hope answered, "I try to protect my staff [from distractions]." She also responded that she creates opportunities for staff to bring in content of interest. "I support right off the bat when things come by me…if you think this would be good for us, sure, …but it's got to focus on our school improvement plan." These beliefs and actions align to the literature on democratic ethical leaders that elevated the need to balance ethical responsibilities to members of the community with democratic responsibilities and standardized accountability (Gerstl-Pepin & Aiken, 2009; Shapiro & Gross, 2013; Starratt, 2004). As a result, Hope's leadership resulted in high levels of staff, student, and parent engagement as noted in the school's status on the Gallup Engagement Survey.

Model, model, model. Another theme that arose in the literature regarding democratic ethical leadership was that these leaders have a strong ethical stance that connects to their beliefs and drives their actions. Interactions with Cadence presented an example of this as she described how her actions serve as the catalyst for change,

> I cause change with my actions. You know that everybody is looking at what I am going to do, how is Cadence supporting the work and I believe that I need to model that behavior and it is not hard to do because I believe in it. I like to know the end in mind so I know where I am going and what I need to modify, really reflect on what I need to do for myself as well as my staff. I connect the mandates, bring the whole system together, and this is where we are. I manage the stress and beliefs about what is important for kids.

Prioritize and communicate next steps. The third theme from the literature on democratic ethical leadership that was evident in the portraits was that of connecting individuality of racial and cultural self to have a sensitivity to the personal narratives and experiences of others. Although Ivy presented as probably the least emotive of the three leaders, my experiences with her during the study revealed that her commitment to deliver the best to her students each day is not hindered by my initial perception of her as tentative. Ivy mentioned that her role is to prioritize and know the critical messages to bring back to staff. To do this, she assesses the current state to intentionally plan for next steps to develop the attitudes and disposition to transform practice as described in the literature (Dewey, 1916; Gerstl-Pepin & Aiken, 2009). In Ivy's words,

> I know where we are, what we are currently doing, and seek ways to communicate demands so it doesn't necessarily seem like something new, but aligned to what we are currently doing. I say to staff, you know this and that, and that is where I want our attention. There are some things I hold back on, until the right time.

Each principal exemplified the sub-themes of focusing on what is right, modeling expectations, and prioritizing and communicating next steps. During data analysis, it

became clearer that as these principals identified and approached their leadership practice they demonstrated a tendency to lead from one perspective above others. As a result, the examples of each sub-theme presented aligned to the principals who most exemplified these elements of leadership.

Summary

Chapter Five discussed the emerging themes of the study using evidence from the portraits of each principal presented in this study. Through interviews, observations, and selected artifacts, the researcher was able to develop a portrait of the beliefs and decision-making processes used by principals that support equity and excellence for all students while elevating some strategies these leaders use to balance the mantle of school leadership. Chapter Four presented each principal's portrait, leading to the interpretation of themes presented in chapter five. The themes of personal and professional authenticity, "hiring the right staff", accountability, shared ownership, and minimizing distractions, were present across the portraits of all three principals, yet subtle nuances existed in how each principal demonstrated their leadership for equity and excellence for all students. In chapter six, I will present the study summary, implications for theory and professional practice, recommendations for future research, and my conclusion.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to capture the beliefs, structures, and decision-making processes that influence principal practice in leading for equity for three elementary school principals. Two overarching research questions this study: What are principals' beliefs and decision-making processes, and the school structures that support equity and excellence for all students and how do elementary principals balance the role and responsibilities of school leadership and negotiate the school context (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability measures) to support equity and excellence for all students? These questions explored how principals operationalize practices, processes, and structures in the context of high stakes testing and accountability to achieve high levels of student achievement for all students.

Utilizing the portraiture methodology, interviews, participant shadowing experiences, and artifacts contributed to the identification of intentional practices these principals engaged in to establish a school context that supports equity and excellence. This study focused on the search for goodness as illuminated by Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Summary of Findings

This chapter presents the conclusions resulting from my research on principals as leaders of equity. Six key findings across the research questions emerged from the study and elevated principal practices that contribute to equitable and excellent schools. Interviews and principal shadowing elevated key elements of principal practice that contributed to equity and excellence for all students. All of the principals in some way

emphasized hiring practices and staff beliefs as essential elements in increasing student achievement and growth. Each principal also mentioned or demonstrated participating, facilitating, or planning for the use of student data to inform instruction. In addition, all of the principals indicated that they subscribed to shared leadership.

Research Question One

What are principals' beliefs and decision-making processes, and the school structures that support equity and excellence for all students? When asked what shaped their views about leadership, the principal responses provided insight on the leadership practice of each principal. The first key finding was that personal and professional experiences influenced the principal's beliefs and expectations as educational leaders. Each principal cited examples of experiences from their youth or early professional career that influenced their views on leadership. Among the experiences mentioned were family values, engagement in volunteerism and civic oriented organizations, and continued professional development.

One principal revealed her parents and the relationships she experienced growing up exerted a strong influence on her practice. The other two indicated professional and personal experiences and educational research were dominant factors in their leadership practice. These principals valued relationships and felt responsibility to develop a school culture that held high expectations for adults and students. When adults are confident and competent, it results in increased engagement of students and parents and students achieve more.

