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ABSTRACT

Principals, whose jobs are increasingly being reframed as requiring instructional leadership (Lunenburg, 2013; Hallinger, 2005), serve as a vital link between standards-based reform and its successful implementation at the school level (Fullan, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Spillane & Hunt, 2010). Standards-based reform or guidelines for change mandated by state government significantly influence teaching and learning (Beane, 2013). Our nation's latest iteration of standards-based reform is comprised within the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which are currently fully implemented in 42 states. Despite the essential role of the school leader in implementation of standards-based reform, research is limited on how principals understand their role, and how these understandings play out in practice. The goal of this research was to address this research gap and directly explore how principals perceive their role in facilitating implementation of the CCSS.

Based upon sensemaking theory, as explained by Coburn and Talbert (2006) and activity theory, as explained by Engestrom (1999), Nardi (1996), and Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004), this study explores how individuals make meaning of information and/or events from interacting within their school environment. Through semi-structured interviews with (current and past) elementary school principals leading nationally recognized, Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence and document analysis of demographic data, this study makes sense of how instructional leaders negotiate and facilitate mandated change.

Findings illuminated school culture and reflective practice of school leaders as important factors influencing implementation. Participants also identified three factors, from their perspectives, in successful change: the cultivation of strong sustained school culture oriented toward continual improvement and student achievement, the strategic development within the

school culture of authentic relationships and trustworthy leadership, and the establishment of shared decision-making and distribution of leadership within the school environment.

Participants described the role of the instructional leader as one of support and service, explained the challenges they faced in the implementation of the CCSS, and revealed the emotional work associated with their reflective practice. Findings are relevant to training of instructional leaders and serve to inform future research involving the ways principals interact with curriculum and instruction as it relates to standards-based reform.

Keywords: Common Core State Standards, rigor, instructional leadership, school culture, standards-based reform

**LEADING CURRICULAR CHANGE:
THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Instructional Design, Development & Evaluation
in the Graduate School of Syracuse University.

December, 2015

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By

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey from graduate student to doctoral candidate to dissertation is a defining experience. It would not be possible without the support of those who influenced, cared, shared, and even sacrificed for my benefit along the way. I was empowered throughout this journey by many extraordinary individuals. I am eternally grateful for their support, and I hold them dearly in my heart. Without them I would not have been able to meet this challenge and accomplish this goal. It's true that who we are is the sum of everyone we meet along the way, and I am grateful to these individuals who factor most heavily into the equation that amounts to the sum of me. With sincere gratitude, I share this accomplishment with the many people who influenced, supported, and shared their generosity with me on this path to scholarship.

To those individuals who served as members of my defense committee, I offer special thanks. Thank you to Dr. Jerry Evensky for serving as Graduate School Representative and Chair of the Oral Examination, and to Dr. John Tillotson and Dr. Susan Monaghan for serving as outside examiners. It was an honor to have your participation, and I am grateful for your time.

To my amazing committee, Dr. Jerry Edmonds, Dr. Rob Pusch, and Dr. Jennie Weiner, a synergy of three amazing scholarly forces, who gave so much of themselves for my betterment: I am truly and humbly grateful to each of you for the difference you've made in my life. Thank you for your knowledge, your time, and your continued support throughout my journey. Thanks for sticking with me and providing me the ways and means to keep pushing on.

To Dr. Jerry Edmonds, whose guidance as my committee chairperson paved a path for me over many years and helped me build the structures that would lead me to success: Jerry, you made it possible for me to be here and persevere. Thank you for your pearls of wisdom, like "Don't think about the whole thing," which not only applied to my dissertation, but also provided me a valuable life lesson. You said, "You can do this," and you shone the light for me on the clear path to getting here. Thank you for a place at SUPA where I could accomplish this journey. It was through your continual encouragement and your belief in me that I was able to see it through.

