A NOVICE PRINCIPAL IN A HIGH PERFORMING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:

REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE

by

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Principals of schools have a unique set of responsibilities that range from the transactional to the transformational. Principals are expected to set a clear vision for the school community, support teachers in their work, while at the same time being responsible for all the details that allow a school to function smoothly. Thus, the first year of a novice principalship is a complex challenge. The first year in a high performing school carries with it an added set of challenges that a novice principal must come to understand and navigate. First-year principals work to not only gain understanding of their role in the school community, but also to develop a personal leadership style that supports teachers, children, parents and the larger community. It is through their experiences and reflections that novice principals begin to develop their unique voice as a leader. These experiences lay the foundation for their coming years in the principal's office.

The methodology for this study was grounded in a form of reflective action research that focused explicitly on several goals set at the beginning of the year that were then tracked throughout the year and reflected upon when the year was completed. Data sources included district-generated minutes of meetings, long range plans, and written materials. The researcher kept several journals and logs of daily events and reactions to events. Findings were triangulated between sources.

Many themes emerged from this research: the importance of knowing the community well, valuing the legacy of the school culture and community, the importance of listening (but also being "the principal"), the critical need to develop trust, and being aware that patience and perseverance are key to change and that feelings about the person and their role as principal can be seen as unrelated. Findings are generalized back to the research literature on first-year principals, and recommendations are made for further research.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I spent 9 years as a classroom teacher. I taught everything from pre-kindergarten to sixth grade. I loved being with the children, watching them become thoughtful members of the community. I liked having deep connections with families. However, over time, I became frustrated with the bureaucracies of education. From directives about percentages of time to teach a new math program to an oppressive focus on testing, I felt the joy and passion I had for teaching draining away. I looked around for a different profession, but it was the sound of young children singing in an assembly that kept me in education. I decided to go into administration to give me an avenue to help good, dedicated teachers like myself stay engaged in teaching. I wanted to help support them in their work with children. It was this notion of a transformative and supportive school culture that became the foundation for my preparation for the principalship.

I became an assistant principal and also entered a doctoral program in educational leadership. After 6 years of doing assistant principal work, the opportunity to become a primary school principal presented itself during the summer of 2006. I was the assistant principal of a middle school at the time, and was busy working on scheduling students for the following year. An email flashed up from one of the primary principals in the district with the simple heading "news." I opened the email and was surprised to read of her retirement. Suddenly the possibility of becoming a principal and moving back to the

primary level at the same time seemed attainable and within reach. My excitement was tempered with the fact that I had committed to my current school for another year, was deep in planning for the next year, and was excited about the work there was to do. However, with the encouragement of the principal I was working with and my wife, I emailed the assistant superintendent and the superintendent to tell them that I wanted to throw my hat into the ring. I remember seeing the assistant superintendent and saying, "Put me in, coach, I am ready!"

As I prepared for the interview, I read all the materials I could lay my hands on: past Parent-Teacher-Student-Association (PTSA) minutes, Site Council minutes, and the school's development plan. I also spoke to as many people in the district as I could who had some connection to the school, in order to get a picture of the culture, and the successes and challenges of the school community. What came through to me in these conversations was a vision of a community rightfully proud of their school, their students, and their history of being a high performing school. The children in the school had consistently scored in the 97th percentile and above on reading and mathematics for several years. In fact, in the spring of 2006, 100% of all students met or exceeded benchmarks in math and only six students did not meet benchmarks in reading.

However, while there was a clear pride in this history of excellence, a picture also developed for me of a community that was not willing to simply rest on its substantial past laurels, but one that was still searching to determine what the next steps could be in order to continue to foster the exceptional, high performing stature of the school. This reflection on the work that had come before me at the school became the foundation for

the goals for and the vision of the school that I was beginning to develop for myself and the school. I saw the journey through my first year as a principal as transforming for me, and hopefully for my new school as well.

When I first entered my new office and sat in the "principal's chair," it felt right, both physically and metaphorically. However, I knew this first experience as a principal would be a challenge. I didn't know exactly what kind of challenge, but a challenge nonetheless. I had no clear understanding what lay in store. I had arrived at what I had worked so hard to attain, full of what I thought was possible, hoping to make the kind of leadership difference that I had been searching for as a classroom teacher. At the core of my understanding of the role were my own thoughts about teaching and learning, my past experiences with other principals, and my hopes and desires to make a difference. They were all right there in that chair and it felt good to me. I felt I had arrived.

In looking back, I realize I felt like an adolescent faced with a new challenge, invulnerable to any sense of danger or fear. Maybe this was overconfidence, or maybe it was the excitement of the time, but I felt like I was ready for anything. I had a vision of structuring a learning community where the focus was on both student and adult learning. Roland Barth (1990) stated that a learning community is grounded in the perspective that everyone's learning is "off the charts." My desire to become a principal was to not just find ways to foster this type of environment, but to be an active participant in this learning.

While the vision I put forth had some resonance for the community, and I was filled with enthusiasm for my new responsibilities, I began to wonder about how to

actually bring my vision of a learning community to life in terms of student learning, teacher growth, and school climate and culture. So my question became: How do I lead and inspire the staff of a high performing school?

Statement of the Problem

While it can be argued that state scores do not clearly paint a full picture of a school and the learning that happens there, standardized test scores are the most frequently used "measuring sticks" to determine the value of a school from an outsider's perspective. The foundation of my question was based on my perception that the school community was searching for ways to not just maintain their exceptional status, but to grow beyond this distinction.

The purpose of this research study was to document and reflect upon my experiences as a new principal over the course of my first 2 years and to explore the relationships between transformative practices, high performance, and the novice principal. The methodology for this study was grounded in a form of reflective action research that focuses explicitly on several goals set at the beginning of the year, then are tracked throughout the year, and reflected upon and compared against a research-based data base when the year is completed. This methodological framework allowed me to both elaborate and clarify my own assumptions and thoughts about education, schools and leadership. Chris Argyris (1974) called this type of reflection both "reflection in action" and "reflection on action." By reflecting in the moment about the work, and the resultant putative causes and effects of my actions, I would be able to grow my

understanding of not just how to be responsive, but also about how to be mindful about my actions as well. In the end, my goal was to better understand the complexities facing me of being a novice principal and possibly to add to the literature on the primary principal experience in high performing schools.

Organization of Chapters

In this first chapter, I have introduced the situation that led to this study and to formation of my purpose statement. In order to build a conceptual framework for the reflective practice upon which this study is built, it was important to lay a foundation of how my thinking about becoming a principal developed over time and how my previous experiences shaped my thinking as I embarked on my first principalship. It was also important to lay out a general picture of the characteristics of the school I was fortunate enough to become a part of as a new principal.

In Chapter II, I provide a comprehensive review of the first-year principalship research literature, particularly when done in the context of transformative and moral leadership theory. The review is structured to lead from an overview of both the practice-based literature and the research-based literature of novice principals, to the specific context of a transformative and ethical conceptual framework. This hierarchical approach frames the study from the general role of the principal to the aspirations of the role of new leaders in attempting to transform school culture.

Chapter III is an outline of the methodological framework for this study. The ability to be reflective both on and in action can lead to a deep understanding of actions

and an expanded ability to understand the implications of culture, legacy and community relations to one's behaviors (Schon, 1983). By being planful before entering the work moment, being mindful and present in the moment, and then taking sufficient time to reflect back on my actions, I was able to construct a broader picture of my experiences and some implications of my actions. My goal was to place my experiences, and my reactions to my experiences, in context by comparing and contrasting them with results from prior practice and research findings.

Chapter IV is the narrative of my experiences as a novice principal in a high performing school. This chapter documents my journey, the struggles, the successes, and the ongoing questions that were so much a part of my first two years as a principal.

In Chapter V, I draw conclusions and implications about my experiences in order to make some sense of the journey while adding to the literature on principal leadership. In this chapter, I address the following questions:

- What did I learn?
- What were the barriers I encountered and how did I address them?
- What were my failures and what were the successes?
- Why do I think things happened as they did?
- What do I think I could have done differently to be a more transformative leader?
- What have I learned that may be of assistance to other novice leaders and other high-performance schools?

Recommendations are made for changes in practice and also for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research on the First-Year Principalship

I found three general categories of writing about the first-year principal: (a) many practice-based stories about being a new principal, (b) some practice-based tips and advice about what to do as a new principal, and (c) less research-based data on first-year principals. I briefly discuss the two practice-related groups of literature and then turn to the research literature on this topic.

The largest category was the first one: stories about being a new principal. Most of this non-research literature on the experience of a first-year principal is found in magazines such as *Principal*, *Principal Leadership*, *Educational Leadership*, etc., and publications put out by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. All of these articles paint a picture of the principalship from an anecdotal perspective. Thus, these are mostly experiential opinion pieces that simply tell one person's story and are not research-based analysis of the experience. The wide range of these articles includes such exemplary titles as, "Surviving the First Year – and Beyond" (Lovely, 2004), "Getting Through Year One" (Daly-Lewis, 1987), "Life in a Fishbowl" (Davis, 1988), and "Congratulations on Your Promotion? Now What?" (Holman, 1996), to name a few. These types of articles paint a picture of a principal's first year typically spent with

unexpected challenges, long hours, surprises both positive and negative, and a feeling of relief when June of the first year finally arrives.

While these articles typically point to a sense of relief at surviving, many also report joy in the fact that, while the year was trying, the authors often reported being uniformly excited by the prospects of year two. Daly-Lewis (1987), for example, reflected on his experience this way:

> I have survived my first year as an elementary school principal. While there were times when I wasn't sure that I'd ever be able to say that, the experience has been splendid, and I'm delighted to be on the threshold of another year. (p. 36)

This sentiment runs through all the dozens of published practice-based articles that I reviewed on the first year experience.

Another genre of literature I identified on the first-year principal falls under the heading of "tips and advice." The amount of advice pieces that are peppered through the popular education literature is large. Articles in this area have titles such as, "Survival Skills for the New Principal" (Rooney, 2000), "Keys to Success for First-Year Principals" (Buckner, 1999), "Jump Starting a New Principalship" (Quinn & Troy-Quinn, 1999), and "Been There, Done That – and Won't do That Again" (Young, 2006). There would be no way for one person to follow all the advice or examples given, especially if one were also to follow the advice of "balancing one's time." In an article titled, "Tips for the First-Year Principal," for example, Aquila and Hoynes (1996) listed 34 different tips for a successful first year. These tips range from "work hard to learn names" and "be able to write behavior management plans" to "strike a balance between openness and

decisiveness" and "keep the central office informed about potentially explosive situations." While these may be decent tips, they are numerous and sometimes confusing.

There are similarities in much of the advice for new principals. The main pieces of advice given were to take time to listen well before acting, get to know the culture, and build trusting and respectful relationships with the staff and community. What the advice articles demonstrated to me was that the learning of a new principal was often hard won (Aldrich, 1984; Capelluti & Nye, 2004; Lael, 2002; Sorenson, 2005).

Once I had sorted the practice stories and the practice advice from the research-based literature, I was left with a much smaller grouping. The third and most important group for this study was the research literature that examines the complexity of the role of the first-year principal. I identified 33 published studies from the last 20 years with a specific focus on the new elementary principal. I sorted the 34 studies into 3 categories: 6 related to principal leadership behaviors in high and low performing schools, 1 on principal succession, and 27 studies focused on the principalship itself.

The six studies of principal leadership in schools of higher and lower achievement had a common theme in their findings (Davis, 2001; Duncan & Sequin, 2002; Heinlein, 1989; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Sumowski, 2002; Youngs, 2007).

Heinlein looked at differences in principal uses of instructional time in 39 higher- and lower-achieving California elementary schools. She found significant differences between use of time in regard to observation and feedback, and instructional management. Principals of the higher-achieving schools spent more time on observation and feedback. Davis' 3-year study of his own school focused on interactions between the

principal and the teachers in shaping the school culture for continuous improvement in reading achievement scores. She conducted participant observer field observations, critical incident interviews, and document analysis. She concluded that the biggest obstacles to increased student achievement were lack of order and insufficient educational resources. She also noted that teachers' understandings about teaching, learning, problem solving, and their own identities, affected how they utilized the professional development resources provided. She identified a cyclical resistance and cooperation pattern that occurred each time a change was requested

Sumowski (2002) chronicled the experiences and challenges faced by one elementary principal during the first year in a low-performing school with a state-mandated school improvement team. He found that the principal faced challenges in communication, conflict with the school improvement team, issues with time management, and the maintenance of staff morale. At the core of their case study, Duncan and Sequin (2002) developed an understanding of principal effectiveness in relation to succession. By studying the transition of school leadership from one principal to another, they found the effectiveness of a new principal can be affected by such issues as community attitudes, communications skills, leadership style and the sense of trust in the leader.

McGuigan and Hoy (2006) looked at school properties that made a difference for 40 Ohio elementary schools. Their central finding was that "academic optimism" made a significant difference in enhancing student achievement, especially as expressed and modeled by the principal and teachers of a school. This finding was echoed in Youngs'

2007 study of six elementary principals in Connecticut and how their behaviors and beliefs influenced the induction of new teachers in their schools. The three principals who actively encouraged the instructional development of the new teachers, and who involved more experienced teachers with the development of the new teachers, were rated as having a positive influence on development of the overall school culture.

These studies came to many of the same conclusions found in the more experiential, anecdotal publications: it takes time and patience to create environments where the broader community and the staff of the school come to trust a principal's actions. When the principal attempts to implement change too quickly or without truly understanding the ramifications to the school culture, the principal is far more likely to have a difficult first year.

The remaining studies focused on some aspect of new principal life. Alvy's 1983 study, for example, focused on the major difficulties of 70 Montana principals completing their first or second year as an elementary or secondary principal. Curriculum and instruction and professional personnel were the two most difficult responsibility areas for these new principals. Sussman's 1985 shadowing study of a first-year principal included systematic observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, administrators, parents, school department, school committee and community members. She documented memos, notices, letters and other written materials. School culture and the mutual development of teacher and principal leadership emerged as her key finding. The principal spent less time than expected on instruction in the first year and more time on supporting the teachers and providing steady communication links to the district and

to the community. Hartman's 1985 ethnographic study of a junior high school principal came to comparable conclusions.

Berman (1986), Nolan (1990, Greenberg (1987), Holcomb (1989), and Woodruff (2008) each focused on descriptive documentation of the tasks, sources of support, and sources of difficulty for first-year elementary principals. Berman's case study of two new principals identified the central office as a source of difficulty that interfered with attempts at introducing curricular change. Greenberg's study of 10 new Long Island elementary principals also identified tasks and sources of support, but focused on reflections on the year. Her principals used their first years as "windows of opportunity" for personal and school-level change. The specific school context once again emerged as the greatest single force shaping the school year. Holcomb's stratified random national sample of 450 beginning elementary principals also identified the specific school setting as essential to shaping the plans for the year. Woodruff's study found that new principals struggle with role clarification in relation to instructional leadership.

These principals also identified the following important but least supported skills as essential to a successful first year: human relations skills; building rapport with teachers; the ability to analyze tasks, delegate work and use active listening; the ability to communicate effectively with many communities of interested stakeholders; understanding managerial responsibilities; and time management. Nolan's 1990 in-depth case study of six Long Island elementary principals supported these findings but also identified several key issues where these first-year principals met experiences for which they felt they had little training or prior experience. These six principals reported that

routine managerial matters regularly pulled them away from their interests in improving instruction, and that they also had little time to learn the culture of their district and the surrounding communities.

Ginty's 1993 case study of six Rocky Mountain area teachers in their first principalship identified initial dramatic shifts in each person's understanding of the principalship. All six identified issues related to sense of self, health, economic status, work roles and routines, and shifts in relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and superiors as significant changes in the first year of administrative practice. Although the individual experiences were quite different, Ginty included little demographic detail about the schools themselves in the study. Elsberry's 1994 survey of 112 new principals in Alabama, Mississippi and South Carolina identified similar near-traumatic shifts and changes in perceptions for new principals. Butterworth and Weinstein's (1996) case study of one private school used ecological principles to sort out the experiences of the principal and staff. Again, the school as a cultural community emerged as a central factor in determining success. LeGore and Parker (1997) concurred that the factors involved in the success of a new principal is their attention to and understanding of the leadership style, communication techniques and community relations exhibited by the out-going leader. They argued that a new principal, in order to build trust, must take time to stop and listen well to both the words and actions of others in the school. If a new leader moves too fast, the often critical undertones of the school that are vital to supporting the school's culture and climate are likely to be missed.

Pristash's 2001 study of three first-year elementary principals examined their experiences and their reactions to their experiences. She documented the important relationship between one's emerging leadership philosophy and the specific institutional structure and culture of the school. Role contradictions and interpersonal relations, as well as external relations and politics emerged as the three primary themes from this study. Each of the three principals used a different approach to facing and negotiating issues. Griffin (2000) replicated Wolcott's *The Man in the Principal's Office*, first published in 1973, but looking instead at the woman in the principal's office. Griffin's findings were parallel to the studies previously cited in a focus on changing priorities and expectations by the person, by the staff, by central office, and by members of the school communities. Cosgrove's 2002 study also followed the daily work experiences of a first-year woman in the principal's office. Cosgrove also used an "administrative dialogue group" of experienced school administrators who met monthly to discuss themes from the researcher's first-year journal. Identifying the gaps between real and ideal principal role expectations emerged as a key finding, as did cultivating an intimate understanding of the school and district culture.

Johnson (2004) looked at the leadership styles, characteristics/traits, skills and functions of 10 successful elementary school principals determined to be making a difference in their schools. While this study was not focused specifically on the first year of the elementary principalship, Johnson's findings pointed to the need for a new principal to understand early in his/her practice that situations demand different leadership styles at different points in time. Each of these 10 principals also talked

directly about the importance of the first-year principal gaining the support and trust of the staff. They talked about not trying to change a school too quickly and about the essential communication and listening skills necessary to build an atmosphere of support and trust. Ruff and Shoho's 2005 study of novice and experienced principals also noted that differing levels of integration of skills and strategies exist for novice principals than for experienced principals.

Meloche's 2006 study of five new elementary principals documented the substantive demands on time and energy, and the challenges of using a more relational style of leadership than had been previously used at the school site or was currently in use in the district offices. Each of these five women was able to transform their schools into more vibrant learning organizations, but they also each reported that they were left to "survive on their own" and they raised questions about the lack of support for developing women leaders in school organizations. Deaton (2006) tracked the decisions made by three new elementary principals. While he was focused more on types of data used and not used, he also documented the challenges to these principals in balancing heavy demands on their time and energy, and their frustrations in identifying specific pieces of data in a timely fashion to help them make better decisions for their schools. In this study, the level and amount of staff involvement in the decision process varied considerably with the leadership approach of the particular principal.

The good intentions of a new school leader to foster improvement can be seen as insignificant and useless if the stakeholders in the community feel that their beliefs and value systems are not listened to or acknowledged (Duncan & Sequin, 2002). However,

while listening and understanding is important, it is also important that one "take hold" of their principalship and "be a leader." Beghetto and Alonzo (2006) argue in their research on instructional leadership that, "Everyone in the school, especially teachers and students, must understand that final destination and be equipped with the necessary strategies" (p. 284). The leader within the school has to help craft and define this "final destination" with confidence. This appears to be in contrast with the notion of "listening" and "taking time to understand" the school culture. However, it is the principal's job to do both at the same time.

This paradox is summed up in the question, "when to act and when not to act" (Quong, 2006). In his examination of his first year as a principal, Quong found that it was not a particular event that framed his learning, but rather all of his experiences wrapped together that formed the basis for his understanding of the complexities of being a first-time principal. He conducted his study in Australia and recommended that it be replicated in other countries and by other new principals. He focused on being a first year of principal in a small school where he was following in the footsteps of a retiring principal. Through his own action research and in interviews with other beginning principals, he found that there are common struggles that new principals face in understanding the role, the effect of the decisions a principal makes, and how a new leader fits into a community in effective and meaningful ways. The challenge lies in the fact that many principals are hired to come in and create some form of change or growth, yet there may be resistance to this change, at least until there is trust and confidence in the new person. This trust and

confidence comes through not just in words, but is firmly grounded in the actions of the new principal (LeGore & Parker, 1997).