The literature supported the idea that personal beliefs, knowledge, and values of principals contribute greatly to the social construction of the school environment,

resulting in structures that have the power to optimize or create barriers to the academic achievement of all students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Purpel & Shapiro, 1995). Research also elevated the important role of the identity of individuals in the organizational culture (Howard, 2010; Schein, 1985). The portraits revealed that these principals led through the lens of their beliefs to establish school contexts, structures, and processes that supported equity and excellence.

The second key finding was that the participants found staffing to be a critical aspect of their job that influenced the organizational context and student outcomes. The most common phrase used by all three participants to describe the principal practice that most influenced the organizational context to achieve equity and excellence for all students was "hiring the right staff." The principals stated that key to their success was having staff with high expectations and beliefs that all students can achieve at high levels for student achievement and growth. In addition, each principal expressed beliefs or demonstrated actions that promoted professional learning and collegiality as integral to developing staff capacity. Where one principal stated that she could not believe she could change the beliefs of others, she firmly believed there was power and possibility in changing actions and behaviors to support equity and excellence.

Shapiro (2009) posits that principals engage in the process of leading equitable and excellent schools based on their ethical and moral values. These ethical leaders establish schools as communities that are sensitive to the needs of others, and respect and treat others in just ways. Sergiovanni (1990) and Starratt (2004) highlighted the interrelationship between ethical and moral values, and actions, postulating that it is imperative that leaders move beyond technical skills related to management and student

achievement to focus on learning. The portraits of these principals revealed that their focus on hiring the right staff went beyond the professional pedagogy of teaching to expand to the importance of having staff that connected with students and had the mindset and belief that all students could achieve. One principal indicated specific practices (i.e. staff and parent survey data, interview questions to surface beliefs and values, observation of instruction, student performance data) aimed to identify potential staff that held these high expectations for students.

The third key finding was that the participants employed institutional practices that valued diverse perspectives in school-wide decision-making. The lived experiences of each principal provided examples of processes and structures that served to engage staff, students, families, and communities in defining the organizational context of the school.

The literature emphasized that leadership practice is dynamic and responsive to an ever-changing landscape. Sergiovanni (1990) described moral leadership as the basis for transforming schools into communities through intertwining the heart, values, and beliefs; the head, mindset of how the world works; and the hand, shows one's decision, actions, and behaviors. These principals created conditions that enabled the active engagement of adults and students in decision-making processes aligned to school priorities. All of the principals described structures that fostered collaboration and input from parents and community members in academic and social events and practices that contribute to the culture and climate of the school. In addition, professional learning and collegiality were encouraged through collaborative team meetings, conferencing around professional development plans and expectations for staff and students to establish goals

and monitor learning and growth. The portraits served to illuminate the interrelationship between the personal and professional beliefs of the principals and the school practices and operations to create environments that are more inclusive and address the learning needs of a diverse population of students. My sense of how these interrelationships function in the district is that principals strive to implement research based practices to attain higher student performance that may or may not be the best match for the school's organizational context.

Across the portraits, the principals were able to identify personal and professional beliefs about leadership that informed their practice. The data collection and analysis indicated that these beliefs influenced decision-making processes and practices in the school. Although the principals never mentioned by name ethical and moral leadership, their beliefs and commitment to creating communities in their school focused on addressing the needs of all students, aligned to those tenets described in the literature.

Research Question Two

How do elementary principals balance the role and responsibilities of school leadership and negotiate the school context (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability measures) to support equity and excellence for all students? The first key finding was that the participants shared common core values about their role as principals. Participant perceptions of their role as principals included modeling expectations, personal and professional authenticity, respectful interactions, collaborative practices, and equity. These principals were committed to signaling clear and consistent messages about priorities to ensure coherence and alignment of structures, practices, and processes.

Throughout the portraits, the three principals alluded to personal and professional authenticity. In varied ways, all three indicated that visibility and modeling expectations helped to set the context for their beliefs. According to one principal, staff knew areas of priority by the items she personally addressed. Two others mentioned they communicated areas of priority during team meetings, staff meetings, and memorandum. All three maintained that it was important to model the expectations they have for students and staff through their actions. Further, when staff and students know your intentions and that you support them, they will follow your lead and trust you as a leader through the most challenging tasks. Starratt (2004) posit that leaders have a responsibility to take control of resources, maximize their potential, and transform individuals to deliver their best each day. He also asserted that through personal and professional authenticity, proactive responsibility, and an enabling presence, ethical leaders could create the conditions for others to attain higher levels.

The second key finding was that participants demonstrated democratic ethical leadership in their daily interactions. Although the participants did not mention democratic ethical leadership in their interview responses, their behaviors and interactions represented the elements that define the leadership theory. Democratic, ethical leaders are committed to serving the common good, giving voice to multiple perspectives, engaging in actions to foster democratic cultures, and demonstrating courage to work against practices and policies that promote social inequities (Gerstl-Pepin & Aiken, 2009).