To Dr. Rob Pusch, whose guidance and support as methodology expert generously and skillfully helped me craft my abilities to create and conduct research: Thank you Rob, for countless hours of discussion and mentorship as a dissertation advisor. Thanks for helping me figure out how to sit with ambiguity and for coaching me through my program. By opening my eyes when it was time to start my program, and looking out for me along the way, I credit my doctoral pursuit and scholarly accomplishment to your support. Thank you for helping me to achieve my aspirations. Words can't express my gratitude for your influence.

To Dr. Jennie Weiner, whose guidance and support as content expert not only shaped my dissertation, but also taught me to be more like the scholar I aspire to be: Thank you, Jennie, for turning around my submissions and providing feedback instantly, always writing copious notes, and taking so much time and care to show me how to improve. You helped me to navigate through challenges and make necessary changes. Amazingly, from another state even, you coached me every step of the way into learning how to write a dissertation. I am in awe of your

wisdom, knowledge, and the generous way you go about sharing it. Humbly, I also thank you for helping me to find my own voice and reminding me how to use it. You always went above and beyond advising me through the dissertation process, and in doing so; you have made such a difference in my life. Thank you, Jennie, for being a sturdy pillar of support, even from a distance, especially by taking care to know when I needed your help and generously offering your time and yourself just to help me grow and change for the better. I am eternally grateful to you, and forever a fan of AERA for bringing us together.

To Carolyn Hirst Loucks and Kim Loucks, dear friends and precious mentors who in my heart are much more the closest of family, I express sincere gratitude. Your collective guidance through the years has encouraged me to hold my head up in times of struggle and believe in myself. You have motivated me when I've been in doubt or gotten stuck and pushed me through in ways I couldn't have managed on my own. Your interest, thought-provoking questions, cheer, and example as leaders in education have been an inspiration for me. Your belief in me made me continue to believe in myself. Carolyn, your continued mentorship has shaped me as a professional and provided me the very best role model to strive to emulate. Kim, the laughter and fun you share so generously has brought me warmth and joy and kept me smiling in ways that nurture the soul. You have both been the rubber mat to any pitfalls that stood in my way, the direction around any obstacles that may have stopped me, and the fuel that kick-started me, time and again, when I stalled. I am forever grateful to you and dearly love you both.

To Syracuse University Project Advance, I am grateful for the opportunity to work among so many dedicated individuals. Thank you to the directors, the program administrators, the staff, faculty liaisons, and fellow doctoral students at SUPA with whom I've had the pleasure of working. I have enjoyed engaging in intellectual conversations and benefitted from your support and encouragement. The people and the work at SUPA have made it a place at which I have been excited to get up and come to work everyday. Thank you to all who have been a part of that.

To the Instructional Design, Development & Evaluation Department in the School of Education, including Drs. Tiffany Koszalka, Jing Lei, Chuck Spuches, Scott Shablak, and Jerry Klein, (among others) whose guidance and instruction helped to shape me along the way as an aspiring scholar, I express my thanks. Special thanks to Linda Tucker for being a guide and source of information, and for taking such care to help me, and all the rest of us, whenever needed. Special thanks also to two professors who have greatly inspired me, Drs. Nick Smith and Phil Doughty.

To Dr. Nick Smith, thank you for serving as my academic advisor and for teaching me to think differently in order to solve problems. I learned more from one hour a week in your courses than I have ever learned from any other teacher. You helped me strive toward high expectations for academic growth to become a different, better version of myself, more congruent within myself, and more like the self I want to be. Thanks for coaching me through my craziness and concerns along the way. Thank you for your wisdom.

To Dr. Phil Doughty, who really is the person who inspired me on my life path like no other ever has, and in doing so put me on my path to scholarship, which was a path I hadn't

considered until my outlook on life was forever changed by Phil. One conversation with Phil was enough to make me believe absolutely anything is possible. Phil said "...sure," in response to challenges others thought were too great. With a (then) new "Huge!" car commercial, Phil created a life metaphor, which inspired me to leave my secure, tenured position as a teacher to come to IDD&E intent on changing the world. Thank you Phil for your guidance and advice throughout my graduate studies. As a first generation graduate student, the type of mentorship I received from you was out of my reach before I met you. I know I am but one of many who hold you in a special place within our hearts as an inspiration and regard you as an amazing mentor. Thank you for giving of yourself so fully to us as your students. Thank you for making such a difference in our lives.