Johnson-Huff's 2006 qualitative study of the perceptions held by 30 first-year elementary principals in northern California also identified transition challenges with technical skills, self-awareness, balance, emotional intelligence, socialization skills, bureaucracy, and feelings of extreme isolation. Instructional leadership proved to be a complex skill that permeated all transition challenges. These new principals used a variety of support strategies that they named as essential to their survival and success as a first-year principal.

This body of research speaks directly to the complexities and challenges of the novice principal, regardless of whether the school is a low or high performing school. However, high performing schools seem to require a unique form of direct principal leadership. The studies on low performing schools describe compelling reasons for change. Whether it was the focus on developing "academic optimism" in order to enhance student achievement (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006) or promoting staff morale (Sumowski, 2002), there was a similarity of challenge in relation to improvement. However, in a high performing school, there is not this underlying reason for change. Thus, the principal has more time for engaging with teaching on their craft (Heinlein, 1989) and for building the trust of teachers and the community (Duncan & Sequin, 2002; Johnson, 2004). However, with high-performance patterns there comes a resistance to change due to lack of that compelling reason to examine practice. Developing a compelling narrative for change is thus reliant on a transformational approach. It is vision

and shared values that become the foundation of the work of a new principal in order to attempt to move beyond the common issues of being new, such as communication challenges, community relations, and overall school culture (Creemers & Reezigt, 1996; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hipp & Bredeson, 1995; Mortimore, 1993; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Southworth, 1990).

Definition of Terms: Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is about the leader and the followers engaging with one another on a collaborative and collective level. This engagement is built upon a mutual need to raise each other to a high level of morality and motivation (Burns, 1978). Burns stated that this is a "dynamic leadership in the sense that the leaders throw themselves into a relationship with followers who feel 'elevated' by it and often become more active themselves" (p. 20). By defining two leadership types, transformational and transactional, Burns brought a new sense of clarity and understanding to the functions and relationships of leadership. He goes on to suggest that this style of leadership "ultimately becomes *moral* in that it raises the level of the human conduct and ethical aspirations of both leader and led and thus has a transforming effect on both" (p. 20). It is this elevation of both leader and follower to a different place in their thinking and actions that is the cornerstone of transformational leadership. Sergiovanni's (1992b) suggestion that there is a switch from "what gets rewarded gets done" to "what gets done is rewarding" clearly describes a transition from a transactional leadership style to a transformational style.

There is general agreement that Burns' (1978) thinking on transformational leadership created a new paradigm from which leadership constructs were researched. By focusing less on the managerial side of leadership and more on a deep concern for the needs of the followers, the leader values collaboration over the simpler maintenance of control (Cousins, 1996). This switch in focus puts the leader into the position where leaders tend to the needs of the followers through inspiration, dedicated support and care (Hipp & Bredeson, 1995). This style of leadership fosters more organizational effectiveness through an increase in follower morale and through their overall sense of ownership in both the organization itself as well as in their work (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Bottery, 2001; Bridges, 1982; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999b; Pounder, 2002). When there is increased morale and a sense of shared purpose, the entire organization is strengthened and there is an increased level of student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999).

An extensive amount of research has been done to identify those dimensions or characteristics that form the basis of transformational leadership. Examples of this research can be found in Jantzi and Leithwood (1996), Bass and Avolio (2001), and Pounder (2002). Each of the different frameworks demonstrates a style of leadership that transcends the basic managerial nature of transactional leadership. Jantzi and Leithwood define six dimensions of transformational leadership: (a) identifying and articulating a vision, (b) fostering the acceptance of group goals, (c) providing individualized support, (d) providing intellectual stimulation, (e) providing an appropriate model, and (f) addressing high performance expectations. Bass and Avolio also found specific

underlining components of transformational leadership in their study of leadership characteristics. Their four components are idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. Pounder (2002) took the Bass and Avolio dimensions a step farther by adding the variables of integrity, innovation, and impression management to the characteristics of transformational leadership. Each of these components speaks of a leader whose vision draws others in, who attends to the specific needs of staff, who encourages their efforts and provides inspiration for growth and change. Regardless of the dimension or framework used, the underlying guiding principle is that leadership is a process where the focus is more on asking questions than giving directives (Ackerman, Donaldson, & van der Bogert, 1996). In fact, "leaders who embrace open inquiry, the sharing of problems and solution, and collective responsibility will foster creativity, resourcefulness, and collaboration in the work of staff and the learning of children" (Ackerman et al., p. 3).

The concept of transformational leadership laid the groundwork for a renewed focus on the effectiveness of leadership in schools (Fullan, 1992b; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1996). The work of Bass (1985), who further refined conceptualization about school leadership by exploring the need for a balanced approach to leadership, and Burns (1978), has become the foundation for much of the research into the role of the school leader and the effectiveness of educational leadership over the past 25 years.

Over the last two decades, there has been extensive literature on transformational leadership and its effectiveness in addressing organizational learning and improving

school functioning (Bass & Avolio, 2001; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Day, Harris, & Hadfield, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999b; Sergiovanni, 1984). There is not always agreement to what role this leadership needs to take (Gronn, 1996), but generally the role of school leader has been seen as effective in relation to the overall running and maintenance of the school (Ogawa & Hart, 1985). Within the literature on transformational leadership, the concept of transactional leadership is always addressed as an opposite. While there is no recent literature to support the notion that a transactional leader will make significant and lasting changes or reforms in a school, there is much discussion about whether or not a balance of the two leadership styles is the most effective approach for the restructuring of schools (Bensimon, 1993; Gardner & Cleavenger 1998; Pounder, 2002; Sagor, 1992).

The role of a school leader continues to grow in complexity and scope. With the onset of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the role is becoming more public and more scrutinized. There is a large body of literature, both within the more popular mainstream and within the research community, about the changing role of school leadership. The focus of much of the writing on schools has to do with school improvement, school effectiveness, student achievement and the overall climate of schools.

However, in taking a closer look at this large body of literature, there emerged for me some semblance of understanding about the traits and attributes of effective principals and other school leaders. The common thread falls into the scope of what Burns (1978) defined as transformational leadership. While there are multiple perspectives of transformational leadership (e.g. Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Leithwood et al., 1996;

Lincoln, 1989), the common denominator is that leaders with these types of characteristics can make a difference in schools. Key to the relationship between school restructuring and transformational leadership is an underlying focus on high ethical and moral standards. It is through strong moral vision of individuals, their work and their voice that a transformative leader finds his true strength. While the amount of effect a leader can have and in which areas of the school organization has yet to be definitively decided, a path of the need for moral transformative leadership in school restructuring has been forged from the Nation at Risk report towards the goals of NCLB.

The leadership literature is rooted in the notion that in order for lasting change and reform to be sustained, some form of transformational leadership is crucial (Bogler, 2002; Day et al., 2001b; Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996; Ogawa & Hart, 1985). Underlying this discussion are four themes that stand out as being positively related to school effectiveness, student learning, and the overall climate of schools. These themes are:

1. The transcendence of leadership to a moral level (Burns, 1978; Day et al., 2001; Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992).

2. School and organizational effectiveness as it relates to occupational satisfaction and student achievement (Bogler, 2001; Day et al., 2001; Leithwood, Tomlinson & Genge, 1996; Ogawa & Hart, 1985).

3. The traits of an effective leader and why followers allow themselves to be led (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Bryman, 1992; Gardner & Cleavenger, 1998; Yukl, 1981).

4. The issue of power as it relates to leadership (Abbott & Caracheo, 1988; Dunlap & Goldman, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999a).

Each of these themes are interconnected and, while not an exhaustive list of the areas focused on in the literature, they are the components of leadership that best address the

complexities of education today. For example, in December 2004, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement published "Innovative Pathways to School Leadership" in which it articulated the complexities of school leadership. Among others aspects of school leadership:

> Effective school leaders understand that they are in a position to mobilize others by: articulating and modeling core values that support a challenging and successful education for all; establishing a persistent, public focus on learning at the school, classroom, community, and individual levels; working with others to set ambitious standards for learning; and demonstrating and inspiring shared responsibility and accountability for student outcomes. (p. 3)

These expectations for school leaders create complex environments for principals to work effectively within. In order to do the work of creating successful schools through focusing on both the organizational climate and improving school functions, a balanced leadership approach, both transformative and transactional, is appropriate.

It takes time to create an environment where there is trust in the principal and her or her actions by both teachers and the parent community (Davis, 2001; Sumowski, 2002). Thus, when there is increased time to focus on observation and feedback in a high performing school (Heinlein, 1989), there is a need for a strong moral vision of individuals, their work and student learning. It is this base of high moral and ethical standards that creates an environment of trust and ability to move the school forward (Day et al., 2001; Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992).

Moral Purpose of Leadership

While there is general agreement about the characteristics of transformational leadership and there is much discussion about the role of transactional characteristics as

an aspect of any leader's overall style, this focus does not get at the deeper and more purposeful values of transformative leadership. The theoretical underpinnings of transformational leadership are based on making significant changes for the greater common good over the needs of an individual leader or an individual teacher. Simply focusing on making surface level changes does not constitute transformational leadership at its deepest levels. Fullan (2003) suggests that when leadership transcends surface level variables of change, the vision of school reform can be seen as a moral imperative. Leadership moves to a deeper moral level when the focus moves from individual teachers and individual student achievement to what will make a difference for the whole school. Fullan argues that "the moral imperative of the principal involves leading deep cultural change that mobilizes the passion and commitment of teachers, parents, and others to improve the learning of all students, including closing the achievement gap" (p. 41). This moral vision is embodied in a "covenant of shared values" (Sergiovanni, 1992b, p. 108). It is this shared sense of values and purpose that underlies the transcendence from a basic level of transformational leadership to a level of moral leadership. Sergiovanni argued that the acceptance of this principle means that "every parent, teacher, student, and administrator is viewed as an interdependent member of the school as covenantal community and that every action taken in the school must seek to advance the welfare of this community" (p. 106).

Greenleaf (1970) puts this ascendancy very succinctly: "The leader needs more than inspiration, more than insight. He or she has to take the risk to say, 'I will go; come with me!'" (p. 44).

In his book, *Teaching As A Moral Craft*, Tom (1984) states that a moral view of schooling (and, in turn, leadership) has less to do with right and wrong, and more to do with valuation. He defines moral as, "both a concern for the rightness of conduct and a broader concern for what is deemed important or valuable, provided that these valuational situations clearly entail desirable ends" (p. 79). In this sense, the basis of leadership and teaching is to look far beyond the local needs or purposes of one's work, but to make connections to the larger community and how that work fits into the broader community. "Educationally, these characteristics lend themselves very well to rich conceptions of the pedagogical relationship between teacher and student in the classroom, but they also lend themselves to the wider citizenship dimensions of education" (Bottery, 2001, p. 201). The movement from a transactional style to a transformative style is the motivation and inspiration towards fostering these types of relationships, as well as making personal connections to this larger view of our work in schools (Bottery, 2001).

The transformational literature is in agreement that a main component of this style rests in its focus on people. This people-centered approach creates environments where each stakeholder feels invested and part of a higher, shared purpose. It is this focus on both individual and group value systems, rather than only on the managerial aspects of the work that set a transformational leader apart from other types of leaders (Day et al., 2001). Day et al. point out that this style of leadership functions at a deeper level because is does not start "from a basis of power and control but from the ability to act with others and to enable others to act" (p. 27). Moral leadership is based on the welfare of others, which is where true transformation occurs. Thus it is the moral leader who motivates

others to far exceed their own expectations and provides the inspiration to deal directly with challenges (Bass, 1985; Krishnan, 2003). The fostering of moral inspiration and shared sense of values results in followers becoming leaders in their own right (Burns, 1978). This motivation is not through coercion or contingent rewards, but through embracing a higher set of values than test scores, for example, and basing this shared purpose on the principles of justice, equality, dignity, integrity, and freedom (Bass, 1985; Bensimon, 1993; Pounder, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1998).

Sergiovanni (1984) identifies five leadership forces that shape and form the basis of a leader's style. These are technical, human, educational, symbolic, and cultural. The first three forces are more transactional in nature. The symbolic force is a more basic transactional approach that puts the leader in a position to signal to others what is important and of value. While this is a more transformational focus than the first three, it does not truly get to the heart of affecting change and drawing all stakeholders in to a shared vision. It is the last force, the cultural force that moves more towards the idea of elevating leadership to a moral plane. This force relates to a deeper level of moral obligation towards schools because it builds the basis for a school identity by pulling together all members of the school community towards a mutually-arrived-at vision. In later work, Sergiovanni (1992) calls this the "heart of leadership" because "it has to do with what a person believes, values, dreams about, and is committed to" (p. 7).

With the increased focus on the mandated goal of having each child in each sub-group make adequately yearly progress as a result of NCLB, it would be very easy to get mired in a transactional, test score driven mode. However, the transformational leader's

purpose is to not only to have schools where all students learn and make significant progress and to reduce the gap between high and low achieving students, but also to connect students to the larger community – to create thoughtful, caring and competent citizens (Fullan, 2003). However, this type of reform or change requires a shift in thinking to the idea that the culture of the school is centered on these heightened expectations for all members of a school community (Sergiovanni, 1984). Fullan (2002) calls this "transforming culture – changing what people in the organization value and how they work together to accomplish it" (p. 18). Fullan (2002) describes this transformation as having the purposeful, moral goal of making a significant difference in the lives of each child in every school. Lincoln (1989) takes the need for a focus on moral, transformative leadership in school one step farther. She strongly affirms that the role of a leader is to "recognize the invisible and the voiceless, and to grant them the space to speak and the discovery of their own means to snare and share power" (p. 177). This is the moral imperative of leadership towards the improved functioning of schools of all types and levels of performance.

Improving School Functioning: Teacher and Student Perceptions and Connections to Moral Transformative Leadership

As stated above, the moral imperative of schools is to inspire all members of the school community to set their sights to a high level of expectation in relation to all students making significant progress and to connect children to a broader understanding

of the culture of which they are an integral part each day. Schools educate children in order for them to become productive and thoughtful citizens, a responsibility that falls most directly to teachers. The role of teacher is complex and demanding and deserves to be valued as central to the effective functioning of schools. A moral transformative leadership style not only values the voice of teachers, but also calls on them to be collaborative and share in the vision of the school. The motivation to engage in a school vision comes from their participation in formulating the vision and thus their role is critical to making the vision a reality beyond a baseline of expectations (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999a; Sagor, 1992). In order for teachers to have a voice in the formulation of a vision of success for each child, there needs to be a leader who is able to move beyond their own needs and welcome all others to the table with equality and dignity. In this ongoing age of scrutiny towards schools and their effectiveness, transformational leadership is well suited to meet the increased challenges and complexities of schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). Leithwood (1994), in his article, "Leadership for School Restructuring," suggests that when teachers' perceptions of school characteristics are strong, they feel more connected to the school, their work, and the school leader. There is an extensive amount of literature that demonstrates a link between teachers and student achievement. However, there is no clear agreement over the amount of variance leadership has in relation to student achievement. A good deal of the literature, however, suggests that a moral transformative leadership style does have an indirect effect on student achievement through teachers' level of morale, feeling of connectedness to the school community, and their perception of their own effectiveness. While some variance

of each of these factors is attributable to both transformational and transactional practices, it has been shown that it is from a transformative base that the most impact on a teacher's efficacy and their positive reactions to a leader's style is found (Barth, 1990; Bogler, 2001; Day et al., 2001; Fullan, 1992; Greenfield, 1987; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hallinger & Murphy, 1996; Hipp & Bredeson, 1995; Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999a; Ogawa & Hart, 1985; Pounder, 2002).

Hipp and Bredeson (1995) found a positive relationship between principals' leadership style and teachers' feeling of efficacy. The leadership behaviors that were found to have the most significance were (a) the principal modeling desired and expected behaviors, (b) providing contingent rewards, and (c) inspiring the value of shared group purpose. In their study, it is clear that those behaviors that influence a teacher's sense of purpose and efficacy range across the transformational-transactional continuum. This effectiveness was based on the fact that the initiative and leadership for change within the school came from teachers themselves rather than from the principal. Moreover, teachers felt empowered and part of a shared vision in such a way that their commitment for change came from within themselves. Commitment and willingness such as this to share in something larger than each individual is the result of the fact that "principals influence teachers, staff, and students more by what they do than by what they say" (Hipp & Bredeson, 1995, p. 147). When a school leader demonstrates and models the type moral and ethical behavior towards staff and students, staff and students are much more likely to act accordingly (Cheng, 1994). Due to the need for schools to answer the calls emanating from legislation such as NCLB and other avenues of public scrutiny, both

teachers and school leaders will need to embody these types of behaviors in order for school restructuring to be sustainable (Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003).

Leithwood (1994) suggests that when a transformative leader is involved in a school restructuring process, the "psychological dispositions" of teachers explains 80% to 90% of the variance of their perception of the change process and student outcomes. When teachers perceive that transformational leadership behaviors, such as the identification and articulation of a vision, the promotion of shared group goals, conveying high expectations for all, the modeling of espoused values, providing intellectual stimulation, and providing individualized support, they engage in the change process and in the community at a high level (Leithwood, 1994). It is this engagement and commitment and not simply the leader's style that leads to long lasting change. Leithwood also found that contingent rewards are significant in a teacher's perceptions of a leader's effectiveness, but it was the more transformational approaches that were demonstrated to have the greatest impact.

Building collaborative leadership relates positively to overall school effectiveness. This is especially true as schools and the requirements of them become more complex (Bossert et al., 1982). When teachers feel like they are part of the learning process and decision-making structure of a school, their level of job satisfaction increases (Bogler, 2002). Thus, if given the opportunity and encouragement to get involved beyond the classroom walls and if there is the perception that their ideas are valued, teachers are far more likely to engage in change, to feel connected to the school community, and, in the long run, positively affect student achievement. Bogler (2002), in reviewing research

in this area, found numerous studies that indicate "teacher job satisfaction as a single, general measure that is a statistically significant predictor of effective schools" (p. 665). By taking this satisfaction one step further, when collaborative work is promoted and teachers feel their work to be of value, teachers see themselves as stakeholders in both their individual school and towards a macro vision of schools (Bottery, 2001). However, "educators make a difference only if they want to, and this will be largely determined by whether their professional culture is such to suggest that this is a change which matters" (Bottery, p. 215). What the literature on transformative leadership and organizational effectiveness suggests is that the relationship between transformational leadership behaviors and teacher job satisfaction does create a professional culture where change matters. In fact, it is when teachers feel that they are being treated unfairly or without a sense of equality that morale decreases and conflict and perceptions of alienation increase (Blase, 1995; Cheng, 1994).

This decline in morale and perception of alienation relates directly back to the moral side of leadership. When teachers or followers are valued and their voices are part of the overall structure, there is a positive affect on both themselves and the organization as a whole. Blase (1995) found that "the use of control by principals appeared to undermine overall teacher control and influence and to provoke teachers to question the 'legitimacy,' or authoritative basis, of principals' actions" (p. 42). However, the opposite is also true. When teachers are involved and inspired by the intrinsic rewards of their work, commitment and feeling of meaning increase (Cheng, 1994). The moral aspect here is summed up in the notion that in the process of change, "the effective principal's

role is described as a facilitator, freeing the staff and the school to reach its own potential" (van den Berg & Sleegers, 1996, p. 672). The engagement between leader and follower or between principal and teacher relates directly back to the vision of clear link between transformational and moral leadership that Burns (1978) espoused. The underlying moral integrity of leadership lies in "deeply human relationships, in which two or more persons *engage* with one another" (p. 11).

A principal's leadership style explains a large percentage of the variance of a teacher's overall sense of satisfaction and value. However, the percentage of variance explained by leadership style in relation to student achievement is smaller. Ogawa and Hart (1985) found that principal's influence only accounted for as much as 8% of the variance of test scores. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999a) found a similar result from which they suggest that transformational leadership characteristics do not make much of an impact on student engagement and achievement. Instead they conclude that transformational leadership explains "a large proportion of the variation in organizational conditions – school rather than classroom conditions" (p. 469). Part of the reason for this finding is that the concept of school as a complex set of intertwined variables, only one of which is student achievement. Any effects shared by these intertwined variables, "such as those resulting from school climate, are attributed to school and not to principal" variables (Ogawa & Hart, 1985, p. 65). variables. Thus, it is understandable that transformational leadership would only explain a small percentage of the variance of student achievement. However, while the level of variance is low, important implications for school leaders can be drawn from this finding. Regardless of the percentage of

variance, transformational school leaders do have a critical impact on student achievement (Ogawa & Hart, 1985).