The principals shared and demonstrated through actions that it was important to keep a "pulse" on the school climate and staff readiness to engage in new work. For all

three principals, it was important that as building leaders, they assess and align new mandates to existing structures. In addition, these principals considered it was their role and responsibility to provide opportunities for professional learning and capacity building during the initial phase of implementation of any initiatives. When faced with new initiatives or mandates, all three shared they weigh the needs of their students and staff against the possibly disruptive mandates to determine optimal entry points. To do so entailed that these principals are highly visible in their schools, engage in daily classroom visits with structured foci, and debrief and consult with others their observations.

The literature around democratic ethical leadership emphasized the importance of leaders implementing and monitoring institutional practices that disrupt the status quo (Briscoe, 1991; DeAbreu & Elbers, 2005; Canfield-Davis et al, 2009). To do so, leaders must engage in ethical and moral decision-making and create opportunities for teachers and members of the community to build and sustain positive relationships based on shared knowledge and vision. Across the three portraits, these principals implemented school structures and practices aligned to their beliefs that also created a platform for encouraging others to engage in authentic change for equitable and excellent school cultures.

Accountability to standards of professionalism and achievement were evident in all three portraits. Through data monitoring, professional development plans, and student goal setting, these principals were clear about expectations. When faced with academic, instructional, or behavioral issues, these principals aligned their responses with established expectations to provide consistent and clear messages to adults and students. According to the examples provided in the interviews and observed when shadowing,

these principals provided specific feedback and used data to drive conversations about adult practice to support equity and excellence for all students. The principals at each school had established protocols for staff to discuss data, set goals, and engage in reflective practice.

The third key finding was that the participants shared common expectations for professional practices in their school context. The intentional structures that contributed to the organizational context established by each principal exemplified the importance principals placed on knowledge and competency of staff, utilization of data to inform instruction, collaboration, constructive feedback, and ongoing professional learning.

Among the school structures shared by the principals were the use of classroom, school, and district data. Each school utilized specific documents and templates for collecting and analyzing student data as well as instructional practice. The leaders engaged in data analysis with staff, often sharing the facilitation of data conversations with teacher leaders. They used processes to engage diverse perspectives and to validate the expertise of students, staff, and community members. All three principals shared examples of how they engaged others in decision-making. Moreover, these principals mentioned that there was a shared expectation for all stakeholders to support the development of a positive learning environment for all students.

The literature around the social construction of schools supported the idea that principals have a critical role in the development of schools that reflect the belief that all students can achieve at high levels (Giroux, 1981; Shapiro, 2009). All the principals utilized structures for data monitoring and accountability, as well as clear expectations for professional growth, and relationship building between and among students and

adults. Throughout the portraits, it became clear that these principals focused on creating school contexts that would result in higher achievement and value the diverse needs of their students, staff, and community. The principals also anchored their leadership practice in their personal and professional beliefs.

Implications for Theory

Three themes arose from the research regarding democratic and ethical leaders: an understanding of self as a racial and cultural being in connection with their own personal narratives and a sensitivity to the experiences and stories of others; a strong ethical stance connected to their beliefs driving their actions to facilitate collaborative processes within their local context; and an effort to balance ethical responsibilities to members of the community with democratic responsibilities and standardized accountability.

The conclusions from this study support the findings from the current literature that place principal practice as the driving force in establishing the organizational context of schools. This study assumed that the participants led from a social justice perspective although they did not identify as such. The selection criteria used in the methodology allowed me to select principals and schools that had demonstrated the characteristics of social justice leadership and equitable and excellent schools described in the literature. Another assumption was that democratic ethical leadership would be a contributing factor to the leadership practice with these principals. This proved accurate. None of the principals described their leadership style as democratic and ethical, yet through their beliefs and views about leadership expressed in the interview, principal shadowing, and artifacts, all three demonstrated aspects of democratic ethical leadership in establishing their organizational context. The data from this study further support the findings that

democratic and ethical leadership contribute to the principal's capacity to implement institutional practices that value diverse perspectives, facilitate climates of high expectations and beliefs for all students and adults, and develop the cultural proficiency of all adults in their organizational context.

All of the principals in the study were aware of the local, state, and federal mandates for accountability in standardized testing that influence their organizational context. As such, they shared a common belief that their role was to minimize distractions and create optimal conditions to meet the individual diverse needs of students. The research called on school leaders to become culturally competent, social advocates who challenge teachers, parents, and community members to be partners in sponsoring solutions for their schools (De Abreu & Elbers, 2005; hooks, 1994; Scheurich and Skrla, 2003). The study found all three principals to be strong, confident, and strategic. They each demonstrated the characteristics of personal and professional authenticity in their daily interactions. All three engaged in collaborative practices and served as advocates for underserved students in their schools.

As previously stated, the literature has created a strong argument that social justice leadership is needed to attain academic achievement for all students; however, there is little research that includes an analysis of the characteristics and intentional practices and processes deployed by principals to explicitly create an equitable and excellence school context, while balancing the factors that influence or impact the context of the school (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability policies structures and processes) (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Riehl 2000; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2010; Walker & Dimmock, 2005).

Through the portraits, I was able to explore the alignment between principal beliefs about leadership and the day-to-day interactions and practices they implemented to support students. Often, leaders hear or read about a good practice or strategy and immediately decide to implement it in their school context and shortly realize that it does not work for them. Linton (2011) stressed that to achieve equity; there must be attention and a balance to the culture, practice, and leadership within the organizational context.