To Deborah Capri, Micah Shippee, Leigh Tolley, Michael Webb, and Karen Zannini Bull who walked this journey with me. Thank you for giving me a safe place to open up, and for sharing your thoughts and feedback with me as we struggled together through the inevitable challenges of striving together toward creativity and scholarship. I am so pleased and proud for each of you in your accomplishments on your own doctoral journeys. Mostly I am grateful to know each of you and your friendship.

To Melissa Lowry, thanks for keeping me on task with my head in the game! "Is there something you should be doing?" It's your turn now, my friend.

To Michael Eiffe, whose inspiration as a colleague, generosity as a professional, and kind spirit as a friend, has demonstrated for me, and for many others, the knowledge, skill, optimism, and heart it takes to be a strong instructional leader in a steadfastly changing field of education.

To my dear friends Amy Feeney and Alanna Schoonmaker, who pulled me away from my computer and kept me focused on a healthy balance of real life and dissertation work. Thank you for mid-week dinners and get-togethers, and for your consistent messages of encouragement through long stretches of hard work. You are my breath of fresh air outside the inevitable madness of striving toward creativity and scholarship. I am blessed to call you my friends.

To my uncle, Ron Caruana, whose continued support, interest, encouragement, and faith in my ability to succeed has kept me focused on my goals: Like a lighthouse in a storm, thanks for being a safe place to land. Thank you for your time, your feedback, and for caring about my work and my personal growth.

To my grandmother, Ann Caruana, for saying a rosary for me every day of my life. Thank you for your prayers. I know they were powerful! What a generous and amazing gift. Love you.

To Aunt Ida and Uncle Paul Sedor...I did it. Can I take you to dinner now? Thank you for supporting, encouraging, pushing, and believing in me. Love you both.

To my grandfather, Sam Caruana. You made sure I grew up understanding that "Education is the most important thing." I listened and took it to heart. I hope this makes you proud. This is for you.

For Sammy Carr

There is only one way to learn. It is through action. Everything you need to know you have learned through your journey.”
~Paulo Coelho

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Within the U.S. Education system, there is a tendency for faddism, i.e., when policies come in and out of style, oscillating like a pendulum between wide adoption of new ideas and giving up on those new ideas, only to swing back to another new idea. Slavin (2008) describes the “pendulum swing” as change driven by the evaluation of an innovation based upon preference more than “evidence” (p. 124). There is also a tendency for government to create “reform fatigue” for teachers and administrators. As mentioned by Hinchman and Moore (2013) these wearying “waves” of change are particularly true regarding curricular change and standards-based reform (p. 441). Efforts to adopt a new program or theory or strategy are often tossed aside to make way for the next innovative process, only to be brought back again in a different package or form or as a means of recapturing what was lost years prior. This has caused educators to accept, if not in defeat, the tendency for innovation to be impermanent and for their efforts to make change fruitless (Gewertz, 2012c). In turn, this leads to challenges for instructional leaders concerning implementation of new curricula and/or instruction with teachers and staff who are reluctant or even resistant to change.

Successful leaders value high standards, clarity in communication, and transparency in authentic professional relationships to implement and sustain curricular change and improve student development and achievement. In response to resistance to standards-based reform and the general notion that the pendulum always swings back (i.e., old ideas related to curriculum and instruction eventually resurface as new again), one school leader with whom I have had the pleasure of discussing matters of change within schools focuses his teachers on a simple, salient shared philosophy, “Our pendulum swings only in one direction, toward kids,” i.e., no matter what the situation, policy, or change, kids and what is best for kids are always the priority. It is

this type of collective focus on collaborative efforts to continually improve practices and procedures for the benefit of all students that successful leaders invoke in the implementation of curricular change mandated by standards-based reform.