This relationship between transformational leadership practices and student achievement ties directly back to teachers' perceptions of effective leadership. Pounder (2002) states, "communication of one's teaching philosophy falls squarely within the inspirational motivation dimension of transformational leadership and influencing students by setting a good example" (p. 10). When an environment is both created and fostered as a result of a clear vision of high expectations for student achievement and the ethical and moral behavior of all members of the school community, "the mission serves as a source of identification and motivation for members, bonding them to the organization" (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987, p. 190). Fullan (1992) talks about this building of a shared vision in terms of the principal's role moving away from the implementation of particular programs or innovations to looking at the school as a complete organization made up of different stakeholder groups that both need and desire a voice. In order for schools to move beyond changing individual classrooms, to affecting change on a larger scale, the school leader has to be collaborative and inclusive (Fullan, 1992). It is this development of productive, safe and satisfying work environments for the entire school community that foster desirable learning conditions and outcomes for children (Greenfield, 1987).

Thus far, the discussion has centered on those features of leadership that affect teacher efficacy, student achievement, and moral transformative aspects of leadership. However, there is a great deal of discussion in the literature about what qualities a leader

needs to embody to allow them to be seen as legitimate leaders. Going back to the definition of transformational characteristics, it is the inspiration and motivation to stretch towards a loftier, shared purpose of student achievement and school expectations that creates the environment for teachers to become active, thoughtful collaborators. In this environment both leader and teachers become learners and change agents. The school leader then gains influence and demonstrates leadership by entrusting some of it to others. "Being accorded leadership generates new leadership" (Barth, 1990, p. 128). Leaders are seen as effective when their actions match those of their followers (Bensimon, 1993). Transformational leaders are "heralded as the triggers for lifting workplace performance levels by organizational subordinates beyond anticipated targets" (Gronn, 1997, p. 276). In fact, the influence a leader has is based on the perceived expertise of the leader and those attributes that are seen as attractive (Yukl, 1981). Bass (1985) goes a step farther by linking not only the leader's attributes to followership, but also the personalities of the followers as well. This puts the legitimacy of leadership not solely in the control of an individual, but takes into account those attributes of followers that put them in the position of both wanting to be led and needing to be led.

In their study of impression management strategies and transformational leadership, Gardner and Cleavenger (1998) built off of Bass and Avolio's (2001) leadership factors of idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation as a basis for understanding what attributes a leader embodies and how those attributes cause others to follow. They suggest five impression management strategies used by leaders: (a) ingratiation, (b) self-promotion,

(c) exemplification, (d) intimidation, and (e) supplication. While each of these strategies was seen as either positively or negatively correlating to effective leadership, two stood out as being associated with transformational leadership.

Exemplification (the leader being seen as morally worthy) was seen as directly related to transformational leadership. This supports previous findings on the value of moral leadership and its effectiveness at creating positive, collaborative communities.

The other strategy seen as transformation was ingratiation. This strategy is defined as making one appear warm and attractive to others. While this may have a negative connotation, individuals reported that displays of warm, friendly, and approachable behavior are attractive traits for a leader to embody (Bass & Avolio, 2001).

The other three strategies were seen to negatively impact impressions of a leader's qualities and ability to lead effectively.

What these findings demonstrate is that when individuals observe behaviors that are consistent with their sense of qualifications for a leader, they classify the person as a charismatic leader and conclude that he or she is effective.

This relates back to organizational effectiveness because the perceptions those followers have of their leader is correlated back to whether or not they engage in the vision of the organization. Teachers, who feel that they are part of something larger than themselves, accord the leader with those attributes they see as effective and meaningful. When this happens, teacher morale increases, which in turn has a positive impact on student achievement and the overall functioning of the school (Bogler, 2002; Bottery, 2001; Cheng, 1994; Gardner & Cleavenger, 1998).

Organizational Effectiveness: The Role of Power

When a person is in the role of leader, they are accorded some level of power by the very nature of their position. However, this power has to be seen as effective, positive, and valued as legitimate by those to whom the power is applied (Bryman, 1992). Yukl (1981) writes that those power bases which are mainly transactional in nature are much more dissatisfying to followers than that power basis that is more transformational. While power bases such as coercion and the contingent reward model have a degree of follower dissatisfaction related to them, they do cause a certain level of compliance. Here again, the literature comes back to supporting an environment where followers, or in the case of schools, teachers, feel connected, valued, and part of something bigger than themselves, and thus they are more likely to work to their highest potential and beyond. As Yukl (1981) points out, " a leader is more likely to have loyal, devoted subordinates if he shows consideration for their needs and feelings, treats each person fairly, and defends their interests when acting as the group representative" (p. 45).

Dunlap and Goldman (1991) suggest that facilitative power is effective because it is "rooted in the kind of interaction, negotiation, and mutuality descriptive of professional organizations" (p. 13). This type of power is best typified by the idea of a leader not having power over a person, but facilitating power through people. This decentralization of power from one to the whole is crucial in fostering the collaborative environment that is the hallmark transformational leadership. One definition of power is that it is "a force that determines behavior outcomes in an intended direction in a situation involving human interaction" (Abbott & Caracheo, 1988, p. 239). Abbott and Caracheo propose

that individuals do not have power, but do have the ability to exercise power. If this statement, along with the stated definition of power, is taken as true, then a transformational leader is morally obligated to use power that is built upon sharing in problem solving and goal setting. As the previously discussed literature suggests, an organization with this type of environment has a greater potential to lead to higher satisfaction in teachers and an increase in overall student achievement and organizational effectiveness than does a transactional, top-down style of leadership.

As has been argued, transformational leadership, teachers' intrinsic satisfaction in their work, and high student achievement are linked. The basis of this linkage is that each member of the school community sees themselves as an equal part of the whole. This link is also based on the leader understanding that schools are people-centered organizations. The transformational leader sees "power – and relationships – as not things but as *relationships*" (Burns, 1978, p. 11). This builds morality into a transformative view of organizational effectiveness. While NCLB asserts that all children can learn and make progress, it would be safe to assume that all teachers can lead (Barth, 1990). "Teachers harbor extraordinary leadership capabilities, and their leadership is a major untapped resource for improving our nation's schools" (p. 124). Were this to be true, then power becomes shared and valued by all and the organization more effective due to all stakeholders being engaged and invested in the common good. It is through an understanding of this transformative view of leadership that the stakeholders within the school become empowered towards their collective responsibility of educating all children.

These four areas of literature form the foundation for my beliefs about leadership and what I hope to become as a leader. The literature on first-year principals gave me a glimpse into the complexity of the principalship. However, the advice, tips, and overall experiences of new principals, while instructive, did not prepare me for the type of leader I hope to be or for the reality of day-to-day experiences of the principalship. It was the transformational literature that formed the basis for my understanding and beliefs about leadership, and it was the moral purpose literature that provided the heart and soul of the leadership style I aspire to embody. Through both these bodies of literature, my belief in bringing all into a shared purpose of our collective moral obligation to children and their learning was formed. However, it was the moral transformative literature that helped me to see the interdependence between the vision and heart of leadership and the obligation I feel as a leader towards the continuous learning and collective responsibility of all within the school community.

While this literature formed the basis for my hopes and dreams as a novice principal, I knew that the day-to-day demands of reality and my lofty expectations would sometimes be in conflict. However, my goal was to try and be a moral transformative leader who supports, guides, and is part of the growth and learning of all in the school community, and to learn from my experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this study, I utilized a form of reflective action research that focuses explicitly on several goals set at the beginning of the year that are then tracked throughout the year and reflected upon when the year is completed. This methodological framework is a combination of Argyris and Schon's (1974) ideas about reflective practice and an action research perspective. It also reflects what Reba Page (2000) called "the turn inward" characteristic of all qualitative research.

Reflective Practice

In 1983, Donald Schon, then Ford Professor of Urban Studies and Education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, published an important contribution to the literature of planning theory and practice. He argued that the best professionals, in any field, know more than they can put into words about professional knowledge. He argued that they built new knowledge for themselves through both *reflection-in-action*, based on their prior experiences, and through *reflection-on-action*, after the event itself was over. He argued that this was how professionals moved from simpler technical proficiency to complex professional practices. To meet the ever-changing challenges of their work, they come to rely on improvisation learned through practice and reflection where prior knowledge is not sufficient to guide them through the new experience. In some ways like

a gifted musician, the professional incorporates everything that she or he knows about the work or the problem, into thinking about the best solution to this problem at this time, and has the capacity to create a unique mastery solution in the moment. In other words, practical wisdom is the difference between reading music and making music.

Drawing on his earlier work on theory in professional practice with Chris Argyris (1971), Shon (1983) proposed that through teaching methods of reflection-in-action and reflection-on action, professionals in any field can be taught how to monitor and change their own practices. This theory of action developed by Argyris and Schon provides a conceptual foundation for the type of reflective action research this study used as a framework (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

By distinguishing between reflection-in-action as a way of thinking about a situation while engaged in it, and reflection-on-action as a second stage of additional mindful practice, Schon translated Heidegger's (1962) philosophical notions of "breakdown" into activities that can be practiced without supervision and that can be taught to new practitioners to strengthen their future practices. Schon's subsequent publications in 1987 and 1991 laid out patterns for doing and teaching reflective practice for professionals. In framing the process of reflection-in-action, Schon (1983) suggests several questions that practitioners should ask when reflecting on their work. The two questions that best illustrate his point are: "When a practitioner takes seriously the uniqueness of the present situation, how does he make use of the experience he has accumulated in his earlier practice?" and "In what sense, if any, is there rigor in on-the-

spot experiment?" (p. 132-133). The answers to these questions are at the heart of one's learned ability to elaborate and reflect on one's action.

Johns (2004) and others have subsequently summarized the research in many fields where people have worked with these ideas in their professional practice, or have studied other professionals at work. Definitions of reflection have come to be characterized as learning through experience toward gaining new insights and changed perceptions of self and practice (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Mezirow, 1981). Johns summarizes reflective practice as having these elements: practical wisdom, reflexivity, becoming mindful, commitment, contradiction, understanding, and empowerment. He identifies writing in a structured fashion as the primary agentic action to accomplish these elements as practice evolves. He argues that it is possible to construct a reflective framework for clinical practice in order to track how the professional moves from vision and plan, through reality, and on to reflection where cultural and personal accommodations have occurred. Johns further argues that this form of evolving practice is a necessary match to the desire to build transformative leadership in a learning organization.

The steps outlined by Johns in building a reflective process include having a vision for practice that is constructed around a valid philosophy. In this study, that would mean a vision for the school year and for my actions as leader. Then, keeping detailed documentation of how the vision becomes, or does not become, reality. Johns argues for particularly noting accommodations that must be made as the event progresses.

Action Research

The reflective processes outlined above can also be used in action research designs. Action research has been defined as research *in* action, rather than research *about* action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Many of the origins and roots of action research can be found in the early work of social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946, 1948) who was led by both theory and data in developing new research findings. Argyris (1993) outlined four core themes of Lewin's ideas about research in and on action. First, he believed in grounding any theory in the examination of practice. Secondly, he designed research by examining a whole setting, and not by trying to eliminate the peculiar characteristics of a setting. Instead of thinking of peculiarities, like race or gender or elementary school as possible "intervening variables," Lewin described them as part and whole of any embedded social interaction set. Thirdly, Lewin built general constructs from individual cases. Thus, the individual case, with all of its unique peculiarities, was at the basis of any generalization to any larger set. Lastly, he was concerned about science serving the needs of real individuals. All four of these themes are essential to the study of a particular leader in a particular school.

Action research is done in "real time" where it is concurrent with emerging events and where a sequence of events and an approach to problem-solving are set in advance, and documented as reality emerges. Action research requires a pre-step of setting the context and purpose of the research, setting a process in place for regular documentation and "meta-learning" and then reflecting upon what happens in a regularized and documented fashion. It comprises "iterative cycles of gathering data, feeding it back to

those concerned, analyzing the data, planning action, taking action and evaluating" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 4).

The purpose of action research is often to work toward a democratic group process, but action research techniques have been specifically adapted to conduct a reflective practice research process. Alverson and Skoldberg (in Coghlan & Brannick, 2005) argue that reflective practice is based on a foundation of thinking about the conditions for one's own actions and then investigating how those actions actually played out in the work setting.

Instead of a form of ethnography, Coghlan & Brannick (p. 52) define "quadrant 3" of their action research typology as the form of action research where the individual practitioner is engaged in an intended self-study of himself-in-action, but the system itself is not the focus of the study (the other 3 quadrants are sorted by group endeavors and other forms of organizational change research). They specifically refer to this form of action research as "the researcher engaging in a study to improve professional practice" (p. 52) where the researcher is acting as a "reflective practitioner." Inquiry into personal assumptions and ways of thinking and acting are critical to the research process, as is the focus on the researcher's job or role within the organization (see also Gall et al., 2003, p. 579-594). It is through engaging in "meta learning" that the practitioner engages in a cycle of inquiry that allows challenge of assumptions, diagnosis of issues, plans of action, taking action, and then evaluating those actions in light of learning.

This cycle of inquiry can be particularly beneficial to a practitioner. Reflection is critical in order to fully understand one's learning and to be able to understand the issues

the practitioner faces in growing as both a learner and as a professional. Mezirow (1991, in Coghlan & Brannick, 2005) has identified three forms of reflection that form the underpinnings of being able to both interpret and understand one's experiences: (a) content, (b) process, and (c) premise. Content reflection focuses on how one thinks about the issues being faced. Process reflection focuses on the strategies and procedures for how work is being done. Premise reflection is the critique of the perspectives and assumptions that both guide the work and affect the work (p. 25). Each of these types of reflection is important, but it is by engaging in all three types of reflection that "meta-learning" is able to happen. This process is described as critical to gaining improved capacity for accurate judgment and for building flexible mental processes for creativity (Goldberg, 2001; Sawyer et al., 2003).

Gall et al. (2003) state that one of the purposes of action research is "to produce heightened self awareness in practitioners, including clarification of their assumptions about education and recognition of contradictions between their espoused ideas and actual classroom (leadership) practice" (p. 580). This type of reflection was an integral aspect of this action research project. It is the reflective action research aspect of this study that sets this type of research apart from other research methodologies. Whereas most traditional methodologies attempt to reach "objectivity" about "truth" by removing the researcher as much as possible from the data being collected, in this case, the data being collected is about the researcher/practitioner. To attempt to remove myself from the "data" collection would negate the purpose of the study. Instead, Mertler (2006) and others argue that action research is possible by developing an action plan, documenting

events and reactions to events, and then reflecting back on the events. In action research, the researcher is taking action in real time. By combining action research principles with reflective practice principals, both reflection-in-action and later reflection-on-action can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the events themselves and also may contribute to a greater understanding of similar events. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) argue that the "desired outcomes of the action research approach are not just solutions to immediate problems but are important learning from outcomes both intended and unintended, and a contribution to scientific knowledge and theory" (p. 4).

Focusing the Study

In order to simplify my study over the course of 2 years, and avoid being deluged with data, I deliberately chose three particular strands to track in my journals and other data collection. Two of these strands are reflected in Chapter II: the novice principalship of an elementary school, and high performing schools. The third strand was related to a particular goal for the year: creating a professional learning community in the school. I defined a professional learning community as a group of people who are committed towards learning from each other, to sharing their craft knowledge, and to understanding and implementing best practices across the curriculum. I address the notion of a professional learning community at the beginning of Chapter IV, as part of my data reporting on the year. I developed the following "research questions" related to this goal:

- What has worked well for children and their learning this year in each room?
- What are our celebrations from the year in terms of our work together?

- What have been our challenges as a learning community?
- How should we address our challenges and celebrate our successes?
- What are our next steps as a learning community?

Data Sources

I looked closely at the design of Quong's 2006 autobiographical study, Burchfield's 1997 self-reported experience of succession and socialization as a first-year principal, and Patten's 2004 autoethnography of a first-year elementary school principalship. These three dissertations, completed in Australia, the University of Virginia, and the University of Utah, respectively, gave me a detailed model of how to document the year through personal journals, district calendars, memos, etc., and then to reflect back on my experiences on the principalship to construct my final product of a personal reflective narrative. It is through a record of one's thoughts, actions and engagement with others that a professional is able to fully reflect on his or her actions. To do this well, there needs to be a variety of data sources that create a clear picture of growth, progress and reasoning behind the actions, decisions, and relationships developed during the time when data is gathered. For my own reflective research, the data sources I was able to draw from were varied and allowed me the ability to reflect upon my own "real time" thinking.

The data sources I used to document my journey as a novice principal were:

- A reflective journal – This journal was based on my thoughts, reactions, and feelings about events, interactions and ideas that happened over the course of the year. This was a place where I addressed my thoughts and set directions for my

overarching themes of creating a professional learning community and writing. Entries were made, at minimum, on a weekly basis.

- A daily log – This log documented what occurred on a daily basis. This represents a historical record of daily meetings, phone calls, agenda planning, meeting notes, questions, etc. Entries into this log were ongoing throughout each and every day.

- My daily calendar – This calendar was a companion to the daily log. It was a source for dates of meetings, conversations, etc., that are represented in the daily log.

- Archival records – The archival records are those documents that were either created for meetings or were records of meetings that occurred over the course of the data collection. Examples include PTSA agendas and minutes, Site Council agendas and minutes, the school-based Planning Committee agendas and minutes, and other district-level meeting notes. Also included are my weekly written updates to the staff, bimonthly newsletters to the community, and general results of an end-of-year survey of progress. These documents represent an aspect of communication to both the staff and the community around my specific themes, my thinking over the course of the year and evolving direction of the school.

The above-mentioned data sources helped me to triangulate my data. There is an inherent challenge in reflective practice in that the researcher is also the subject. However, this threat to validity was lessened by careful documentation in several different ways, and feedback coming from a variety of sources.

Limitations of the Design

There are issues and challenges to conducting research on oneself and on one's own organization. First, it is fundamentally opportunistic research that is site and person specific and, therefore, cannot be easily generalized to other settings or other practitioners. However, to balance that loss of "objectivity," reflection-on-action research can be effective intentional self-study that can yield a profound understanding of one's

own personal leadership epistemology, of one's school culture, and of how the two interact.

Anderson and Herr (1999, in Gall et al., 2005, p. 591-594) have identified five validity criteria to evaluate action research studies: (a) outcome validity, (b) process validity, (c) democratic validity, (d) catalytic validity, and (e) dialogic validity. Each of these validity criteria relies on credibility and trustworthiness of the data, and the findings and conclusions drawn from the data. Data collection is a critically important aspect of this process. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) state that, "when you conduct action research, you must think about the process as research and you must call the evidence you collect "data." If you approach the task as a researcher and ask "research questions," you force yourself into a reflective frame of mind where you undertake your work more systematically (p. 227). It is the systemic nature of this type of research and the reflection of research in action that underlies the validity of the findings and conclusions.

New knowledge is generated in this dissertation research project, but it is necessarily new knowledge that is based solely in my perceptions. I attempt throughout the dissertation to document plans and events in sufficient detail so that the reader can come to his or her own conclusions about meaning of events. While I was tracking particular goals and outcomes throughout the study, my goal in this research project was not to achieve the desired outcomes but to track and then analyze the processes that I used to attempt to achieve the desired outcomes. Thus, it may be difficult to generalize from my process in this particular event in this particular year to another person's professional practice. My hope is that other novice principals, and other researchers who

study novice principals might, however, learn more about the principalship from my journey.

The results of this study are necessarily at a local setting, for one person, at one point in time. A different result might have been achieved if a different set of people interacted around a similar topic at a different time. A different result might have been achieved with the same set of people but at a different point in time. Other people involved in the same process might have seen it in a different way than I saw it. All of these aspects may introduce bias into the findings. My goal was to reduce bias wherever possible but, more importantly, to write this study in sufficient detail as to establish credibility for my findings.