The main contribution of my research to my discipline is in understanding the intersectionality between the principal's beliefs and their actions that contribute to optimal conditions to achieve both equity and excellence. In looking at the conceptual framework and the overarching questions for the study — what are principals' beliefs, decision-making processes, and the school structures that support equity and excellence for all students; and how do elementary principals balance the role and responsibilities of school leadership and negotiate the school context (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability measures) to support equity and excellence for all students— I was able to make connections between beliefs and specific practices that leaders noted that contributed to culture, practice, and leadership within their organizational context. Table 6.1 Cross Portrait Alignment of Beliefs and Principal Practices for Equity and Excellence, reflects my interpretation of the portraits as they related to democratic ethical leadership.

Table 6.1

Cross Portrait Alignment of Beliefs and Principal Practices for Equity and Excellence

Personal beliefs	Structures/processes for equity	Structures/processes for excellence	Principles of Democratic Ethical Leadership
Influenced by parents/ family values Personal and professional authenticity	Communicate and model vision and values	Consistent messages to students, staff, and parents about what is important	Strong ethical stance that connects to their beliefs and drives their actions
Responsibility to develop school culture	Hire staff with high expectations Focus on academic, social, and cultural needs	Hire staff with pedagogical knowledge and skills Prioritize initiatives	Balance ethical responsibilities to members of the community with democratic responsibilities and standardized accountability
Professional learning transforms practice	Monitor transformation of adult practices Specific protocols for discussing academic, social, and cultural needs	Monitor student data Model expectations	
Shared ownership for the success of students	Set goals for social/behavioral expectations Collective data monitoring	Set goals for academic expectations Collective data monitoring	
Develop positive relationships	Know individual stories Engage Diverse Perspectives	Establish partnerships with parents and communities Communicate academic and behavioral expectations	Connect individuality of racial and cultural self to have a sensitivity to the personal narratives and experiences of others

Implications for Future Research

As this study was limited to three principals at the elementary level, to deepen the body of knowledge of how principal beliefs and expectations contribute to the conditions for equity and excellence, more extensive studies with a greater number of

participants would contribute to more transferable conclusions. Two of the three participants in this study were single administrators having more influence on consistency of messages and expectations in the building than when there are multiple administrators. Expanding the study to gather information through a comparative study of single administrators versus administrative teams could contribute to a deeper understanding of the degree of influence of organizational context a principal has when there are other administrative leaders in the building.

The study was concentrated in the fall and winter of the academic year. Ethnographical methodology suggests that conducting the study over a longer time, perhaps one school year, would provide additional opportunities to gain insight on how the principal engages in the instructional planning, hiring practices, engaging external stakeholders, and professional learning espoused in the interviews. This would also provide an opportunity to uncover the relationship between beliefs, expectations, and decisions that define the organizational context of the school.

Based on the selection criteria for the study sites, all three principals involved in the study were female, two African American and one White. Another extension of this study would be a comparative study on the influence of gender or race in the ability of the leader to lead for equity and excellence. In other words, what role do gender and race play in the principal's capacity to lead for equity and excellence?

Finally, the criteria of the study limited selection to schools with similar student demographics to the school district. Conducting this study in schools with higher disproportional numbers of students by race or other special populations would contribute to the body of knowledge of systemic and strategic change.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this research validate the research on social justice and the attainment of educational equity and excellence. The principals in these three schools articulated their stories as educational leaders of diverse settings that have established equitable and excellent schools. My goal as a researcher was to provide insight on how these principals translate their beliefs and expectations into decisions and actions that contribute in equity and excellence for all students. Through the stories of these three schools and principals, school leaders and practitioners may benefit from proven steps that support the transition from theory to practice.

Within the narratives were implications for staffing practices, leadership style, and structures and processes that contribute to the organizational context. All three principals stressed the importance of hiring practices and developing the capacity of staff to be culturally responsive. This aligned to the research on democratic and ethical leadership. Hearing the principal's perceptions of the importance of hiring practices and professional learning on student achievement may help other school leaders think strategically about current hiring practices and strategies in their schools for professional learning and collegiality.

Additionally, all three principals considered themselves as collaborative leaders and established school structures that were welcoming and inviting for students, staff, and community. Developing positive, trusting relationships was instrumental to these principals having the ability to balance current practices and expectations with increasingly more rigorous demands and new initiatives. The three principals utilized specific structures to engage others in decision-making processes, including on an individual and

group basis. Many times, the entry point for addressing challenging demands was the use of data, formal and informal.

On a broader scale, this study has implications for central office and district supervisors responsible for selection, supervision, and evaluation of principals. The study suggested an interrelationship between principal beliefs, practice, and the organizational context. District leaders might be mindful of the nuances of balancing principal beliefs and practices with the school setting in matching a leader to a school as well in designing and implementing professional learning to develop the capacity of principals around hiring and engaging in leadership practices that create and sustain equitable and excellent learning environments. In light of this study, school districts should also consider the unique needs of specialized settings and the leadership beliefs and skills needed to enact transformational communities that accelerate learning for all students when selecting and assigning principals to these schools.

In summary, it is important for principals that vested in establishing equitable and excellent schools to examine their own beliefs and expectations about leadership as these influence their practices as educational leaders. Principals can use the findings from these narratives to examine the strength of their beliefs, actions, and strategies to set clear expectations for teaching and learning that includes a focus on accountability, to challenge the status quo and move their schools to the next level. District leaders can use these findings to examine existing structures and processes for supporting the selection, supervision coaching, and evaluation of principals as well as reimagining the assignment of principals to schools and specialized school settings.

Conclusions

After collecting data through interviews, shadowing experiences, and document and artifact analysis, several themes emerged that aligned to the research on democratic-ethical leadership and personal beliefs as they relate to principal practice in equitable and excellent schools. Although none of the principals identified themselves as social justice leaders, or specifically labeled themselves as leaders for equity, the actions and strategies observed or noted in interview transcripts and other documents revealed these principals enacted principles of social justice leadership noted in the literature.

This study gives insight into how principals transition beliefs and expectations from theory into practice. The research indicates the following: (1) personal and professional experiences influenced the principal's beliefs and expectations as educational leaders; (2) participants shared common core values about their role as principals; (3) participants demonstrated democratic ethical leadership in their daily interactions; (4) participants found staffing to be a critical aspect of their job that influenced the organizational context and student outcomes; (5) participants shared common expectations for professional practices in their school context; and (6) participants employed institutional practices that valued diverse perspectives in school-wide decision making.

This research examined and provided insight into the relationships between beliefs and practices of three elementary school principals in schools that have demonstrated elements of equitable and excellent schools.

Epilogue

Participant Reflections

Each study participant read and reflected on their completed portrait. I wondered how well I had portrayed their stories and what if my telling informed or influenced their leadership practice. After providing time to read and process the portrait, I scheduled a time to meet with each principal and engage in a reflective conversation. Each principal indicated I captured the essence of their identity as a leader in their portrait. Some expressed surprise at actions I captured, the little things they do unconsciously. The reflective conversations about these unconscious actions were perhaps the most interesting for me as the researcher as the principals provided more context behind their actions and additional insight into their beliefs and values.

Hope. Hope first commented, "I wish my parents could have read this." She felt the portrait depicted accurately her focus on social emotion learning and hiring the right people. She expressed surprise that I portrayed her as being patient and soft spoken during the one goal setting conversation with the building services staff who had not met performance expectations. According to Hope, staff knows she is displeased when she speaks in a low, deliberate tone. My perception of her conversation provided feedback that she is improving in keeping her anger and frustration in check, so she my depiction pleased her.

As my shadowing experiences did not provide an opportunity to observe her leading professional learning or a faculty meeting, she shared her philosophy about coaching. Summarized, she indicated she places an emphasis on pricking the right people who have the expertise to lead and do the work. She believes strongly in moving the work to the next

level, not being the smartest person in the room, but providing the structures for others to engage in teamwork. What makes this all work? According to Hope, it all about the planning and that is where she uses her leadership influence, to plan and set the stage for the work to move forward. As a single administrator, she cannot be everywhere, so she ensures she has the right people in place.

Why did she wish her parents had been able to read this? Her parents would have asked questions about why she did or did not make certain decisions. They were a strong influence in her life and a source of inspiration for her leadership practice. She would have looked forward to talking about my perception of her as a leader with the persons who influenced her the most.

Cadence. "Wow! I've only read the first six pages…but, wow! It's like reading a novel about me." This was a brief conversation with Cadence before our scheduled reflection. Her initial response stemmed from all the little things she said I noted, the pictures on the wall, her picking up the paper in the hallways, the little unconscious acts she engages in throughout the day. She appreciated the "prodigious specificity" with which I described her actions and noted my interpretations and pedagogical connections made the portrait real and connected to her role. Cadence reflected,

> In the nearly 12 years that I've been a school-based administrator, I have never had an observation of my work that was as thorough as what was described in the portraiture. As I read this document, I began to disassociate myself, pretending that the main character was someone else. I said to myself, "Wow, I would love to be her someday!"

She believed the portrait affirmed much of what she knew about herself as a leader, coupled with some revelations; specifically, how well she balanced operational and instructional leadership duties. At the same time, she wondered if demographic information

about herself and the school would have provided a more well-rounded view who she was a leader. This was information I later added to all three portraits. Cadence's final thoughts were that the portrait and findings articulated and affirmed who she is as a leader, her core values in action, and the steps she takes to ensure every student is successful.

Ivy. Ivy was surprised that I depicted her as not smiling. The portrait resulted in her thinking about how her "seriousness" might affect others and the implications for her interactions with staff. While my perception was of her being reserved and quiet, Ivy indicated she is often that way as she discovers the context around her, a self-preservation strategy until she is equipped to navigate possible pitfalls. I can confirm that as the study progressed and in subsequent interactions with Ivy since her participation in the study, the layer of reservation is not present. Most likely, I know her better, and she now knows my role as a researcher was to retell the story of "goodness" in her practice.

Ivy remarked she saw herself in the portrait. My perception of the staff meeting she led pleased her as it reflected the comfort with which staff engaged in conversations about race, with a stranger in the room. In her words, this demonstrated the growth of staff to have uncomfortable conversations, speak their truth, and share their own growth with someone who has not been on this journey with them. It was a proud moment, something she demonstrated throughout my study.