CHAPTER IV

TWO YEARS AS A NEW PRINCIPAL

Before the First Year Started

I had looked around at the principals I had worked with and decided that I first needed to become a student of leadership if I wanted to become a good principal. A principal I met described his job as being "the keeper of the works." He described being the keeper of the works as the person who is called upon to plan and implement targeted staff development, evaluate all staff from teachers to custodians from a place of knowledge, and to have a working knowledge of systems in the building from the boiler to the septic system. However, Southworth (1990) in his study of leadership and effective primary schools, had found that "time spent of blocked drains, lost coats, leaking roofs and missing dinner money is sometimes injurious to curriculum, staff and school development activities" (p. 11).

When I took on the role of principal, I was aware of the responsibility that was being placed on my shoulders. However, it was my vision of the collaboration of the community in our collective work that helped me to accept this responsibility willingly. I believed that my own values and beliefs would be recognized and form a foundation for relationships and "forward motion," while I simultaneously learned how to be keeper of the works.

This led me to the inevitable questions: What kind of leader could I be? How could I become the kind of principal that I wanted to be? What kind of principal would I become?

The school that I was offered had over 95% of students meet or exceed state benchmarks in math or science for at least 10 years running and parent involvement was very high. This was unusual for any school, and was not the type of school where I had imagined beginning my principal career! Thinking about being principal of such a school caused me to think deeply about how to approach the role. How would this special school be similar to or different from other schools? The preparation that I did for the principal interview process became one foundation for my work during the first two years. I had read past school development plans, PTA and site council minutes, and had conversations with district level administrators about the school before the interview process. I came up with a series of questions that I asked during the interview process. These questions had two purposes. One was to gage the connection between my beliefs and the school culture. Secondly, it was my intention to signal what was important to me and begin to lay out a vision I had for the school community. The questions I asked were:

- Two themes emerged from reading a wide range of school documents: continuing to build and grow a culture of excellence, and finding ways to deepen student understanding. As a community, what progress has there been with these themes? What is the school's growth edge?

- I really like the belief statements about educating each student in the school development plan. They speak to a respect for all members of the school community and what they bring to the school. Did students have a voice in this? More broadly, how is student voice heard in the school?

- What do you all see as the school's next challenges?

- How do teams at each grade level work? Process for teaming? Content of team meetings? Is there a sharing out with the staff as a whole?
- What is the vision of what fifth graders will walk out of the school with?
- The school's motto is "Cultivating minds and hearts." How does the community interact with this motto? What does this look like on a daily basis?

The interview process was positive and I felt like the school, community and I were a match. This was an excellent school, from all appearances, and I was honored to become part of the community. Sergiovanni (1984) summed up excellent schools nicely.

> We know excellent schools when we experience them, despite difficulties in definition. In excellent schools things "hang together", a sense of purpose rallies people to a common cause, work has meaning and like is significant, teachers and students work together and with spirit, and accomplishments are readily recognized. To say excellent schools have high morale or have students who achieve high test scores or are schools that send more students to college misses the point. Excellence is all of these and more (p. 4).

Thinking about change in such an environment can be difficult. All the measures that rank and order schools in my current environment highlight the school as exceptional due to test scores, attendance, and student behavior. However, it was my belief that by resting on our laurels and feeling as if we have no "growth edges," the school would not stay exceptional for long. This lead me to think about what our next tasks could be and how to achieve our next best level in terms of student learning, instruction, and curriculum development; i.e., "the space between" where we are now and where we could be through the mutual examination of our practices.

Discovering those compelling reasons for looking carefully at our individual and collective practices would be both an art and a challenge. The art would come in having

conversations about change from a basis of trust and mutual commitment to excellence and not have the conversations become value laden or judgment based.

The historical foundation of the school was a community that believes deeply in the school and its achievements. These achievements are found in test scores, community relationships, and longevity of the teaching staff. I believed that leadership was found in finding reward in the work that gets done and not solely in that which gets rewarded (Sergiovanni, 1992). However, the challenge that came with high performance for me and the school was the fear of losing "exceptional" status. The question of "what happens if the scores go down?" was real to me before I began and I expected it to be a real concern as I began my work with teachers and parents. However, I expected our collective learning to be fostered not through coercion or contingent rewards, but through embracing a higher set of values than test scores, for example, and basing this shared purpose on the principles of justice, equality, dignity, integrity, freedom, and the strength of our relationships (Bass, 1985; Bensimon, 1993; Pounder, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1998).

I saw my challenge as how to create an environment where all voices of the community were heard equally. Lincoln (1989) affirmed that the role of a leader is to "recognize the invisible and the voiceless, and to grant them the space to speak and the discovery of their own means to snare and share power" (p. 177). For me, it was about how to share power within the school. Through a collaboration of shared decision-making, the whole would be stronger. The goal of this collaboration would be to foster a set of shared values and actions in such a way that the result would be that teachers and

the community as a whole became leaders in their own right (Burns, 1978). For me, it was about the management of change rather than the maintenance of the "status quo."

I decided that my major goals as a new principal should be centered on (a) building a professional learning community, (b) creating dialog around teaching and learning, and (c) attempting to better understand what it means to be a principal. These were the subjects that I focused on in my data collection and that formed the framework for my reflections.

The First Year Begins

As I write this narrative from the perspective of my third year as principal, the sense of excitement and nervousness I felt during my first year comes flooding back. That first summer, the sense of not knowing what to expect and the anticipation about what might be around each corner was thrilling to me. I was excited to go to that beautiful school in a beautiful setting, and claim that "chair that fit" as my own. That summer I was looking forward to being the principal I wanted to be for teachers, which continues to be an aspiration.

At my first administrative retreat as a principal, I was introduced to the concept of the space between. This came from a picture of a young girl in a tutu staring into a mirror and seeing herself as a professional ballerina bowing in the stage lights. I realized that it is in the space between where the work of schools, principals, teachers, and parents takes place on behalf of children and their dreams. This concept became a touchstone of my work at the school. The space between gave room for me to pose such questions as: How

do we help children achieve their greatest potential? How do we help children to dream, explore, ask thoughtful questions, and apply their learning to their lives each and everyday? The work of the school could be found in the distance we want children to travel between where they are now and their highest potential. In some ways, the space between was also the distance I wanted the school and me to travel from where we were at the start of my first year with the school and where we could be through collaborative learning together with each other.

The notion of the space between and the notes from my interview questions and answers were the foundation from which I developed my initial goals for the school going into my first year. The goals I wrote were:

- *To help the school community in articulating its vision, both in continuing to grow its strong culture of excellence and in strengthening the culture of care.*
- *To take student learning deeper – beyond the surface.*
- *To keep literacy at the core.*
- *To examine what it is that every student should walk out of fifth grade knowing and understanding about themselves as learners and people – then work backwards to look at our practice to clarify curriculum and instruction.*
- *To foster a community of learners through collective learning, feedback, reflection, and dialogue about our work.*
- *Take teacher and community learning deeper.*
- *Model expectations for student learning.*

I had taken the path towards becoming a principal because I wanted to be a part of the larger questions about schools. I wanted to be part of the transformation of schools to places that helped and encouraged and cheered on the space between for every child. I

wanted to help teachers, like myself, understand how I could help every child and not lose their joy in teaching because of seemingly insurmountable barriers presented to that lofty goal.

My new principalship had some unique characteristics. Becoming the principal of a high performing school where there was focused pressure on maintaining high test scores gave me the opportunity to think about leadership in a new way. My position was not about raising test scores, as might be true for most principalships around the country, but was more about focusing on student understanding and about deepening student thinking, curiosity, and excitement for learning. I saw this as not just part of the job I had been hired for, but in Sergiovanni's (1994) words, a moral imperative for me as a leader. The space between and all that should be possible for every teacher and every child became the moral imperative of school development and my day-to-day work with teachers and staff. Did I set my standards high as I started this journey? Yes, I did.

At a teacher meeting in November 2006, I was asked, "What happens if the scores go down?" as faculty and I were discussing our school development plan. My response was that very little would happen to teachers, but were scores to continue to go down, serious questions would be asked of the principal. I willingly took on this burden because I firmly believed that, with solid instruction and thoughtful caring relationships between teachers and students, the test scores would remain high. My notion was still that if we were to solely rely on keeping the test scores high, the potential of transformative learning from kindergarten through fifth grade might be unrealized. It was my own belief that inspiration to examine our practices closely could come through the mutual

engagement in the work, and in the thinking and the possibilities that are inherent in growth and change.

However, there was clearly a tension among the staff in trying anything new when "what we are doing is working very well." The leadership question that I was continually confronted with, from the first day, was how to take care of the needs of those who were drawn towards the necessity of "nuts and bolts" and those who were more eager to closely examine their teaching practices. Early on, I began to ask myself if transformational thinking was possible on a school-wide basis when transactional thinking towards maintaining a status quo was the apparent norm.

One of the first things I did as a new principal was to try to make contact with each staff member. I invited them to a private conversation with me, whether on the phone or in person, in order for them to get to know me and begin to understand my core beliefs as a principal. In order to develop trust, a principal must spend time building relationships and I thought that this was a good way to begin. I was excited about meeting each person individually but very few people took me up on the invitation to come into school to talk.

Teaching is a complex task and it takes a lot of time and energy to plan instruction and to give quality feedback. My intention in sponsoring a more structured vision of teaming was an attempt to decrease the amount of individual time each teacher spent on their own work. This is what I had found to be a critical aspect of my life as a teacher when I was fortunate enough to be a part of creative, thoughtful team, and thus had hopes to bring this to my new school. I was trying to create a space between for us. The notion

behind the space between was meant to not put value or judgment on what had come before or what was to come, but to create space to look collectively at our work and student engagement and to explore ways to grow and deepen our understanding of best practices.

I asked teachers to meet as teams each week. There was resistance to my request, based on issues of time and perceived value. I asked to extend the length of existing teacher meetings, so we could discuss curricula and teaching together, and there was a union stance evoked about time limitations. Apparently, my efforts to open more discussion of teaching and learning was seen as attempting to get more work out of teachers than allowed by the union contract. I was confused by the response.

At that meeting about the school development plan, it was also requested from the district office that plans include the statement, "All students will achieve at 90% or higher on math and reading testing for the 07-08 school year." When I presented this, teachers became upset. They were concerned about what would happen if the scores did not either reach this target number or fell below the target. They were also concerned that by putting a percentage target down that they would be held to this standard in some sort of negative way were it not achieved. This statement of a percentage was seen as pressure being put on in a very top down fashion, even though students at the school had historically always scored well above 90%.

In the fall of year one, I also decided that if the site council was going to be a place where teaching and learning was discussed, the members should do the same reading as the staff. I gave each member a copy of Ron Berger's (2003) *An Ethic of*

Excellence. This is a book that all new hires are given as a way to introduce them to the overall aspirations of the district. Throughout our subsequent conversations, it became clear to me that these parents were willing to go with a school in just about any direction as long as the school defined the "what and whys" of their thinking. One parent on the council asked an intriguing question. He asked: "What are the barriers to this kind of teaching and learning here at school?" This was such a great question! It was the question I wanted to focus upon with the teaching staff. It spurred on work in the Site Council around developing a writing pamphlet for parents, yet I was still having trouble getting teachers to ask the same question.

In fact, the parent's question about barriers caused concern from some teachers who wondered why the site council would be reading the Berger book at all. They said they were worried that the question devalued their efforts in the classroom. I thought that the parent was simply excited by the thoughts presented in the book and was wondering how the council could support teachers in this type of work. The reaction of some of the teachers helped me to better understand the underlying pressures that some of the teachers were feeling. At the time this all happened, I was so energized by the question that I missed the broader implications of the teacher reactions. I'll come back to this point as I summarize the year's events later in this chapter.

Some of my first steps as a principal didn't seem to be heading in the direction I had been planning for and expecting! The year continued that way for me, filled with surprises, most of which were not pleasant. Four stories stand out for me from the first year. Each of them points to a different part of my learning about being a new principal.

Story #1: A Teacher Leaves Early in the Year

The first experience involved a teacher going out on maternity leave for the remainder of the year after the first 2 weeks of the school year. A replacement had been hired before my arrival. I knew that parents would be concerned about their child's teacher only being there for 2 weeks, and that whoever took over the position would need to inspire confidence in parents that their children would have a productive year. After spending time with her, it was clear that she was not the right person for the position. I also knew that I needed to find a teacher who could handle the pressure of the situation. There were obvious questions and concerns from parents, but I knew that I had to protect the dignity and integrity of all parties involved.

As the situation developed, parents were understandably angry that their child's teacher would only be at the school for 2 weeks. They were frustrated and concerned that a replacement had not been determined, and they were fearful about the year their child would have. One parent came into my office and vented all her worries, frustrations and anger at me. As I sat there, taking the heat, I sympathized with her and I understood that she only wanted the best for her child. It was in that moment that I realized how involved parents were in the school and how engaged they were with their child's educational experience. I knew that I needed to listen well and, even though I had just met this parent, I needed to ask for her trust that I would do the right thing by her child and others in the class. However, I also knew that I needed to deliver or that the thin veneer of trust that was between us would be lost.

I hired a good replacement, and things settled down. But, it was clear to me that the early departure of the teacher happened on "my watch" and was seen as my failure. The fact that I tried to watch out for instructional values and bring in a teacher better suited to this classroom did not change the fact that unrest occurred for parents early in my first year. So, one of the first things I learned was that I was responsible, even for things that had come before me.

Story #2: Lunches

Another example of an unforeseen event that shaped my thinking occurred also early in my first year. This experience was centered on the issue of lunches in the cafeteria. There had been a lot of discussion about lunches prior to my time at the school. The purpose of the discussion was to explore how to make the lunches both more nutritious and easier to recycle. The initial thinking about the plan was to get rid of hot lunches and have all the lunches in paper sacks. There had been a lot of work and thinking done with a wellness committee, which was connected to the site council, and the district had been in on some of this work. As the planning had developed, the timeline was to begin this new model during the fall of my first year.

Not knowing much of the history, I wondered how much information the entire community had about this topic. It was surprising to me that there seemed to have been very little information shared with the broader community, which was evident when the committee finally sent out a letter outlining the proposal. The backlash from the community was staggering. However, it also allowed us to slow down and explore more in depth the thinking and the purpose of the proposal. After a variety of meetings where

upset parents came to share their thinking, after many phone calls and emails to me from parents, and after more involvement with the district, it was decided that the proposal would go away and that food service would work to change menus and enhance the nutritional value of the food being served.

Not only was this an example of the power within a school community to affect change, it was an example of communication processes and the willingness of the whole school staff to listen well to all parties. From the time of the announcement of the plan, the process moved forward in a mutually pleasing way, even though the original plan was under contentious discussion. This experience gave me a window into the community and into the staff of the school. It showed me that the community needed and expected clear communication up front on changes and plans. They wanted details spelled out and they needed to feel included in conversations and decisions. The members of the school staff and the district staff quickly recognized that more discussion was needed, and did not hold unnecessarily tight to their long-discussed plans. They were open to community input.

This experience taught me about the community, but it also taught the community about me. I never got ruffled or defensive in the face of frustration, I worked to communicate proceedings and the thinking of the group as much as possible, and when there were missteps I took responsibility for them. So, the second thing I learned was that, even if I was held responsible for things I had not done myself, I could use good communication processes and rely on a good staff and district support to sort out what was best for everyone. I wasn't alone in this process, even when it sometimes felt like it!

Story #3: Mold in the Classroom

This experience gave me insight into the culture of the school and how many events in a school can have little to do directly with teaching and learning, but still be related to how a leader is perceived. In November, I got a note that read:

> *I am very sad to tell you that there is a distinct smell of mold or mildew in my classroom. I have had quite a few kids with chronic "colds." I am very allergic to "m and m" myself. Help!*

This note came from a teacher whose classroom had had ongoing issues with mold. In consultation with the district, I made the decision to move the classroom. There was a great deal of understandable frustration on the part of staff as they felt the issue had not had been properly attended to the previous year. I heard comments such as: "Here they go again, the district sticking it to us," "I fear the district will not take is it as seriously as they need to at this point," and "The concerns about the mold are nagging us because of the way it was played by the district last year." While concerns were being expressed mainly towards the district, my own actions were also being scrutinized as the principal. My reactions to the situation were watched carefully as many teachers seemed to think that my behavior in this situation gave an indication as to what type of principal I would be in the face of future difficult situations. It did not matter that I had never dealt with anything closely related to this experience. I was the principal and thus I needed to handle it well. I communicated often with the district about the status of the room and then communicated all information to teachers and parents. I also voiced concerns expressed by teachers about air quality within the building to the district as well. As much as I was able, I made my communications and actions transparent. What I learned from this

incident immediately was that communication is critical and that the more information people have, the better they feel about a decision being made. So, the third thing that I learned was that even when actions aren't agreed to by everyone, it is good to talk about why they are taken and what the consequences might be. If problems reappear, it was good for me to look for multiple roots to causes.

Story #4: Finding Time to Talk Instruction

As the year progressed and the teacher meetings stayed the same length, the instructional coordinator and I were frustrated that teacher meetings were not becoming places of learning. The challenge was that the teacher meetings could only last 45 minutes, which is just not long enough to go in-depth into a topic. Thus, we proposed a plan where we would meet for 1 hour and 15 minutes once a month in exchange for a 15-minute meeting to do just nuts and bolts. This idea was rejected on the basis of some teachers not feeling that they could give up the time. What this said to me was that time was being used as a screen for lack of interest or desire to collectively examine our work together. What it also said to me was that I had not done a good enough job of demonstrating the value that a longer time together could bring.

Looking Back, Recalibrating, and Trying Again

Each of these experiences helped to define my leadership voice and give me new insight to my leadership style. However, incidents such as lunches and mold felt to me like they took me away from the work of fostering a learning community. So much time was spent on dealing with issues that had little to do with teaching and learning that it is

not surprising that there was a lack of value placed on our collective learning. My energies were spent on the transaction keeper of the works aspects of the job rather than on collective learning of the whole. As mold and lunches became the conversation, the dialog about teaching and learning further diminished as I was not able to keep my focus on the vision. Thus, as I looked forward, I knew I needed to step back from the maintenance aspects of the work and recalibrate my focus and attention.

I knew that I needed to learn about the nuts and bolts of maintaining a safe and supportive learning environment but I struggled every time a maintenance task took the place of a conversation or demonstration about teaching or learning. I also noticed that most people seemed to feel on safer ground with me if the discussion was something relatively concrete, like a schedule or an event. I knew that it would take time to build norms of trust and openness but I found myself chafing to move ahead at a faster speed!

Leithwood and Jantzi (1999b) looked at the conditions through which leadership may have an effect on schools and student achievement. One condition they looked at was how clearly defined the "purposes and goals" (p. 115) of the school are, and whether they are understood by teachers and the community. They found that stakeholders are more apt to find the goals and visions of the school meaningful and of value when these goals are "believed to be a compelling and challenging target for one's personal practices as well as the collective school improvement efforts of staff" (p. 115). I had understood going into the work of the first-year principal that I needed to value the work of those who had come before me. I had expressed this notion clearly during the interview process.

However, what I came to see that I had underestimated was how conversations about growth and a focus on deepening instructional practices could be seen, and were seen by some, as devaluing the work that teachers had been doing in the years before I came to the school. While I felt that my words and actions were centered on appreciating teachers and their work, the feedback I was starting to get was that my underlying message was negatively charged. If I wanted change, it must be because something was wrong with them. And, since test scores showed that the teaching staff was obviously doing very well, and that students were learning, then it must be me that had questionable goals or values.

My increased focus on instructional practices was a pattern of successful behaviors that has been attributed to principals in high performing schools, but my new staff did not know that (Gaziel, 1995). My focus tended to be more on instruction and continuous growth as an obligation to ourselves and to students because there was not the need to focus on raising test scores. High performance can, if allowed to do so, create freedoms that other schools do not have. Scores are where parents and the community want them to be, so the focus can be on improving teaching even more. However, the other side of this goal is that there can be a strong resistance to changing anything when everything is going well. If it is not broke, why fix it?

When conversations or meetings were directed by me towards instruction, there were those in the organization who took offense because the perception was that the new principal thought that their work was some how deficient. I began to see this pattern. No matter how noble my goals were, I was not communicating well with my teaching staff.

I began to understand that the excuse of "lack of time" was often used to stop a change from happening. Maybe this response wasn't always really about time. Maybe sometimes it was because of mistrust of my motives, combined with concerns about changing anything they were doing, since the results were so good right now. In the moment, it was hard to understand this stance. I didn't understand what looked like willingness to create conflict around the concept of time. How could anyone see me as not valuing their work and thus passing negative judgment on all that had come before? Upon reflection, I came to believe that this perception more had to do with trust in me than in anything else. What I came to understand was that the issue of time was not just about time, but was more about trust in my values and a lack of understanding about my intentions. I had believed that by creating a picture of the possibilities around our collective work that teaming would naturally come. However, I underestimated the pressures that come with a new, untested principal, new ideas not expressed completely, and a history of high achievement that probably led many to question any need to change anything.

Finally, a Success Story

At one teacher meeting, teachers had gathered to discuss the school development plan. I was struggling with ways to effectively connect the school development plan (SDP) to the daily work of the school. The SDP was filled with thoughtful goals and created a structure for our work; however, while it looked good on paper, how to make it a living, fluid document remained a question. Each year, the superintendent, the two

assistant superintendents, and the director of special education come to each school to talk over the SDP and generally lend support to the work of the school. I used the opportunity to ask about the connection between the SDP and the daily work of teachers. We had a great conversation and the thoughts of the teachers helped me to think about how to use every available opportunity and discussion to thread in the key goals and concepts of the vision of the school.

This caused me to look carefully at the meeting structures of the school. That week in my weekly update I wrote:

> *This fall we have been trying a variety ways to do this, some maybe more successful than others. The teacher meeting times are so short that it is hard to really get our thoughts around something before it is time to go. So, I am wondering how to structure these times to make them more valuable. While grade level meetings have had both informative and thoughtful conversations, I am also wondering if there are any changes that need to be done so that these times become an even more valuable learning times. As I look toward the rest of school year, I have been thinking about how continue to foster our collective learning community. Related to this is the very real need to talk about issues in and around the school, such as room 22, etc. Thus, I am wondering if we need to start-up the planning committee. As I think through all of these things, I want to get your input and thoughts. I do not want to have meetings simply to have them. Your time is valuable and I want to find ways to support your important work. Thus, I have some questions and or suggestions:*
>
> - *Do we need to have a planning committee? If so, how often should it meet? What should its charge be?*
>
> - *I am thinking of having teacher meetings only twice a month. On the other weeks there would be an optional conversation time to talk about curriculum and instruction questions, ideas, concerns, etc. These times might also be a way to do a book study for those who are interested. My only concern with this is that I do not want us to become too disconnected from each other.*
>
> - *Do teams want to take on more ownership over agendas for grade level meetings with us? We may bring topics of questions at times, but the agendas could come more directly from a grade level's work and questions.*

We did form a planning committee in January of my first year. There was a general consensus that this type of structure would suit the need to tackle the nuts and bolts issues that are a part of school life. Day et al. (2001) point out that this style of leadership functions at a deeper level because is does not start "from a basis of power and control but from the ability to act with others and to enable others to act" (p. 27). This was my attempt to address the concerns over the need to have transactional types of discussions, but was also my way to not give any more value to the nuts and bolts than they needed, and to save some of the teacher meeting times for our collective learning. It was also my way to try and help all stakeholders to feel invested and part of our shared purpose across the school. Here is how the role of the planning group was defined at the January 3rd meeting:

- The committee will meet on the first Tuesday of each month.
- Agendas will be compiled by a designated teacher – topics will come from teams.
- The committee is a place to share concerns, get feedback on topics and to share information with teams.
- The goal is to have this be a place where nuts and bolts are discussed rather than at teacher meetings.

In order to be sure to not let the transactional items take over, it was important that agenda items for planning committee meetings were guided in such away as to range from disseminating information about upcoming events, such as an assembly, to hashing out agreements about hallway behavior, to more transformational topics, such as planning out a day of staff development. The planning committee became a great avenue for members of each team to come and share thoughts, concerns and questions. It served the

purpose of giving greater voice to all, when there was the perception by some that we did not have a forum for sharing and discussing the matters of the school. My motivation was to elevate the conversation of the entire community to a place of our mutual learning, but the impetus to remain on the transactional was still strong among the school staff.

The First Year Concludes

I didn't fully understand at the start of my first year as a principal that the concept of the space between would apply to my learning as well as to that of teachers, students, and parents. My experiences as a new principal were not that different from those expressed in the non-research based literature. A majority of those articles I had read focused on survival and simply getting through the first year. These were feelings that I had and I finished my first year definitely feeling like I had overcome a tremendous challenge. I came into the first year with high ideals and a goal of what I wanted to happen. I guess I thought because my motives were clear and good, that things would just work out. What I quickly came to understand is that transformation can only happen when everyone is engaged. It didn't matter how idealistic my goals were; nothing was going to happen until everyone was ready to move! One example that stands out for me as representative of this learning process was in the frustration with getting even the smallest change in our schedule so that we could begin, as a staff that cares about teaching and learning, to focus on teaching and learning together.

When I shared my frustrations with the time issue continually being raised by some teachers with my supervisors, their response was that the focus on the past masked

an unwillingness to change. I thought about that a good deal. Of course it did! They had been successful for a long time without me! There had been a great deal of hard work, deep thinking and care that built the reputation of the school I had been selected to lead. I had always tried to respect the history of the school, while at the same time thinking about where our growth edges could be as a community.

I started my first year setting out an expectation for teaming around issues of teaching and learning. I believed then, and continue to do so, that collective learning is the key to the school's next advancements in teaching and learning. However, I now realized that I had not sufficiently outlined neither the value of consistent teaming opportunities nor my own core values and beliefs about the power of collective learning. There were many who saw my talking about teaming as an imposition on their time, or that the new principal was checking on them and was worried about their work. Thus, when I attempted different practices, such as asking teams to meet each week, or extending the time of teacher meetings, there was resistance. The resistance tended to rear its head through invoking a strict union stance and bringing out a variety of strict contract language. I needed to find ways to build my case for collaboration.

My perception was that there were those within the staff who felt like I had not always come across as respecting the past enough. This might be particularly troublesome to some because they had done so well in the past as measured by test scores. In this era of No Child Left Behind, schools that are not performing are forced to talk about change and about practices that can raise student achievement. However, when the students score between the 95^{th} and 100^{th} percentile, there may be an expectation to

maintain those scores through continuing past practices. I needed to do a better job in communicating how collaborative practice might help us to do even better with our teaching and learning practices, without reducing test scores.

On my quest to define and foster compelling reasons to closely examine teaching, learning, and what children are asked to engage in each day, I experienced a great deal and learned many lessons throughout the first year. I describe what I saw as the five main areas here: (a) being new, (b) the role of a history of high performance, (c) issues of time, (d) the balance of transactional actions and transformational actions, and (e) the element of surprise in developing a leadership voice.

Being New

The first year of a principalship is often described by those who have gone through it as a something to survive or something that one simply has to get through (Lovely, 2004; Daly-Lewis, 1987; Davis, 1988). People have often described the first-year principalship the way medical school lore describes the first year of residency; this is a rite of passage one must go through in order to begin traveling down the path towards being a "true principal."

I went into the year, thinking that I had spent many years observing other principals, studying leadership, and preparing myself for the role. I thought I was ready. Perhaps I thought that I would be immediately good at the role. It was a shock that little of what I thought would constitute the focus of the year would actually be the focus of the year. I was shocked and surprised almost every day by how little of my time was spent on trying to reach those transformational goals that I dreamed about.

There wasn't much of a "grace" period. I was immediately hit with people unhappy about decisions that had been made before I arrived, and I was expected to solve problems not of my making. It became clear to me that the "office of the principal" and the person who is the principal, can be seen as two different entities simultaneously. There were those who did not respect me as the principal, but who seemed to respect me as a person. There were also those who respected me as a principal and as a person. I was sometimes surprised when this dichotomy in perception would appear in the middle of an activity or event.

The Role of a History of High Performance

Studies of first-year principalships make the very clear case that when a principal does not truly understand the school culture, the first year is far more likely to be challenging (Davis, 2001; Duncan & Sequin, 2002; Heinlein, 1989; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Sumowski, 2002; Youngs, 2007). I thought I had a good sense of the school community, going into the role of principal, but I was unprepared for how deeply ingrained the sense of legacy was embedded in the school culture. As I tried to lay out my vision for a professional learning community, and sought conversations about curriculum and instruction, some teachers did not trust in my intentions as a leader. It became clear to me, over the months of the first year, that my questions and vision gave some people the perception that I gave no value to the work that had come before me. The very fact that I was suggesting something different looked like I didn't like what they had done before. Looking at our next best performance level as a school was seen as disregarding the quality of both past and present work. Once this perception became clear to me, I

started to talk more about legacy and about the foundational work that had propelled the school to its exceptional status in the first place. Unfortunately, I could see in the eyes of some that once distrust is sown, it is difficult to back up and repair the damage.

Issues of Time

I have already described how pressures on how time was used came up with every suggestion for change in practice. I have already acknowledged here that I understand the time pressures on busy teachers. However, I must also note that this all relates directly back to the notion of compelling reasons for change and the development of trust that is critical for a new principal. There is very little time for a person to learn on the job because of the expectations placed upon the principal to have answers and to be able to solve problems that come up. Looking back over my actions during the first year, I could see that I had not spent sufficient time getting to know and openly supporting teachers *as they were* when I arrived. I may have come in with great ideas, but they either were not ready for me or my great ideas, or they did not know they were ready for me and my great ideas. And I fully understand that my great ideas would remain only mine and ideas unless they were understood and shared by the teaching staff. I needed to do more teaching and more listening as I found small spaces to begin the changes I envisioned.

The Balance of Transactional and Transformational Actions

The inexperience with being the keeper of the works and all this entails caused the learning curve to be steeper and more accelerated than I ever could have imagined.

Southworth (1990) found that time spent on the systems of the building can take away from the transformational side of the leadership. However, in their study of the effects of transformational leadership on student engagement, Leithwood and Jantzi (1999b) found that "most models of transformational leadership are flawed by their under representation of transactional practices" (p. 114). My key learning in my first year was that not paying attention to the transactional aspects of the work caused a sense for some that there was a vacuum of leadership responsibility. I came to understand that the trust that some people need in their leader comes from evidence that the principal will take care of transactional events as they happen, so that the teaching staff does not have to worry about them. I came to understand that a transactional event will push a transformational event off the table, every time. Further, I learned that this did not mean that the transformational actions were not valued. It simply meant that the nuts and bolts need to be perceived as being in place for most people to have sufficiently low anxiety levels to be able to try something new.

When I looked back over my daily log, I found that I spent over 70% of my time in transactional events. As I looked towards year 2, I was adamant about finding ways to keep my focus on the vision of our collective learning together. I was determined to not let the transactional or surprise events derail forward motion. I knew that I had to be sure the details were covered and attended too and I had high hopes that this would allow more space and willingness to engage in deeper conversations about our craft. It was clear that people not just needed, but expected, the details to be in place before there was any level of willingness to engage in transformational thinking.

The very nature of the need for high performance has the potential to cause a level of stress around the issue of time. Time is an enormous factor in all schools, but especially elementary schools, due to the sheer number of lessons that need to be planned for each day and the ability to give timely and meaningful feedback in each of the different content areas. Time has the tendency to become the conversation, rather than collective learning or exploration of curriculum and instruction. This manifests in teams not having time to meet; all too brief teacher meetings dedicated to nuts and bolts that have to be settled; not enough time to prepare for an assembly; conflicts over scheduling due to either gaining or losing time from one event to another; and conversations about minutes being over or under for meeting times, recesses, and other school activities.

The work of quality teaching takes a lot of time in terms of planning and preparing. However, with the added pressure of demands for high performance and high test scores, the need for students to continue to achieve at the highest level causes time to be even more of an issue.

The Element of Surprise in Developing a Leadership Voice

As much as I laid out my vision and planned for different learning opportunities, it was unforeseen opportunities that helped me develop my leadership voice and to build trust with teachers and parents. As much as I tried to plan and to be mindful of the opportunities for my voice to develop, it was in those unexpected moments where I called upon my inner intuition and knowledge about leadership that my voice as the principal deepened. After multiple contentious meetings, one parent told me that they were

impressed in how I stayed so calm and composed. I recall sitting there struggling to think about what to say next or how to "calm the waters," but what came across was confidence. I did not set out to model my child-centered vision for the school through dealing with lunches, but by centering the conversation on meeting the needs of both kids and families, I was able to do just that. While I have no desire to repeat the experience, it was actually a good way to introduce my voice to the community because I demonstrated my willingness to listen, leave space for differences and work to come to a mutually agreeable solution

However, I also learned that trust is sometimes only "an inch deep" and that good will that was achieved in one situation does not necessarily carry over to other challenges. There are times when parents are not pleased with their child's teacher and they call to complain to the principal. Whenever this happens, I always first discuss the matter with the teacher and work to understand all sides of an issue. I am very deliberate ensuring that the integrity of the teacher and parent remain intact so that the needs of the child are not lost. During my first year, I helped a teacher work through a particularly difficult issue where the parent was calling the teacher's integrity into question. By facilitating a conference between the parent and the teacher where both sides felt heard and honored, an agreeable plan of action was achieved. The relationship between parent, child and teacher was salvaged. Both the teacher and parent told me how much they appreciated my support throughout the process. The teacher seemed particularly grateful.

However, I was surprised a few weeks later when an issue around time came up and this same teacher was overheard commenting to others that I did not value the work

of teachers and was not supportive of the challenges they face. It was surprising to learn that there are times when individuals can feel supported, but that this can be fleeting when the larger group is seen as questioning that very same support.

Building a Compelling Narrative for Change

My goal for the second year became building a compelling narrative for change. What I continued to miss about being in the classroom was a sense of collaboration that can come with a small group of people working closely together. As I came into the role of principal, it was my hope to take this sense of collaboration school-wide. I approached my work from a collaborative style, attempting to elevate the conversation beyond the simpler nuts and bolts of teaching work. While some welcomed this approach, I soon learned that it was frustrating to others. Not everyone thought that collaboration would improve teaching and learning. I had my work cut out for me!

With renewed enthusiasm, I re-set my goals for the second year. I looked at reevaluating teacher meetings. In my journal, I wrote that I wanted these meetings to have:

- *Coherency*
- *Be a valuable use of time*
- *A place of shared learning*
- *Be clear what people should walk away with*
- *Time to explore student work as a lens from which to explore our craft*

Other goals I set going into the second year were centered on the following two questions:

- *What do we want each student to leave our school with as a learner, thinker, community member and person of character?*
- *How do we continue to strive to be a community with collective responsibility to cultivate minds and hearts through the significant and beautiful work we engage in everyday?*

With these two guiding questions, I wrote the following goals in my journal:

- *To develop professional learning teams that:*
  - *Connect to their work*
  - *Be scholars of their work*
  - *Be reflective practitioners*
  - *Adult modeling of student expectations*
  - *Collegial*
- *To differentiate curriculum and instruction*
- *To continue to explore character education*
- *To use Berger's work to foster a culture of excellence*

It is with these goals in mind and a renewed sense of spirit that I moved into my second year as a principal.

The Second Year

Three events stand out as illustrative of my second year: a question of testing, moving a computer lab, and shutting off the water.

A Question of Testing

During my second year as principal, there were significant issues with the statewide automated testing program. The issues reached a breaking point and the program was shut down. Schools had to resort to paper and pencil testing. One of the many problems with this situation was that students across the state would have a variety of testing experiences and formats which would call into question the validity of the test. The district school board looked at this situation and asked a courageous question. They asked, "What would happen if we did not test?" Principals were asked to talk with parents in their schools and gauge reactions to not testing. Every parent in my school said basically the same thing:

> *We came to this school because of the test scores and report card rating, but what we found was so much more. We know that teachers know our kids and that our kids are making progress, so we do not care whether you test or not.*

The leadership challenge this answer presented was that it seemed to contradict the fear and worry that was generally expressed around testing and scores. When I posed this same question to teachers, I heard a wide range of comments in support of the action that usually started with, "Now I will have more time to do…" The ironic part is that parents expressed a different kind of support in the school than I had heard before, while teachers felt a new sense of freedom. Unfortunately, we did go ahead and test that spring and the sense of optimism and possibility was quickly replaced with the same worries about testing and scores. When the pressures were lifted, possibilities about a different view of teaching and learning seemed to be within reach for a short period of time, yet as

the reality of testing returned so did the concerns about changing any of the current practices or even talking together about them.

This was an important time as it became clear that, with the right conditions, a much deeper level of discourse was possible. My new challenge became how to build a similarly compelling reason to move beyond a preoccupation with testing.

Moving a Computer Lab

The spring before my first year the decision was made to move the computer lab to the library. Children had been going to one room for a technology class and to the library for two additional classes. The thinking of the teachers was to try to connect technology skills to library skills in such a way as to support the district's research and inquiry initiative. The technology class was originally developed as a way to give teachers more preparation time during the school day, not from a place of wanting children to grow their technology skills. This was a great byproduct, but not the impetus for development of the class.

I felt that if students were going to spend time out of their classrooms, the time needed to be valuable and connect to their lives in an authentic way. During my first year, the instructional coordinator, the teacher librarian, and I met to review how the move of the computers to the library was going. What became clear was that having two classes going on in the library at the same time was not an effective learning or teaching environment. So, we started to explore options for the class, space, and schedule going into the second year. We asked ourselves a number of questions that formed the basis of our ongoing thinking about the library technology time. We asked:

- What is our purpose for having a technology lab?
- What is the transference of skills between the lab and the classroom?
- How does the schedule reflect what we want for our kids in relation to research and inquiry?
- What research should children be engaged in that is compelling and that grows out of their classroom experience?

Surrounding this conversation was the need to "massage" agreements that had been made well before my tenure around the issue of time. Looking carefully at the technology-library time was, for me, about creating the best learning opportunities for kids; but I also knew that if the issue of time was not directly addressed, the chance to create something better for children would be less likely to occur. We engaged the planning committee in a conversation about the issues that the space, schedule and purpose presented. We also proposed to change the schedule so that children were in the library for one hour at a time rather than three one-half hours. In order to offset the one-half hour loss of teacher planning time, we planned to extend lunch an extra 5 minutes so that the overall loss of time was only 5 minutes total over the course of a week.

We had done such a good job of laying the groundwork for the conversation that teachers understood the issues and generally went along with the proposal. However, there was some resistance to losing the third one-half hour of planning time. The feeling of some teachers was that each year they had lost planning time and that the expectations for their work had gone up at the same time. I understood their concerns and desire to have time to plan, but I felt that the conversation needed to focus on children and being sure that children's time out of class was worthwhile and purposeful. A suggestion was

made to put the loss of time on the bottom of the new schedule as a way to document all that had been lost over the years. Fortunately, more level heads prevailed and it was decided that this would shed a poor light on professionalism.

This is good example of the pressures that demands for high performance can bring to thoughtful people. It was up to me to be sure that the needs of children stayed at the center of the conversation, but it was also my responsibility to be sure that all of the teachers felt heard and that their needs were addressed in the conversations as well. I know that, to a teacher, they wanted each experience the children engaged in to be valuable to them, but they also wanted to make sure that each teacher had sufficient time to do the best job they thought they could do to achieve that goal. Again, an argument over how time was spent brought out the conflict between ideas of how time was to be best spent to support a child's learning.

Shutting Off the Water

In March of the second year, I got a call from the maintenance department saying that there was bacteria detected in the well, the water would be shut off immediately, and that water bottles were on the way. As soon as I heard the news, I sent an email to teachers and then the instructional coordinator. I went around to each classroom and spoke directly with teachers about what was going on and letting then know next steps. As soon as the water was delivered, I helped to distribute it to classrooms. Each morning, the instructional coordinator and I made sure each room had water and hand sanitizer so that no one would be without either. The goal was to not only be sure everyone was well stocked, it was also for teachers to see that the situation was being taken seriously and

that we were doing all we could to alleviate any worry or concern. It was a matter of taking care of the details so that teachers could carry on doing their important work.