She appreciated the attention I gave to the role of staffing as she has experienced poor staffing choices in the past, prior to her current practice. Ivy indicated after reading her portrait, personal and professional longevity to build relationships and set expectations along with clear, targeted hiring practices resonated with how she identifies as a leader.

The reflective conversations with Hope, Cadence, and Ivy reaffirmed my perceptions of each portrayed in the portraits. The commitment and dedication to students, staff, community, and continued improvement emerged in their self-reflection of their leadership practice.

Researcher's Reflection

This research as provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my own journey and growth as an educator, parent, administrator, and researcher. As an educator, I have always been passionate about engaging in practices that fostered positive relationships with students and engaged multiple stakeholders. I operated through my own set of beliefs and values about what is right for students. It is through this lens that I developed my pedagogical skills and developed relationships with colleagues, students, and parents to create positive learning environments. I leave this study with a deeper understanding of the connections between my beliefs and actions and their impact on those I serve—staff, students, parents, and community members.

As a parent of three African-American daughters, I am reminded of the power teachers and administrators have to construct the current and future hopes and dreams of students. Each day and each interaction creates the opportunity for success or failure that can have long-lasting impact on a student's ability to thrive. This study has illuminated the importance of principals recognizing students as racial and cultural beings and engaging parents in the organizational context of schools to influence educational outcomes for children.

Over the tenure of this study, I have also served in my district as an assistant principal, assistant to the Associate Superintendent for Professional Development and

School Support, Acting Director of the Equity Initiatives Unit, and Executive Director to the Deputy Superintendent for School Support and Improvement. These roles afforded me the opportunity to see and experience the influence of leadership and vision on the organizational context of individual schools and across a large district. As I reflected on the common themes presented in this study, I also reflected on my administrative practice and my actions to lead and follow to serve the best interests of students. While I have boasted of my commitment and dedication to equity and excellence, how would others perceive my practice and actions through the lens of the cross portrait analysis presented in Table 6.1? Am I always clear in my expectations or use structures that truly value the diverse perspectives of others? How well matched are my espoused beliefs and values to my leadership practices and do they contribute to an organizational context that promotes equity and excellence for all students?

Finally, as a researcher, I am reminded that learning and discovery can only maximize the potential for growth and change when communicated with clarity and coherence and free of bias. I embarked on this study with my own set of beliefs, values, and experiences. These factors exert a strong influence my racial and cultural identity, and subsequently on my practice as a parent, educator, and administrator. Utilizing the portraiture methodology, I was able to capture the stories of three leaders, who engage in daily intentional practices that create the conditions for adults and students to thrive regardless of the complexities of accountability measures. It was critical to my data collection and analysis to set aside my preconceived notions of equity and excellence to focus on understanding the stories of others to inform a larger body of work.

Portraiture created a space for me to give voice to the stories of others and reflect on where my beliefs intersect with my passion and my actions. I believe this study profoundly shifted my identity as a parent, educator, administrator, and researcher and through my new lens and perspective will continue to help me navigate the organizational context within which I operate to support adult learners and practitioners in creating and sustaining equitable and excellent schools.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Balancing the Role of the Principalship: Creating and Sustaining Equity and Excellence in an Accountability World

{IRB #07126}

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by the executive director to the deputy superintendent, School Support and Improvement, in the role of researcher, under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Clayton of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University (GWU). Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary and your decision to accept or decline this invitation or to terminate your participation at any time will have no professional implications resulting from the dual role of the executive director as both researcher and district administrator.

The purpose of this study is to capture the beliefs, structures, and decision-making processes that influence principal practice in leading for equity for three elementary school principals. It is anticipated that participants in the project and educators will deepen their understanding of the leadership practices that contribute to the conditions for equity and excellence for all students.

If you choose to take part in this study, you will participate in semi-structured interviews, consent to shadowing experiences, and be willing to share documents and artifacts relative to your leadership practice. A minimum of two, ninety minute interviews will be arranged and conducted onsite, based on mutual availability. The interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. At each school site, the principal will be shadowed for a period no less than 10 hours over a three-day period, for a minimum of three hours per session, based on mutual availability. The total amount of time you will spend in connection with this study is 13–15 hours. You may refuse to answer any of the questions and you may stop your participation in this study at any time.

The risks and discomforts associated with participation in this study are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. No aspect of your participation in this study may be used by the researcher in her role as executive director to the deputy superintendent or in any form of the evaluation process.

Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential, however, this cannot be guaranteed. The results of this study will be reported without identifying individuals directly, and any reported statistical data will be aggregated so as to make indirect identification of individual participants very unlikely or impossible. To help protect your privacy, we have obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality to resist any demands for information that would identify you. The research materials gathered from individual participants will be destroyed within five years after the completion of the project. The Certificate of Confidentiality will not be used to prevent disclosure to state or local authorities of reportable incidents such as child abuse and neglect, or harm to self or others.

The Office of Human Research of George Washington University, at telephone number (202) 994-2715, can provide further information about your rights as a research participant.