As often as there was new information to share, I would send emails to teachers and the parent community. I felt that with regular updates and complete information that the entire community would know that we were taking every precaution to be sure children were safe. It ended up that the water was off for 2 months. However, there was never a complaint from the community. The proactive information and monitoring work at school caused the community to not worry and trust that all was being taken care of in as timely a fashion as possible. There were some understandable grumblings from teachers who were tired of hand sanitizer and who worried about whether or not it was keeping germs out of their rooms and off children.

While I never could have predicted that the water at school would be turned off, or that it would take such a long time to fix the problem, it turned out to be an event that helped to forge a certain level of trust between me and the teachers and the community. By being present daily in classrooms and taking care of details in a very transparent manner, people could see that I understood the gravity of the situation and could help to find ways to work through the challenge. Through both emails and comments to me, it was clear that teachers and members of the community appreciated how the situation was handled. I certainly did not deserve all the credit. The maintenance department was very proactive and disseminated a lot of thoughtful and detailed information that I was able to use to explain current and next steps. However, it was clear to me that my actions

"looked like a principal" to many people in this incident, more clearly than some of my other actions had been perceived.

It was frustrating when I later found out that the union lodged a formal complaint to the district to say that they were not adequately informed up front about the water concerns. It was gratifying, however, to be able to go back to all the communications and be able to demonstrate that we had, indeed, given complete and detailed information to teachers and parents the minute the problem was brought to our attention.

The Second Year Concludes

My increased focus on the legacy of hard work did seem to help build trust in my intentions. However, in December of year 2, I had a conversation with a teacher who expressed frustration about my leadership. Our conversation focused on her perception that, when I talked about examining our curriculum and instruction practices, I was not signaling that I valued the work of teachers. What she heard me saying was that teachers' instruction needed to improve because it was not strong enough, when my intention was to explore the possibility that, by the examination of our work, we could collectively grow and strengthen what were already strong practices.

This was affirmed during another conversation with a teacher at the end of my second year where she asked me why I had come to the district. While there had been particular individuals I had met who drew me to the district, there was also the fine tradition and reputation that was definitely part of my decision to change school districts. What she wanted to make sure I did not forget was the reputation so many teachers and

parents had built upon the work and dedication of those who had come before me. Her point was clear – my actions and words about my respect and value for the work of the entire community were not ringing true for some.

I was disturbed by the notion that my actions had been seen as devaluing anyone in the school community. I definitely had not gotten into administration for this reason. I had also gotten feedback that my style of leadership was supportive and helpful to teachers. New teachers in particular had said that they appreciated the feedback and support as they got their classrooms up and running. I looked back over my emails over the course of the year, and there were plenty that ended with a statement of appreciation or support. Yet, it seemed that I was reminded on a daily basis that not everyone was going to be pleased with my decisions or actions.

Jim Collins (2001), in his book *Good to Great*, argues that a key factor in moving from good to great is having the right people on the bus in the right seats. One of the most important responsibilities of a principal is hiring the best teachers for the school. In my first 2 years, I hired eight classroom teachers (a third of all classroom teachers) and I've been a part of hiring three special education teachers (three fifths of all special education teachers). I've hired an instructional coordinator, a Title 2 teacher, and have been a part of hiring nine classified instructional assistants. I am very proud of the hiring and am confident these new teachers will be integral to not just maintaining our exceptional status, but to help grow our definition of exceptional.

Most of this hiring occurred due to retirements, so there has been a substantial shift in the longevity of the average employee in the school. The challenge of retirement for a

school community is that an enormous amount of craft knowledge walks out the door, along with a great deal of valuable institutional memory. However, hiring new teachers allows a new principal to get new people on the bus, to create space for others to bring new eyes to the community and the work, and expands the ability to grow a different type of discourse among the staff. Bringing new people into the organization has been an important aspect of change, but it has been a source of discomfort and mistrust for many. As one teacher remarked, "He keeps hiring people who are just like him."

During this time, there was also a change in the parent population. There are a lot of families whose youngest child is in fourth or fifth grade, and a large number of families whose oldest child is in kindergarten through second grade. This shift in families has had ripple effects through out the school community in terms of parent relations. At the beginning of my third year, I addressed this in a newsletter to the community. I use it here to illustrate the importance of this change:

> *Over my brief time at [this school], there has been a great deal of change. This change has come in the form of a new principal and [instructional coordinator], new teachers at almost every grade level and team, many new families, and of course new children. All this newness has caused me to think a lot about all that has come before and the strong foundation that has been laid by teachers and parents over the years. [This school] has a long legacy of fabulous work and accomplishments directly resulting from strong, dedicated and caring teachers and parents. We are a community that cares deeply about providing an outstanding education for each child. It is this legacy and solid foundation that guides our on-going growth and development as a school. Very early on in my time at Stafford, I quickly came to know us as a community who:*
>
> - *Understands the value of engaging students in thoughtful, authentic work.*
> - *Believes in challenging students to do their best work.*

- *Values creating environments that nurture children, both socially and academically.*
- *Understands that relationships are critical to the learning process.*
- *Care deeply about the entire community.*

I believe that our strength as a school is rooted in these shared values and beliefs. It is with these values in mind that the staff and I developed our goals for the year.

Through a survey on my leadership at the end of year 2, I learned that any problems were problems with school leadership. If you are the leader, you are seen as the person who should solve or prevent problems. So, sometimes you get blamed for something over which you have no control and sometimes you get credit for something you didn't do. Some people argued that they wanted a more traditional principal, more attention to nuts and bolts, and, surprisingly, more meetings. This was counter-intuitive to my own inclinations towards my role. I had hoped that a drive towards our own growth and learning would be the focal point of conversations, rather than a call for more attention to details of running the school.

Over the course of my first 2 years, the feedback I would get from some was that my vision about the space between was seen as devaluing the work that had come before. While my intentions were directly opposite of this viewpoint, there seems to have not been a culture present within the school that either fostered or valued examination of curriculum and instructional practices. Moving to a culture where this type of examination is a valued expectation was a new concept for some. When asked to explore these beliefs and values, some people clearly felt that the very culture and past of the

school is somehow not up to par in the eyes of the new leader. Since the staff had been very successful in the past, this could easily lead to resentful feelings. And it did.

The feedback I received at the end of the second year was hard to take, but it also helped me to grow. Journal entries from the summer following year two reflect a pensive state of mind about carrying on the work. There are statements such as:

- *Can I do this work?*
- *Can I do it well?*
- *There is a need to build and repair relationships.*
- *Has there been a loss of credibility with some and can I salvage it?*
- *I am who I am – value kids and their learning and value teachers, their learning and growth.*

Out of these thoughts, I framed a set of questions and aspirations for the coming year. I wrote:

- *It is imperative that our kids are our new thinkers, inventors, problem solvers and this is our compelling reason to talk about growth and change.*
- *Clarity of communication – I thought I had been, but this is a point of reflection for me.*
- *As a community we all need to be connected to the idea of positive school culture for learning.*
- *My values are firmly set on learning, children, and the value of the work each of us does in the community – need to look for indicators of this – how do I help others come to believe this not just in me, but in our collective work together?*
- *How do we all connect with the vision? Is there clarity in the vision? We need to celebrate our work – need to be purposeful in making this connection.*

These aspirations and statements energized me for the work of year 3 and beyond. My learning about the value of legacy, the importance of trust, the continuous pressures

of high performance expectations, and my continued search for my leadership voice, have created a solid foundation to move my own learning forward. I often wondered if the work would get easier as I became more experienced, but what I have come to realize is that the complexities of the principalship will always be there and that only time and more experience will tell me the answer to that question.

Learning from Doing

As I reflected back on my first 2 years as a principal, there were four key areas that stood out for me as places where I had learned something very important to my future practice as a principal: (a) knowing the community well, (b) valuing the legacy of previous people and work, (c) the critical importance of developing trust, and (d) patience and perseverance as essential keys to change. I talk here briefly about what each of these topics meant to me at the end of the second year, before turning to a comparison of my experiences to those previously reported in the literature.

Knowing Your Community Well

As I stated at the start of this chapter, my preparation for the principal interviews involved getting to know the community through as many means as I could identify. What I gleaned from all the different sources I read and people I spoke with was that it was a community that cared deeply for the school and the teachers, that parents of the school gave a tremendous amount of their time and money to support the school, that teachers were extremely dedicated to the children and to the community as a whole, and that both parents and teachers were proud of the work and successes of the school.

Knowing the community well is important, but it is equally important to be open to a variety of ways to come to know the community. What I learned before joining the community turned out to be true, but not always in ways that I expected. I had to keep learning about the community. The lunch plan example I gave earlier was moving along before I even got there and most likely I should have attempted to slow the train more before the plan went public. However, it was through the upheaval that came from the first public notice that my first lessons about leadership and the community were learned. While this would not be the path I would want to follow again, it was a unique opportunity to deepen my own understanding of the community. I learned that members of this community would speak up if they didn't like something. I learned that I could listen to them and engage them in conversation. I learned that I could keep from getting defensive when under attack for something that I had not done. I learned that I was seen as responsible just because I was the principal.

The experience also gave me the opportunity to help the site council to think differently about their work and to shape the new direction in a manner that fit with the vision of the entire school. As it turns out, while there appeared to be a lot of energy expended around a question about lunches, when given the opportunity to engage in conversations about teaching, the fact that the lunch question had been resolved in a satisfactory manner helped increased attention to a deeper conversation.

Valuing the Legacy

With a high performance history comes a reputation within a community that parents shop for and teachers feel proud of working within each day. High performance

does not happen without forethought and dedication on the part of the entire community. The other side of this reality is that high performance brings forth a sense of worry about test scores continuing to be high. Being new in this environment created a challenging situation because of the fine line I needed to walk between looking at our growth edges as a school while simultaneously valuing all that had come before me. The importance of legacy became an issue to some people.

"Change" is an interesting word in a high performing community. The questions that naturally arise are: Why change? Change towards what? Is change something that the community wants? As I look at myself as a learner, I am always reading new books, recent articles, going to conferences, or going back to school in order to deepen my understanding of my craft. Change is an integral, taken-for-granted part of my life. In fact, I became a principal to be a part of these types of conversations on a much broader scale. I found that not all people embraced a call for change. The inherent pushback that can come from a call for change of any kind is that it is taken as a value statement of the work of those who have come before. That is, if change is needed, than what came before must not have been adequate. When I first started at the school, I did not fully understand the role this perception played in the lives of many of the teachers. I took their pushback as a an unwillingness to engage in professional conversations about teaching and learning, but came to understand that the underlying conflict arose out of the pressure felt by all for students to continue to achieve at the highest levels.

Legacy has an impact on a school culture. In high performing schools, there is the absolute need to find ways to value the hard work that has come before. However, there

is also the need to truly understand the school culture and the expectations for discourse within the building. When there is a perception that the legacy of good work of teachers and of people in the community is not being valued, there is inherent mistrust in the intentions of the leader.

My experiences over these 2 years clearly showed me that it is through relationships that trust is built. Trust comes to the new leader when it is perceived that the leader's actions and words are "in sync" with each other. When there is a sense that there is not congruency, trust quickly disappears and is hard to regain. I found that when conversations about curriculum and instruction were put on the table, without overt deference to prior history, there was a tendency by some to view this as a disconnection between my words and actions. The sense was if I truly valued them and their work, there would not be a need to talk about change. If I valued the work that came before, that should be enough to believe that it would always be strong into the future and there should not be a need to talk about changes.

The leadership question for me became how to transcend these concerns without simply giving up and solely attending to the managerial aspects of the principalship. I learned to talk about the past, and to tend to the nuts and bolts at all times, but I continued to seek places and times to raise what I thought of as the more transcendent questions of improved teaching and learning through collaboration.

Trust

Closely related to paying attention to the history and legacy of a school culture, is the issue of trust. Trust plays an interesting part in high achievement. First, there is the

trust a community has in a school because scores are high. There is faith that the scores will continue to be high and students will do well. Second, there is trust in the teachers because parents look at how well their students do and rightfully relate this back to the quality of their child's teacher.

These are two characteristics that foster a positive culture in a school, but they also create pressure for all events for the whole school to also be seen as high performing. "When quality of instruction, time for learning and opportunity to learn are defined as the essential classroom factors for student achievement, school level factors should be defined according to the same criteria" (Creemers & Reezigt, 1996, p. 223). In a high performing school, it holds true that what happens in the classroom becomes the expectation for the school as a whole.

The challenge for a high performing school is to be sure that scores do not become the only goal and the only expectation, and that any change is seen as a potential threat to previous high performance. I found that when I raised any question about a change, my intentions were not trusted by everyone. The first question that was always raised was, "Yeah, but what if the scores go down?" I thought that high scores gave us an opening to explore what else we could be doing but, instead, I kept running into the high scores being used as the reason to change nothing. Every time I appeared to want to change something, my intentions were questions and the fear of lowered scores was raised.

The leadership challenge in this environment is to find ways to foster a collective sense of possibility that comes with high scores. In his 2003 book, *An Ethic of*

Excellence, Ron Berger describes just such a school. He talks about taking student learning beyond the school walls and connecting students to their community and lives in interconnected projects that develop deep understanding in each content area. The students in his school do very well on state tests, but yet very little time is spent on teaching to those tests. He described a deep level of trust that the scores will continue to be at levels that the community expects. I clearly needed to build that level of trust in this school. I knew that it would take each teacher trusting their own teaching enough to reach out and share teaching and learning experiences with others, and I knew that it would take sufficient trust among the parents in the community to support us if we, for example, started sending home homework that didn't look like any thing they had seen before. All of this was possible in any school with clear communication about the "what and whys" of the work. I just needed to take the necessary steps to make it possible in my school. What that means to me, at this point in time, is continuing to bring examples and models to the teachers and parents in order to demonstrate what is possible. I have to continue to build trust in the vision.

Patience and Perseverance are the Keys to Change

One key thing that I have learned as a new principal is that I am impatient when it comes to change. When there is a new idea or learning opportunity, I want to jump in and do it. I get frustrated when the process is slow. And, I have learned that the process is always slower than me! I have to keep reminding myself that change takes time. The challenge that I faced over the course of my first 2 years as a principal was that talk of change was equated to my devaluing the past and present work of teachers. My learning

in this process was that talk of different instructional methods or talking about a vision for the school needs to be accompanied with positive talk about the past and present, and also with action. Teachers who are feeling the pressure of time and who are not connected to a compelling narrative for thinking differently about their work do not want to spend time in theoretical conversation. They need to see and experience concrete action. Relating back to the need to develop and foster trust in leadership, there also has to be trust, through the examination of instruction or curriculum, that student learning will grow, work load will decrease, and there will not be unmanageable pushback from the community. Developing this level of trust takes patience and perseverance, with lots of time and lots of examples and models.

Looking back through my calendars for the first 2 years, there are initiatives and ideas that were sown that carry on into my third year. At first glance, it is frustrating to me that we continue to talk about the same things or are continuing to implement the same vision. However, in looking at what we are doing now, it is clear that my perseverance on pieces of my original vision is paying off 3 years later. I have learned to extend my timeline for accomplishment of my goals. I have learned to think about sowing seeds.

Here are four examples of my changed view. First, I started a focus in my first year on how the library is used by children and how much what they do in the library connects to what they do in their classrooms. The district has a strong vision around the idea of research and inquiry and we are using the library space and the time students

spend there as a leverage point to demonstrate what is possible and to model how to interconnect different content areas to deepen student knowledge and understanding.

A second seed growing is in where the teachers' meetings are held. This year we are bringing back the idea of meeting in teachers' classrooms for our weekly teacher meetings in order for people to find different ways to share their work in a public manner.

Another seed sown is in community coffees. I suggested to the PTSA my first year that we hold a couple of community coffees throughout the year. Over time, these events turned in to evening parent socials. The first event had about 10 people and the last event of my second year had about 30 people. The idea of getting to know fellow community members took hold and parents saw the value in the time. We are carrying these on into my third year with the hope that the numbers continue to grow. I still want to discuss teaching and learning at these meetings, but I am more patient and understanding that maybe first we need to know and respect each other!

Lastly, with new people in the building, it was important to find a variety of ways for people to get to know each other. The instructional coordinator and I started periodically bringing bagels on Friday mornings to create a social time for teachers. While people came, took a bagel, and went directly back to their classroom the first year, now more people come and stay to chat with their colleagues. Sometimes the chatting is about teaching and learning!

These are just a few examples of patience and perseverance of ideas where seeds were planted in the first year and continue to grow over time. When each of these examples first started, the numbers of people involved was small but I kept at the

practices. It takes time to start new traditions. While it is easy to not carry on a new idea when enthusiasm appears to be low, sticking with it will bear great fruit as time goes on if it is a good and useful idea.

I clearly represented change as I came into my position as principal. While I was hired from within the district, I was new to the school. Over my first 2 years, I also oversaw tremendous change within the school. I hired one third of the teaching staff and many new instructional assistants. During this time, there has also been a great deal of change within the parent population. All of this change has lead to a need to renew our collective sense of school culture and maintain and raise the level of trust within all the wide range of relationships there are within the school community.

Change, for me, is about understanding legacy and building trust. The new parents and teachers work hard to find their place within the existing culture, but yet look for ways to add their thoughts and ideas into the mix as well. This has created conflict in a variety of ways. There have been concerns about new people not respecting those who have been there for a number of years, as well as new people not feeling valued by those with experience. There have been mistaken judgments or communication gaps as the different groups learn how to communicate effectively with each other. This unrest has been distressing to me and to others, and has lead to some finger pointing in the search for someone to blame. The entire community wants there to be peace and a renewed sense of collective purpose. This will take time and patience, also, along with dedicated diligence in order for this goal to be met. My concern is that hard feelings will linger and present yet another barrier to addressing how to improve teaching and learning.

In a high performing school, there is a collective, and understandable, belief that the performance of children and the level of instruction is exactly where it needs to be. Thus, conversations about change can cause concern and worry due to the lack of an apparent compelling reason for initiating change. However, change comes in a variety of forms. With a new principal, a changing parent body, and the addition of so many new staff members, change has come. The leadership challenge is how to manage this change, while honoring the past, leaving space for new ideas, and fostering a sense of calm as the school community learns its way forward.

CHAPTER V

COMPARING MY EXPERIENCES TO PRIOR RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, I have organized discussion of my findings by these topics: *Reflection-in-Practice and Reflection-on-Practice*, *Characteristics of First-Year Principalships*, *High-Performance Schools*, and *Transactional and Transformational Leadership*. I finish the chapter with a discussion of the uses of power in the principalship, conclusions about this study, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research studies.

Reflection-in-Practice and Reflection-on-Practice

Johns (2004) and Schon (1983) talk about reflective practice as having the elements of becoming mindful in taking the practical wisdom, understanding and empowerment that comes from one's experiences and putting them into action. I traveled down the first steps of my path of becoming a principal with high hopes and a sense of idealism about being a transformational leader. My understanding of the principalship deepened in the transition between year 1 to year 2 and, even more so, from year 2 to year 3. My insights and ever changing perceptions of my work and myself were characterized within the key elements of reflective practice (Boud et al. 1985; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Mezirow, 1981).

I found that using the reflective practice model of framing a vision, detailing a proposed plan for implementing the vision, and then tracking actions on a regular basis, forced me to look every day at how much of my work had been aimed directly at my long-term and short-term goals. Knowing that I would be making daily, weekly and monthly entries in my journals and logs also helped me be cognizant in the moment of an administrative action of what I was doing, i.e., reflection-in-action. Because I have not been a principal before, I don't know what it would be like to have gone through this experience without a deliberate reflective process. What I do know is that I regularly modified my actions, based on my reflections on my plans and actions, and on people's reactions to what I did. Having regular documentation of events and reactions to events helped me look back over long periods of time and identify patterns in my behavior, or in the behavior of others, that I might not have otherwise seen. In short, I found the reflective practitioner process to be very useful in helping me guide myself through my first 2 years as a principal.

Here is an example. Teaching is a challenging job and teachers do not want to be surprised by or burdened with the minutia of the details. When there is a perception that these are not being taken care of, space is not created to have conversations about the craft of teaching due to the worry over nuts and bolts. It is harder to build the type of collaborative relationship that is the underpinning of transformative leadership when the transactional aspects of the school are not seen as handled. This was a challenge for me because I consistently felt that the details were covered, when there was the perception by some that they were not covered. This led me to reflect on why the nuts and bolts of the

work took on such significance for many people. Was this a result of a deficiency on my part? Was the nuts and bolts focus a way to test the new principal? Was it a way to keep the conversation away from instructional practices? In conversations with other, more experienced principals during this last year, their common answer has been that staffs have the tendency to go along with the principal in terms of focusing on curriculum and instruction, but only to a certain point. When they feel pushed too far, or the conversation causes disequilibrium, immediate pushback is the result. This pushback usually comes in the form of other tangible, concrete topics being raised, such as, "there is a lack of discipline in the building," or "we need to decide on that schedule," or "we have to tend to the business of the school and we don't have time to do what you want."

This feedback caused me to pause and to deeply practice Schon's (1983) reflection-on-practice. Each week I write an email to the staff with updates, reflections and dates. Each week I include some sort of appreciation for teachers and their work, but the reminder I was being given was that words don't mean much when actions are not there to support them. This caused me to reflect upon whether or not my words and actions were in sync. While perception is reality, I began to wonder if the sense of devaluing work was born out of my actions or out of the perception of my actions. When I am told stories of families moving four blocks to come to the school, there is a natural burden that is placed squarely on the school's collective shoulders. However, it comes down to whether or not this is a burden we choose to accept and, more importantly, what we choose to do with such a burden. The learning for me has been that it is important to stick to my beliefs about teaching and learning and to constantly be aware that my actions

and words match. Goleman (2000) states that a leader who is able to seamlessly move amongst an array of teaching styles to either a greater or lesser degree has the tendency to be more effective with a wider band of those in the organization. The critical learning here is how to do this while, at the same time, being sure that children are at the center of the conversation rather than non-learning issues extending from adult personalities.

Characteristics of First-Year Principalships

In this section, I compare my findings to those of the previous studies identified and described in Chapter II of this dissertation, in the order in which they were presented in that chapter.

Heinlein's (1989) study of the use of instructional time in 39 higher and lower achieving schools found that principals in higher achieving schools spent more time on observation and feedback. What I found was that there was more time available to me to spend considerable amounts of time in classrooms in this high performing school than I had experienced in previous, less high performing schools. However, there were reactions, especially from some of the more tenured teachers, who questioned my motivations behind regular classroom visits and observations of their classrooms. Questions were brought to the union representative about my wanting to do increased observations of teachers. This pattern appears related to Davis' (2001) findings in her study on the interactions between the principal and teachers in shaping school culture. She found that teachers' understanding about teaching, learning, and their own identities affected how they used professional development resources. I offered myself up to

teachers as a sounding board for ideas and "a set of eyes" on their work in order to give feedback on the practices they were working to better understand. However, these offers were either not drawn on or the motives behind them were questioned.

Sumowski (2002) chronicled the experiences of a first-year elementary school teacher in a low performing school. The challenges he documented were related to communication, conflict with the school improvement team, issues with time management, and maintenance of staff morale. My experiences were similar in three key ways. The first is that I worked diligently to communicate a vision and my own beliefs about the type of learning community I was trying to foster. Yet, even when I thought I had been clear and specific, there were those who continued to hear judgment in my words about their instructional practices. The second is that I had my own issues with time management in the sense that I could not possibly spend more time with the work. Yet, when there was pushback or resistance when I tried to open discussions, or a call for me to have a more detailed focus, I wondered if I was doing the right work during the time available to me. The third similarity was that as much as I tried to communicate my belief in the value of the work I was seeing, there were those who found it disingenuous, which then apparently led to staff feeling devalued and generally more negative about their work environment.

Duncan and Sequin (2002), in their case study on principal succession, found that the effectiveness of a new principal is affected by community attitudes, communication, leadership style and a sense of trust in the leader. These findings were corroborated by my findings. The community welcomed me with a mixture of excitement and trepidation.

I heard a lot of comments such as, "You have big shoes to fill." Over my first 2 years, I made it a point to have lunch with children as much as possible and the community saw this as an indicator of my care for children. Thus, even when parents were upset about some issue, I came to understand that this small act gave them an understanding of my commitment to children. As I documented in Chapter IV, the importance of communication was very much at the center of my learning throughout my 2 years. I believe that the key to my experiences was the issue of trust. When teachers felt trust with me, they were far more willing to engage in dialog about teaching and learning. However, I also learned that trust is both easily lost and difficult to regain.

McGuigan and Hoy (2006) studied 40 Ohio schools and found that "academic optimism" made a significant difference in student achievement, especially when it was modeled by teachers and the principal. My school students achieved at a high level on high stakes tests, and in those times when teachers engaged students in authentic learning experiences, they often talked about how they were amazed by the quality and depth of student work and thinking. It was the valuation on the students, connecting learning to their lives, and the excitement over the work itself that raised the level of quality and connections to their lives. Youngs' (2007) study of six elementary principals found that it was the encouragement of instructional development for new teachers that had a positive influence on the school culture. My experience demonstrated that whenever teachers or children trusted the support and encouragement that was directed to them, their overall connection to their work went up, which in turn helped the overall morale of the building.

When they did not trust my motives for trying to support and encourage them, morale went down.

Alvy's (1983) study of 70 new Montana principals found that curriculum and instruction, and personnel, were the most difficult responsibilities for new principals. Curriculum and instruction was actually the areas where I found I could be helpful to individual teachers when they asked a question about a certain content area, because I could draw on my own experiences and learning over the years. My challenge was in how to bring dialog about curriculum and instruction to the whole staff without there being resistance and judgment. However, I also found that my knowledge, expertise, and willingness to share it, were not always welcomed by every teacher.

Sussman (1985) found that the first-year principal she studied spent more time supporting teachers than on instruction itself. In order to attempt to foster trust in my vision of collective learning, I spent a lot of time being an indirect support to teachers. This took the form of covering classes when a teacher needed to leave early, canceling meetings when there was a lot happening in the building, and trying to fulfill other requests as they came in the door. It had been my hope that this would build trust and allow for conversations about instruction, but I found that teachers did not often make the connection between this support and my interest in our learning together.

As I documented in Chapter IV, there were aspects of the school culture that I was unprepared for as I took on the role of principal. The majority of the teaching staff in this school were far more willing to rest on past laurels than I was led to believe through the interview process. It was the embedded status quo context of the school culture and the

history of that culture that had an immediate and lasting impact on my ability to garner trust and support for my vision. My experiences appear similar to those reported in Berman's (1986), Greenberg's (1987), and Holcomb's (1989) studies of new principals. They similarly concluded that it was the existing culture of the district or school that shaped and impacted conversations about change.

Woodruff (2008) found that new principals struggle with role clarification in relation to instructional leadership. I knew that being an instructional leader would have the greatest impact on student learning, but the pull towards the transactional as an expectation by some caused me to question my own purpose and focus. Nolan's 1990 case study of six elementary principals found that they, too, struggled with the pull towards the managerial that took them away from their preferred focus on instruction.

My understanding of the principalship was based on my observations of other principals and my own studies of leadership. I had worked for exceptional instructional leaders who inspired communities. I had also worked for a principal who came in with no sense of the culture and an unwillingness to empower teacher leadership. Thus, I had a sense of the role, responsibilities and ways of quality principal leadership. Ginty (1993) and Elsberry (1994), in their studies of novice principals, found that their initial understandings of the principalship were dramatically shifted by their experiences. At the end of my first year, I recall being amazed by all that I had done. I could never have imagined having to deal with some of the issues I have reported here. I had my observations of successful principals, and my "book understanding" of the life of the principal. However, it was not until I experienced the role for myself that I understood

the complex responsibilities and expectations that are placed squarely on the shoulders of the principal.

Butterworth and Weinstein (1996) found that the cultural community of the school is a key factor in determining the success of a new principal. LeGore and Parker (1997) found that a new principal builds trust through stopping and listening carefully in that cultural community. They reported that when a new leader moves too fast, key undertones are likely to be missed within the school culture. This was definitely true for me. I left the interview process thinking that I understood the direction of the school and what its next steps were. However, it became clear that the public view of the school that was given off through newsletters, school development plans, interview questions and answers and people who knew the school was different than the reality of the culture and the willingness of every teacher to engage in a culture of continuous learning. My initial understanding of the school culture caused me to miss the undertone of reluctance towards change.

Pristash (2001), in her study of three first-year principals, supported this finding. She found that there is a relationship between one's emerging leadership philosophy and the culture of the school. I thought that my thinking about learning communities fit with the school culture more directly than was the case. One of my leadership challenges has been to keep my own philosophies about the value of collaboration at my core, while continuing to deepen my understanding of the school culture. Griffin's (2000) replication of Wolcott's (1973) *The Man in the Principal's Office* study had a similar conclusion in that experiences in the role have the tendency to change both priorities and expectations.

One of the things I learned over the course of this study is that there can be different views of the person who is the principal and the role of the principal. People can like the person, but disrespect them in their role. Cosgrove's (2002) study of the daily work experiences of a first-year principal found that there were gaps between the real and ideal role expectations of the principal. I found that there were those who have their ideal image of the principal and all they should accomplish. For some, the reality of who I was did not measure up to their ideal image. As I think back, I am not sure what their ideal principal would be like, but it seems that the individual would "stay out of the way" of teachers and simply "let them do their thing." I came in wanting to be involved with teachers as a supporter and learner who worked with and beside them, but that reality did not match the image many had of the role they thought I should play.

Johnson's 2004 study of the leadership styles, characteristics and skills of ten successful primary principals found that new principals needed to understand that different situations require different leadership styles. By employing different styles as situations demanded, principals are usually better able to gain trust and support. This was a lesson that was critical to my first year. Through the water, for example, I was able to garner a level of trust because the teachers thought that I was taking care of the situation effectively and many of them also thought that was my primary job. While regular in-person updates and delivery of water bottles had very little to do with teaching and learning, or transformation, the situation required that I focus on the immediate needs efficiently and directly. In the long run, this helped teachers and the community to trust that, in a time of concern, I would carefully look after the best interests of all. As Ruff

and Shoho found in their 2005 study of novice principals, my ability to integrate a wide variety of skills and strategies helped to calm the waters at a difficult time.

Quong (2006) found that it was not any one particular event that framed his learning as a new principal, but it was all his experiences wrapped together that formed his understanding of his new role. This was certainly true for me. I cannot point to any one experience that is solely responsible for my expanded understanding of myself as a principal or of the school culture, but it was the collection of 2 years worth of daily experiences and the time taken to reflect back on them that has formed my understanding of the principalship.

Both Meloche (2006) and Deaton (2006) found that there are substantive demands on the time and energy of a new principal. These demands range from developing relationships to identifying the data points needed to help with the decision making process within schools. It was so important for me to come in as a new principal and develop relationships in order to foster trust. I believe that I have developed good relationships with many of the staff. However, my challenge was how to transfer these relationships to helping support a culture of learning. There were many who were very friendly to me, but yet caused friction and resistance whenever the subject of time and instruction was put forth.

Beghetto and Alonzo (2006) found in their study that the community must understand the final desired outcomes of the school vision and that the leader must put forth the vision with confidence. I thought that I had been very clear about my goals over the 2 years and that I had been very consistent in the vision I had for the school. I used

every opportunity I could to talk about it – in newsletters, at curriculum night, or in conversations through goals conferences. When I talked about aspirations and visions, I intentionally tried to honor the culture and speak to what I felt was the direction the whole community was looking for in a leader. However, there was an underlying sense on the part of some that my words and actions did not match and that my vision did not honor the legacy of the school.

Johnson and Huff (2006) identified the challenges of transition to the principalship in terms of self-awareness and balance, among others. I had a sense of who I wanted to be as a school leader. My experiences have caused me to come to a deeper level of understanding about who I am as the principal and who I want to become. My awareness of the need for balance in leadership styles has proved to be one of the most important areas of growing understanding for me. While the school culture, overall, has the tendency to push me towards transactional behaviors, it is holding to my core beliefs about children and their learning that will help me to stay focused on my vision for the school and my own leadership.

High-Performance Schools

An essential underlying, and probably confounding, variable to this study is that the school has long been, and is, a high-performance school. Pepper and Thomas (2002) in their study on the effects of leadership on school climate concluded that, "Culture building by transformational leaders includes behaviors aimed at developing school norms, beliefs, values, and assumptions that are student-centered and support continuing

professional growth by teachers" (p. 157). The challenge presented by this definition for me in this high performing school is that the concern of parents and the teaching staff over keeping up the level of achievement that the community has come to expect from the school has formed a foundation of norms, beliefs and values that are at the heart of the school culture. Not all of these long embedded norms and values are student-centered and not all support continuing professional growth by teachers. I learned in the first 2 years that it was very important for me to understand the embedded values, to support those that supported teaching and learning, and to slowly begin to add events and knowledge that would begin to shift the norms that did not support teaching and learning.

What was not apparent to me in my years as a teacher or as an assistant principal is how much time, patience and nurturing is needed in order to lay the groundwork for transformational events. The role of the principal is centered on the climate and morale of the school (Day et al., 2000a; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; Pepper & Thomas, 2002). Climate and morale are directly affected by large events and small events, many of which have little to do with what happens between teachers and children in the classroom. When teachers feel overwhelmed or over burdened by their work, their enjoyment and engagement in their work can diminish (Bogler, 2001; Day et al., 2001; Leithwood, 1996; Ogawa & Hart, 1985). It is understandable that regular high stakes testing and a longstanding reputation for high performance on tests are going to add pressure. Teachers are going to worry about what happens if the test scores go down. Teachers are caring and want the best for their students, but they also do not want to let anyone down.

It seems to me, based on my 3 years at this school, that the communal mindset that can develop in a school where students achieve at the highest makes conversations and explorations around new and different teaching practices more difficult than they might be in a low-performing school. The worry over the consequences of the test scores going down is always near the surface in any discussion of new teaching techniques, for example, and there is always the fear that something new may not be as good as what we already have – which is obviously good, since we get such great test scores every year. There is almost a built-in resistance to change.

Transactional and Transformational Leadership

Leading by Doing

The literature on transformational leadership is based on the notion of a leader making significant changes for the greater common good over the needs of the leader (Bottery, 2001; Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992). This is significant in schools. The work of any school must be about children and their learning. Sergiovanni argued that it is only through a shared set of values and purposes that the ability for forward motion occurs. In approaching the work as a new principal, it was my belief that I needed to do more than simply inspire the teachers and keep the doors of the school open and working. I had to be willing to model caring about the best teaching and learning and I had to engage in the work alongside staff. By jumping in and being a part of the work as a fellow learner, instead of as "the expert," it was my hope that my commitment to great teaching and

learning would open the way for a collaborative and ongoing professional discussion and practice of teaching and learning.

As a classroom teacher, I had always used modeling as a powerful part of the learning process and I had hoped that I would be able to do the same as a principal. What I was unprepared for was the power of history combined with the worry that comes with feared changes. These two factors collided in this situation and made it very difficult to build the atmosphere of trust and support that is needed for open collaboration. The challenge for me became the constant pull towards transactional practices that are about maintenance rather than spending time in activities or conversations that could lead to change or enhancement of the program as a whole.

Does Everyone Want Transformation?

The other challenge I faced was that I do not think that all teachers wanted a learner alongside. I think there was the perception by many of the more senior teachers that principals are not supposed to be involved in classrooms unless there is an emergency concern or for an observation for the supervision and evaluation cycle. Through many conversations with many of my teachers, I learned that this outdated image of what a principal should be, or always was, usually stemmed from prior experiences that teachers had with other principals throughout their careers. Some of these experiences were reinforced by talk with other teachers. Sometimes it seemed to me that they pooled all their bad experiences and said, "that is what you are," instead of being open to a positive experience in a different mode. Sometimes I thought that no matter what I did or how I acted, some of the teachers would just keep waiting and withholding judgment until some

opportunity gave them the chance to say, "See, I told you that is what principals are like." It was hard to learn that this was sometimes the underlying assumptions about my behaviors, and it was even harder to begin to give them new experiences with me to help them counterbalance those powerful old pictures.

My goal was, and continues to be, to move from a predominantly transactional style to a transformative style by motivation and inspiration through fostering relationships, as well as by making personal connections to a larger view of our work in the school (Bottery, 2001). Being a transformative leader is a goal that I set for myself as a principal. It is what I argued for in my interviews for my position; it is why the district hired me to be the principal at this school. However, I have a renewed sense of respect for how daunting this goal may be.

What is the Leader-Follower Relationship when Someone does not Follow?

Burns (1978) stated that transformative, dynamic leadership is based upon a relationship between leader and followers, where the followers feel energized and inspired to the point where they themselves become leaders. Danielson (2000), in her work on teacher leadership, argued that when teachers feel empowered to become leaders, the entire school community benefits. I agree philosophically with Burns and Danielson. I have worked in schools where this has happened, so I know it can happen. It was my deep concern for the needs of teachers that grounded my desire to be a leader who values collaboration over the routine maintenance of control (Cousins, 1996). However, over the course of this study, it became clear to me that, in a high performing

school where the staff has been there for an extended period of time, there was a widely perceived need by the teaching staff for me to be on the managerial side of leadership.

In survey responses about my principalship at the end of the second year, there were a number of comments made that my actions were perceived as devaluing the work that had come before and that the legacy of this work needed to be more at the forefront of all my words and my actions. One piece of advice that the retiring principal gave to me was to be consistent and be sure that my words and actions matched. I had worked hard to do just that. When I reflected back over my vision, my journals, my daily logs and minutes of meetings, I found few discrepancies between my words and actions. What I did find, and what I now see was probably meant by this criticism, is that I did not always begin discussions of something new with how valuable the existing teachers and programs are, and with how important the past has been. In this very secure and somewhat insular setting, simply talking about something new implied, at least to some, that I was criticizing the old. An insight that I hope to put directly to work in the coming year!

The challenge as a new principal is to find ways to build the trust of the community through listening carefully, being present with children and responsive to challenges that come your way. It is also in expressing support and caring for the traditions and history of the school, at the same time you continue to extend the invitation, the inevitable invitation to continue to grow for the sake of both teaching and learning.

The Relationship of Little Things to Transformative Leadership

I know that simply focusing on making surface-level changes, such as working for higher test scores or fixing a mold problem in a classroom, does not constitute transformational leadership in and of itself. I also know that these nuts and bolts aspects of the principalship are important aspects of any school structure. While there is a role for transactional characteristics as an aspect of any leader's overall style, focusing on these characteristics does not get at the deeper and more purposeful values of true transformative leadership (Fullan, 2003). This realization helped me to come to the understanding that every action or experience is an opportunity and a leverage point to help move the school forward.

Burns (1978) argued that transformational leadership is defined by the ability of the leader to develop relationships within their organization and, through these relationships, create an environment where all members of the community become active, supportive participants in the vision of the organization. As I gain more experience, Burns' vision of transformational leadership is simultaneously closer and farther away from my own perception of my ability to do the job well. When I was first envisioning becoming a school leader, I was enthralled by the notion of being a transformational leader who could come in and help a school community to grow their instructional practices, to deepen the connections between teachers, and, ultimately affect the lives of children in meaningful and authentic ways. I looked at this vision in much the way

Sergiovanni (1992) envisioned transformational leadership: change as a growth process that is collectively guided with the support of a dedicated leader.

Perceptions of Leaders

What my first years as a principal have shown me is that are there a myriad of different leadership styles that individuals in a single building both desire and/or expect. Some teachers seem to carry a notion of a leader who just stays out of the way until the teacher needs something, and then immediately provides the something. Some seem to carry old images of patriarchs or generals, and automatically distrust anything that the "boss man" has to say. Some welcome a collegial conversation but then don't understand when the principal turns around and gives an order that must be followed. In times of stress, events often happen where people are in the same room as the principal and some are saying, "Just tell me what to do," and others are saying just as adamantly, "Don't you dare try to tell me what to do." These different images and expectations of what a good leader should be are often complicated by gender, age and ethnicity expectations.