To ensure anonymity your signature is not required, unless you prefer to sign it. Your willingness to participate in this research study is implied if you proceed.

*Please keep a copy of this document in case you want to read it again.

Printed Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Name of investigator: Arronza M. LaBatt

Signature of Investigator: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Framing

- Discuss the purpose of the study
- Provide informed consent
- Provide structure of the interview (audio recording, taking notes, and use of pseudonym)
- Ask if they have any questions
- Test audio recording equipment
- SMILE-make the participants feel comfortable

First Interview Semi-structured

1. Describe your views on school leadership. What factors shaped your views?
2. What are your thoughts about the factors that contribute to student achievement and student growth?
3. How do you foster change in your school in light of the mandates from school system, state, and federal government?
4. Describe the level of collaboration at your school. Describe the level of collegiality at your school. Describe the level of commitment to professional learning at your school.
5. How does your leadership style influence your school's context (i.e. practices, processes, structures)?
6. In what ways are others involved in your school?
    a. How are parents/families involved in your school?
    b. How is the community involved in your school?

c. How do teachers, parents, and community members impact decisions made in your school?

7. Is there anything else I should know about your school and the factors that influence student achievement and growth?

Second and/or Third Interview: Semi-structured

1. When you assumed your position as principal of this school, what were your initial priorities as a school leader?
2. How did you decide on these areas of focus? What influenced your thinking?
3. In what ways were others involved in these decisions?
4. How are these decisions evident in the school context today (i.e. practices, processes, structures)?
5. To what extent have these decisions contributed to teaching and learning in your school? What data supports your thinking?

Appendix C

Interview Response Matrix

Interview questions	Hope	Cadence	Ivy
Views on school leadership	Leaders model the behavior they wish to see Leaders have to be visible Hiring the right people Attention elevates importance Consistency in expectations	Leaders communicate their vision and apply it in their own actions Leaders are present in all actions of school Focus on instruction and social skills Consistency of instruction Ensure personnel are equipped to do the job (i.e. professional development, understand the vision, operationalize the vision) Align system and school framework	Serve as role model for instruction, coach, problem-solver Instruction defines relationships Create a comfortable engaging environment for learning Can be lonely role
Factors shaped views	Family values Modeling positive behavior and seeing the good in others	Professional development System policies Intrinsic motivation: drive commitment to students and families	Upbringing Interactions with teachers (positive and negative)
Factors that contribute to student achievement and student growth	Attention to social emotional learning and what's going on at home High expectations Goalsetting Share ownership of school practices with home Focus on academics Committed staff	Committed belief to do what is needed for students to achieve Examine student data and monitor progress for struggling students and advanced students Staff with sound knowledge and practice to support students See beyond testing data to the individual students	Hiring the right people Providing feedback Structures to look at data at the grade level and the individual student level Staff understanding of the individual student context and personal story Staff knowledge and skill with instruction and using data Teacher beliefs

Interview questions	Hope	Cadence	Ivy
Foster change in your school in light of the mandates	Use of data to challenge beliefs Annual goal setting Engage in and invest in ongoing professional growth Expand practice across school clusters Anchor new expectations in current practices	Model behaviors for staff Communicate expectations and beliefs Prioritize messages and expectations	"Striving for Success Way" Prioritize critical messages Know the pulse of school and staff and time communication and implementation Infuse new into current
Collaboration, collegiality, level of commitment to professional learning	Provide opportunities for staff to engage in PD to support implementation Whatever it takes to help each other	Support interests Create opportunities and expectations for sharing best practices Establish context for communicating school practices with family and community	Peer observation and learning from one another Clear instructions and expectations for collaboration Expectations for goal setting
Leadership style and school context	Shared leadership and role in delivering messages and expectations Tie into sense of community Create a safe space Tap into the leadership of others	Collaborative leader Shared leadership Sets expectations for follow-up and implementation of professional development Seek opportunities to engage others	Hands on with staff Clear with expectations Maintain focus on students Shared leadership Committed to building teacher capacity and providing opportunities for professional development Document expectations in letters, prost-observation conferences
Involvement of others in your school	Inclusivity: Important to involve everybody Collaborative program with parents: Accelerated Reader	Create concept of collegiality with school-home connection Serve as a catalyst Encourage minority families to be a part of existing decision-making structures Shared decision-making Spend time sharing the vision	Knowledge of the current and historical context Find entry point for every family Partner at individual level Engage community members: Churches, civic organizations, cluster schools Bank relationships to build credit

Interview questions	Hope	Cadence	Ivy
		Surveys, printed documents, face-to-face conversations Tap into student voice (i.e. surveys)	

Appendix D

Observation Protocol

Participant ID:

Date: Time:

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

Appendix E

Sample Observation Protocol

Participant ID: Striving for Success ES Principal C: Ivy
Date: November 16, 2015 Time: 1:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Cafeteria/Lunch grades K, 1, and 3 Checking in with kids in hallways to direct to appropriate locations "You were here when I left…" Assisted students in cafeteria Positive interactions	Clear expectations Relationships
Received call on radio Left lunch to go to office and return a call to a parent Secretary handed her a packet containing an appeal letter from a parent related to a student suspension. (letter was anticipated) Discussed background on student and the number of supports that have been put in place to support the student Called another parent related to follow-up on student concerns discussed at an earlier meeting. Behavioral issues encountered the day before, staff provided one-on-one support to manage behavior. Needed to connect with father on long-term support. Left voice mail Reading specialist came with forms to sign Returned to phone contact, persisted until father was reached (three times). Discussed supports that were provided, staff contact hors. Rationale for scheduling/support to student. Requested follow-up from therapists and how this would support academic and behavior support at school. Managed expectations for counselor contact and therapists.	Parent/school communication Expectations/Clarity Messaging the importance of kids
Returned to cafeteria for second lunch with grades 2, 4, and 5 Several students ask about playing kickball and soccer (strategy for interacting with students and modeling expectations for recess play) Check in with numerous students including the students with whom she'd received the appeal letter and had the phone conversation Returned to office to change shoes for kickball Updated resource teacher on phone call before heading out to recess Brief exchange with PTA officer related to PTA/Staff Kickball challenge on the way out to recess Grade 2 students indicated they wanted her to play ball with them sometimes	Relationships Modeling expectations for students Accountability to expectations
Remained outside entire recess playing and referring kickball on the basketball court Managed team selection, pitched, cheered students, referred Couple of times had to stop and explain the rules Spent time again checking in with the student from the parent call. Returned to office to the end of recess to change shoes	Modeling expectations for students Accountability Visibility

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Visited classrooms	
Posters in hallways with the school motto and expectations	
Class bricks in the café and hallways	Focus on instruction
Student work throughout the building	Relationship building
1st classroom, "I need to check on my friend." Sat at a table and asked, "Can you tell me what the directions are?"	Modeling expectations Visibility
Sat with student and modeled how to solve math problem	
Stayed with student and in class about 15 minutes, one-on-one support, praise, encouragement, sticking with him	
Carried HW for absent student	
Visited other classrooms	Visibility
Took notes/feedback (Notes are copied with one copy to teacher and the other used to develop the evaluation)	Modeling Communicate expectations
Sits with students, asks questions, sometimes provides support	
Noticed students idle, engages in conversation to have them engaged in math games	
Redirected compacted math students in K that were scheduled to support Kindergarten students	
Noticed group not focused on assigned task, redirects them	
Acknowledged creativity of staff to make engaging classroom "Booth"	
Challenges students, "Let me see you do it"	
Returned to office	
Met with parent in the office related to custody concern	Relationship building
At dismissal, student injured in classroom and brought to office	
Principal escorted to health room, made call home, asked parent to come and pick up student	
Answered office phones, secretary went home ill	
Instructional Leadership Team Meeting in Media Center	Clarity of expectations
Opened and facilitated meeting	Focus on instruction
Easy, open rapport with staff	Leading learning
Room set up with three table groups	Modeling
Posters/matching table tents: What are the characteristics of students who made progress and of those who did not? To what extent have specific programs, interventions, and services improved outcomes? Where are we making the most progress in closing achievement gaps? Why?	Data driven
Prescreening/Post screening Data (pink paper): Reflect on, Are you comfortable talking about race with adults? Are you comfortable talking about race with students?	
Staff assigned meeting roles by random pull of roles as they entered.	
Framed meeting, "This year we are trying to have little race and equity snippets in all of our meetings." Reflected on journey through the years. "How do we support our students and engage in conversations about race?"	
Shared article from the post that spoke to the importance of addressing questions about race that come from children to minimize the sense of taboo.	
Engaged staff in reflections and connecting to implications to their role as educators	

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Shifted agenda to reading specialist to lead through data discussion about K, 1, and 2 then 3, 4, and 5 reading data	Alignment of practice to system data
Emphasized time to take deeper dive in the data and move from I wonder, I notice questions to those posted on the charts and table tents/	Focused Shared leadership Encouraging other voices
Yellow sheet on table provided data on school's focus students	Data driven
During table discussions, Principal walked around, listening to dialogue and them sitting with one group for the remainder of the meeting. Reading specialist sat with another group	Manage staff expectations with new data reports
Teams reviewed and analyzed data through the lens of race and equity, using the questions	Prioritized messages and expectations
Conversation with one team, "Keep in mind we regularly switch K-2 reading groups when needs of students aren't being met in current reading group."	
Discussed MAP R and MAPM data	
Framed data that the targets were shifting and becoming more rigorous, but that the school improvement plan was not changing and that the strategies would remain in place. "Stay on course."	
"Prior knowledge of interactions between behavior and academics creates a sense of urgency.	
Discussion of impact of Chromebook on student's interaction with MAP testing	
Principal responded to dialogue and charged leadership with taking back to team and sending proposed solutions to her prior to next meeting to inform a schoolwide decision	
Discussion of student recognition practices; Principal's chat and Practice PALs	

Appendix F

Member Check Form for Interviewees

November 16, 2015

Dear _____

Thank you for an enjoyable and insightful interview. Attached please find the draft copy of the verbatim transcripts of the interview. Please review the transcription for accuracy of responses and reporting of information. Please feel free to contact me by phone at 301-648-6002 or via email at arronza_m_labatt@mcpsmd.org should you have any questions.

Thanks again for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,