The understanding that I, my role, and my actions would be perceived in many different ways was initially confusing to me. The very complexity of leadership led me to question whether or not I could be a transformational leader at all, and whether I could be a transformational leader as a new principal. I will come back to both of these questions in the conclusions of this paper.

After completing two years as a principal, I continue to search for what being a true principal means, but I do know that my challenge has been to clearly define it for the school community and myself. I have learned that I must take care of the transactional

events that happen every day in a school, or there will be no opportunity for any transformational events to occur. While this is consistent with prior research and theory on this topic, I was frustrated and saddened by how much time must apparently be spent in little events so that a "real" conversation can occur.

Founding a Facilitative Environment

In their review of the research done by the Consortium on Chicago School Reform, Sebring and Bryk (2000) discussed the finding that the quality of principal leadership is directly related to a school's ability to move student achievement and learning higher. Through a consistent focus on instruction and student learning within an inclusive and facilitative environment, principals are far more likely to be viewed as effective. Another aspect of effective leadership they discuss is the need to have efficient management systems and the ability "to get things done" (Sebring & Bryk, 2000). It has been my experience that, within a high performing school, there can be a dependency on the nuts and bolts as a priority because of the perception that all is going well in the instructional arena as demonstrated by the test scores. Thus, in the very place where teachers would seem to be freest from concerns about test scores, because the scores are consistently high, fears of dropping scores are just as strong as studies that report fears of not being able to raise scores.

There were historical patterns of behavior in this school community that were challenging for introducing ideas about change. My time and interactions were pushed over and over again towards maintenance of "the way things are" rather than bringing a sense of community-wide compelling narrative to examine our practices and moving

toward "the way things could be." Looking at a new horizon in teaching, or a new idea in collaboration, happened in bits and pieces, and occurred here and there. But I found it very difficult to bring about anything that looked like sustained deep conversation about teaching and learning to me. In the first 2 years, I was able to move several places on to the meeting agendas where deep talk could happen, or a demonstration of something new could occur. However, nothing I read about transformational leadership before trying to do it taught me how much time and patience would be required to accomplish what I saw as little steps.

What Transformative Leadership Looks Like

Hipp and Bredeson (1995) have stated, "What may seem obvious and purposeful to principals regarding their own transformational leadership behaviors may not be easily understood by teachers" (p. 146). They go on to say that "the purpose and intentions of principals' leadership behaviors are not necessarily viewed nor understood by teachers similarly (p. 146)." What Hipp and Bredeson are focusing on is that, even with the best of intentions, a principal's actions may not always be trusted. Whether this lack of trust is born out of a teacher's prior experience, the legacy of past principals, a teacher's own lack of confidence about teaching, or out of the pressure an individual might feel in relation to the need to meet expectations for achievement, there will always be those who mistrust the actions of the principal. I also found that trust in one situation with one person does not necessarily transfer to trust in another situation with the same person.

Gaziel (1995) found that "In order to be effective, principals are expected to be proactive and resourceful and to have personal visions that guide them in setting

priorities, so they are not consumed by organizational maintenance requirements" (p. 179). While my school community would agree with this statement, they also regularly directed me to start with maintenance requirements and work outward from there. My natural tendency is to do the opposite. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) pointed out that "Most models of transformational leadership are flawed by their under-representation of transactional practices (which we interpret to be 'managerial' in nature). Such practices are fundamental to organizational stability" (p. 114). My reflections on my experiences of the first 2 years as a principal completely support this statement. My growing awareness of my actions as a leader deepened my understanding of what balanced leadership is and the need to practice it more thoughtfully. I came to learn that one cannot simply be transformational and still be an effective leader of an organization. This is especially true for the principal of an elementary school who is the sole administrator in the building.

I learned that to simply "vision" and "dream aloud" without related action or attention to managerial detail ultimately decreased my effectiveness as the principal, in all arenas. This included my ability to foster each teacher's continuous growth. When I successfully demonstrated my ability to deal with something like a water shortage or a schedule problem, my credibility as a transformational leader went up. My credibility also went up when I was observed as a good teacher, as a good person, or as a friendly and supportive person in a teacher's work life. But there should be no mistaking the importance of transactional work in the middle of a transformational practice!

The transformational leadership literature is clear about the impact this type of leadership style has on a school and its culture (e.g. Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Leithwood

et al., 1996; Lincoln, 1989). What my experiences have shown that there is power in inspiring and building a strong professional learning community for those who are ready and open. However, for others, it became clear that before a strong culture of collective learning could be established, I had to prove myself as a leader who can take care of the details first and then prove my ability to run the building smoothly and with transparency. Only then would I have some credibility for raising some issues about change.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is this searching for the compelling reasons to engage in professional learning, while at the same time learning the role, responsibilities and expectations of being "the principal" that this study documents. While I have in no way arrived as a proficient principal, my journey over the first 2 years was profound and filled with learning that I believe will help others who find themselves sitting in the principal chair for the first time.

As these 2 years came to a close, I have come to look at our high performance through a different lens. Fullan (2003) describes the purpose of a transformational leader as not just about being sure students were making significant academic progress, but to be sure students are connected to the larger community and that they become thoughtful, caring and competent of that community. The reality of a community where both the social economic status of the students and test scores are extremely high is that the students have the foundation and an opportunity to become the leaders, inventors and problem solvers that will make a difference in society at large. I have come to realize that our compelling reason to grow and develop our strengths as a school community lie in a moral obligation to be sure the children in our charge remain curious and fervent in their learning and ability to solve problems, ask questions and seek answers that become the

foundation for seeking new learnings. If we simply rely on high scores rather than in-depth meaningful engagement, we will have lost a valuable opportunity.

Mortimore et al. (1988, in Southworth, 1990) discuss the connection between effective principals and their understanding of the school, its culture and its needs. Their point is that when principals are engaged in curriculum and instruction conversations, spend time in classrooms, and help teachers understand a variety of teaching strategies, their ability to assert their leadership in non-intrusive ways increases. The challenge in my first 2 years was finding my own voice and the confidence to know when to assert and when to let directions emerge. My natural inclination was towards emergence, but the reality of a teacher's daily life when collaboration and growth conversations are not the expectation inhibited the willingness or space for these discussions to occur.

When my father was in primary school, it was possible to teach everything there was to know at the time. New knowledge and understanding has been uncovered at an incredible pace and it is no longer possible to teach children all there is to know in the world. It is the moral obligation of schools to teach children to think, to be perceptive, to be inquisitive, to know how to solve problems, to work collaboratively, and to be able to analyze and interpret information and their experiences. In a school where children achieve at the highest possible level, it becomes even more important that these goals become the heart of our work. Change is difficult and it is important to value the experiences of those who have come before us, but it is our moral obligation to look critically at our practices in schools to be sure that we are meeting the needs of each and every child as we send them off into an ever more complex world.

As I carry on as a principal, the learning that evolved over the course of this study has been immense. To be very mindful of my practice through reflection has been so valuable. As I look forward, I realize that there needs to be more time to celebrate our work and the progress that is made. It is so easy to get mired in what needs to be changed that it is easy to forget to honor success and good work. Were I able to do these 2 years over again I would force myself to take more time to notice the good work that was all around me and to celebrate the successes of the community more fully. Being a novice principal in a high-performing school brings a complex set of challenges in relation to finding a compelling narrative for not just change, but for the work itself. I have come to understand that my compelling reason for doing the work of the principal is the obligation I feel towards children, teachers, and parents to foster environments that inspire learning, thinking, and thoughtfulness.

A key thing about leadership that I realized again and again is that change takes time. What I came to understand about myself is that the patience needed to see change through is harder for me than I once thought. While the first year was spent listening, watching, working on relationships and laying the foundation for my tenure at this particular school, I went into the second year with the desire to be more active and to use what I felt I had learned in the first year to start the process of being the transformational leader I had envisioned.

In reflecting back on the first year, it became very clear why such non-research-based articles such as, "Surviving the First Year – and Beyond" (Lovely, 2004), "Getting Through Year One" (Daly-Lewis, 1987), and "Life in a Fishbowl" (Davis, 1988), are so

prevalent. Those who have experienced or "lived through" the first year want to share with others their experiences and share a sense of unity over the trials and tribulations of that first year. Upon reflection of the year, it is clear to me that what I was searching for, beyond survival, was the compelling reasons that could serve as the tipping point to talk about our growth and change. In schools where there is community pressure to raise test scores, the compelling reason for change is evident in the basic need to focus on student achievement. In a high-performing school, student achievement is not the focus. I came into the role with the belief that that which would compel us to examine our work and grow to our own next level would simply be found in a collective hunger to learn and grow.

As I came up against both resistance and my own weaknesses as a novice principal, I knew that in order for there to be forward movement as a school and growth in my leadership, I needed to hold fast to my core values and beliefs about teaching and learning. I needed to leave space for growing my understanding and I needed to understand the work of teachers completely; however, my experiences have shown that people want there to be a person in charge – they want someone they can make the tough decisions, to take care of the details and to guide the school through both the good and bad times. I saw that it was my role to not just take on these expectations, but to take them on collaboratively. I know there is great power in teacher leadership and that people want to feel not only valued, but a part of the whole.

What I have come to understand is that there is a time for inviting collaboration and there is a time when being more directive is both needed and desired. This has

proved an uncomfortable place, but as the third year got underway, I found that, by being very clear about the framework for the year and my expectations, there is a greater willingness to engage in conversations about our work. I entered the first year with a sense that it was a community that wanted to engage in deep work and I have found that the more I take care of the transactional aspects of school, there is more space for the transformational side of the work.

The journey, from the day I was offered the position to now at the beginning of my third year, has been about discovering and attempting to understand the complex pathway a novice principal must travel in order to foster the type of climate, culture and strong learning community that brings a community together around a common vision of student learning. I learned that if I continued to honor the past while also talking about our continuous learning, the entire community felt more respected and thus willing to engage. Scanning the school environment, I know there a variety of places where the relationships are strong and other places where they continue to need nurturing. It is critical that in order for trust to truly develop, words and actions have to be in lockstep with each other.

The transformation literature argues that when the leader comes "alongside" teachers and builds a shared purpose for change and growth, the engagement in this change increases. However, what I found over 2 years was that when anyone was worried about whether or not the details had been taken care of, they were far less likely to engage with me in discussions of practice. It was my hope that a collective hunger to learn and grow would be enough of a compelling narrative for teachers to engage in

conversations about change. What I came to realize is that when I was first attentive to the transactional aspects of the school, teachers were far more likely to actively participate in explorations of the teaching and learning aspects of their work. It looked to me like all transactional, "housekeeping" aspects of the principalship had to be in place at all times for even a small space between to occur in which we might discuss the core teaching and learning reasons for our being together in the first place.

The transformational literature tends to paint transaction and transformation as opposite ends of the spectrum, where the goal for any principal is to leave the transactional aspects of leadership behind and become a "true" leader through transformational activities and behaviors. However, I came to see transaction and transformation more like two sides of the same coin. The trust built through taking care of the transactional left space for some willingness to be a part of potentially transformational conversations about curriculum and instruction.

I also found that when I pushed too hard in trying to advance teaming or other types of discussions on teaching and learning, some teachers would revert back to the apparent need to focus again on the transactional. It became clear to me over the 2 years that transactional behaviors must always be in place, and can serve as the door that opens the space for transformational actions. I learned to take care of what looked and felt like simple housekeeping tasks and to try to be patient waiting for any opportunities to talk about teaching and learning together. I knew I wasn't being patient enough when teachers got anxious over talking about teaching and drew the conversation back to transactional topics.

Trust is the underlying foundation to a leader's ability to be effective in the principal role. Trust brings a connection between the direction of the organization and the leader and is the way in which the space between can be identified and utilized. I learned that trust underscores all aspects of leadership. Whether it was through learning to repeatedly show understanding and honoring of the high performance legacy of the school, or slowly building confidence in my behavior and goals by consistency of my words and actions over time, the question of whether I was trusted enough to lead the conversation was always the issue. I found that trust was hard won, easily lost, and hard to regain. Trusting me in one setting did not always lead to trusting my behaviors in another setting. I found that I would think that there was a positive trust situation developed over time between me and specific teachers or parents, only to find trust revoked as soon as I differed in opinion or direction from a person. This was not always easy for me to predict or accept. I knew that my intentions were to help everyone help children, so it was hard for me to be accused of other motives. It was particularly difficult for me to accept this tension when it stopped us from getting better as a community of learners convened to support our children as learners. Sometimes it seemed to me like issues of trust were raised whenever I tried to take us closer to what our core goals should be – helping more children learn better. This was, and remains, a puzzle to me.

As I look back over these 2 years and the experiences I have had, I realize how they have deeply impacted me. The reflection in the moment was often frustrating and caused me to be mired in a sense that nothing was being accomplished. However, my reflection on my actions helped me to realize that my actions came from a place of firm

beliefs about children and their learning, and from a desire to support teachers as best I could. There are many things that I would most likely do differently if I could do them again, but we can only do the best we can with the information or knowledge we have at the time. What I have come to understand is that transformational leadership is challenging in a school that has a long history of excellence. This understanding circles back to the key underlying question of whether or not transformational leadership is even possible in the first years as a brand new principal. In fact, the key underlying question *is* whether or not transformational leadership is even possible in the first years as a brand new principal.

Limitations of the Study

The data for this study was collected primarily from my own experiences as a novice principal. While the conclusions drawn are generalizable to the experiences of other novice principals, they are also pulled out of my own experiences. Throughout this study, conclusions are drawn based on experiences and environmental factors grounded in both time and place. What is not addressed is the fact that I was a novice principal who was trying to make good decisions and support people based on my own intuition and sense of what was right. The literature on first-year principals is similar to the literature on new teachers in the sense that mentorship is critical to the ongoing success of the new hire. Over the course of this study, I received very little mentorship and thus there are times when my inexperience most likely caused certain events to go the way they did. Had I been more experienced or had a consistent mentor to help guide my work,

circumstances may have been different and thus the conclusions drawn may have been different.

Mentorship for new principals is equally as important as mentorship of new teachers. However, my district does not have the mechanism or resources for this to happen on a regular basis. Looking back, were I to have had a seasoned principal/mentor by my side as different situations presented themselves, or had I been able to have direct guidance in action, the issues of legacy and trust, for example, may not have guided the work as much as they did. I may have had the learned wisdom from an experienced voice to sense the pitfalls and to take time to acknowledge more fully the work that had come before my time.

This study does not really address the role of succession and how this may have impacted my experiences. The literature on leadership describes the actions of the leader in terms of the impact those actions have on the school and its forward motion (Alvy & Coladarci, 1985; Barth, 1990; Pepper & Thomas, 2002). This literature suggests that there is a correlation between the effectiveness of the principal and the success of the school in terms of student achievement, morale and overall culture. However, there is the reality of succession and the impact of the prior principal(s) on the culture and climate of the school. A brand new principal coming into their first school not only has to contend with developing a very quick understanding of the job, but also constantly hears about how the previous principal handled matters. In looking at my conclusions, had there been more mentorship, maybe my newness would not have had the impact it had, or at least I could have addressed it up front more effectively.

Another possible limitation could have been the fact that I was hired from within the district. In their study of novice principals, Alvy and Coladarci (1985) found that principals who are hired from within the district have more difficulties than do those principals who are hired from outside of the district. They argue that:

> Perhaps the outsider enjoys a "reciprocal distance." Insiders, on the other hand, may perceive in others the expectation that the insider *should* consider certain aspects of the situation – precisely those that the outsider is expected to ignore – in making administrative decisions. (p. 46)

Being an inside candidate gave me an advantage because I knew district expectations and was fully immersed in the culture of the district. However, did this also create some difficulties because there were added expectations placed on me because I was a known quantity and thus needed less guidance? Had I been from outside the district, would there have been more oversight and, in turn, could some of the pitfalls I encountered have been avoided?

There are also understandable questions of validity in relation to the methodology. Schon's (1983) process of framing reflection-in-action, suggests that a practitioner ask themselves the following two questions when reflecting on their work: "When a practitioner takes seriously the uniqueness of the present situation, how does he make use of the experience he has accumulated in his earlier practice?" and "In what sense, if any, is there rigor in on-the-spot experiment?" (p. 132-133). As I look back over my journals and other data sources, it is clear to me that I addressed both these questions and that they were at the heart of my ability to elaborate and reflect on my actions. Osterman (1990) argues that,

> Reflective practice fosters self-actualization and engenders a sense of empowerment. Assuming that the system can change and that the practitioner's efforts at personal improvement will ultimately determine organizational effectiveness, the reflective process enhances the sense of self-control and engages the person in system change. (p. 150)

Osterman's vision of reflective practice was at the core of my growing understanding of the role of the principalship. The power of reflection allowed me to learn, gain new insights, and in many cases change the perception I had of my practices and myself over these 2 years.

The data in this study is pulled from my experiences, as well as through conversations, end of year surveys and other communications with those who are naturally a part of the life of a principal. There was not a formal gathering of information from others about my performance that went beyond what any principal may do to garner feedback from a community. This may raise questions for some about the validity of the data. However, Coghlan and Brannick (2005) through their description of action research as research *in* action, rather than research *about* action set a framework that supports the validity of the data and collection method. By doing research where it is concurrent with emerging events and where these events are documented, I have been able to understand the emergence of the reality of my journey towards understanding in "real time." Coghlan & Brannick (2005) further state that action research requires a pre-step of setting the context and purpose of the research, setting a process in place for regular documentation and "meta-learning," and then reflecting upon what happens in a regularized and documented fashion. My system of collecting data and reflection is in line with this belief and thus creates validity in the findings.

Recommendations for Changing Practice

Mentorship of principals as they embark on their first and second years can be an effective tool to their success. The times when I had conversations about my work with other principals and district office personnel were valuable and gave me confidence in my actions. I can only speculate as to the power these types of conversations and side-by-side mentorship would have had on my first years as a principal. I had gained an insight from my experiences and from my own studies of leadership, but feedback and support in the moment of my day-to-day life as the principal would have had a positive impact on my experiences and the school community as a whole.

The interview process for principalships could be another area where practices could be changed. I came away from the interview process with what I thought was a clear picture of the school climate and culture. This left me unprepared, however, for the resistance I felt as I tried to implement that vision. Were I to have spent more time at the school speaking with a larger number of teachers and parents, I would have been able to develop a deeper understanding of the culture and thus had a different level of expectations for how to move the school forward.

Recommendations for Future Research

A question that remains for further study and reflection is whether or not a new principal will ever be able to be a transformative leader in his or her first years in a school, especially a school where the staff have been there for many years and have built a strong reputation for themselves and for the school as a whole.

A second area for further research is to explore the transfer of responsibility from one principal to another. I can only speculate as to the difference it would have made if I had time to work side-by-side with the outgoing principal for an extended period of time before I assumed total responsibility for the school. The ability to live within the culture of the school could have profound positive consequences for a new principal.

A third area of further research would to be to look at how the interview process impacts the first year of a principal. Candidates learn a great deal about an organization through the interview process, but are they capturing an accurate picture of the organization? Does the understanding of culture and climate gleaned through this process support or impact the transition into the principal position?

Throughout this study I focused on my own reflections of my actions. I felt that it was important to be mindful about my own practice and how my actions affected outcomes. However, there are many factors outside of the school building that have an impact on the experiences of a novice principal, such as the central office, contextual political and economic events, and relationships with unions. Thus, a fourth area of further research might be to look carefully at the role these outside agencies and contexts play in the perceived and real effectiveness of a new principal. Would more intervention have a positive or negative impact on the success of a novice principal?

Finally, the logical next steps for my own research would be to reflect back on these 2 years and the impact they had after I had been in the principal's chair for 5 or 6 years. Were the lessons I learned from these 2 years the foundation of helping me to be a more effective principal long after I could be classified as a novice? The novice-expert

literature (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2000; Marzano, 2001) could be a very useful lens from which to look at the transformation of a novice to a more seasoned school leader. It would be interesting to interview other novice and more experienced principals to gain more insight into the lasting impact the learning that occurs during the first 2 years has on a leader's ability to be effective.

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