This is a study of school leaders and how they perceive their role as instructional leaders in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a form of standards-based reform. Unlike previous research on instructional leaders, this study explored the “how” rather than simply the “what” of instructional leadership. In other words, this research aimed to extend beyond what leaders should do as evidence of best practice, to explore how leaders made sense of their role and enacted those understandings in practice. Using qualitative methods, including interviews and document analysis, I examined perceptions of school leaders regarding the implementation of CCSS in their respective school environments, and I considered how they understood their role in that process of that implementation. In this introductory chapter, I explain how my interests in instructional leadership as it pertains to mandated change are relevant within the context of that standards-based reform. I also identify and define some relevant keywords. Finally, I give a brief description of the theoretical frameworks upon which I draw within this research.

The Common Core State Standards call for a change in what students are expected to learn (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010), and hence present schools with a top-down directive, challenging instructors to change what and/or how they teach (Beane, 2013; Gewertz, 2013). These standards are intended to be benchmarks for what students should know and be able to do in order to graduate high school prepared for college and career (Carmichael et al., 2010; Beane, 2013). Serving as guidelines for instruction, the standards influence “state assessments, accountability systems, teacher preparation, licensure, professional development, curricula,

materials, and more” (Carmichael, Martino, Porter-Magee & Wilson, 2010; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; Porter-Magee & Wilson, 2010, p. 1). Fully adopted at their initial stage of implementation by 45 states (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010), rigorous fundamental shifts in instruction required by the standards (Coleman, 2011; Hinchman & Moore, 2013) have presented implementation challenges in schools across the nation (Conley, 2011; Alberti, 2013; Gewertz, 2013).

Recently, opposition to the new standards increased with regard to testing load, academic rigor, and questions regarding process and funding associated with adoption of the standards (Ravitch, 2013; Ujifusa, 2013a). On the other hand supporters argue that strategic and authentic implementation of the Common Core is key to successful curricular and instructional change (Conley, 2011; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013). They say that such thorough implementation requires a level of instructional change that surpasses superficial adjustments like new textbooks or shallow test preparation (Alberti, 2013; Carmichael et al., 2010). In this way, implementation must be integrated fully into school curricula, goals, and missions to maximize the collective energy of teachers and students that drive reform (Fullan, 2011).

Standards-based reform, like the adoption and implementation of the CCSS, has a history of falling short of success (Newman & Wehlage, 1995) due to the various factors that influence what is required for a successful change to take effect (Fullan, 2006). One of these factors is the effectiveness of instructional leaders, and particularly their ability to approach school leadership with a balance of priorities that includes goal-setting, teaching and learning, and school culture (Hallinger, 2005), play a key role in the implementation of standards-based education reform (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001; Coburn, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2007).

Indeed it has become increasingly clear that instructional leadership, typically a role carried out by the principal (Hallinger, 2005), has a significant, and often direct, influence on

student learning (Spillane & Hunt, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Edmonds, 1979). Instructional leadership may be considered an approach to leadership, or more specifically the activities performed by a leader with instructional expertise. Hallinger (2010) distinguished between the two definitions and opted for the broader conceptualization of instructional leadership as a type of leadership or “leadership for learning” (p. 126). In this way, Hallinger began to look at the thoughts, abilities, and actions of principals as they were enacted throughout the school environment or culture. This conceptualization presented the opportunity to examine instructional leadership both as it influenced, and was influenced by, school processes and conditions. Regardless of leadership style and/or structure, whether it be top-down or more distributed among school personnel within the context of a school environment, what seems most critical with regard to education reform and successful school improvement, is how leadership practice is undertaken and how principals adapt their styles to the needs of their schools (Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane et al., 2004; Hallinger, 2010).

As in response to CCSS, schools implement a hastily coordinated and communicated new set of rules for what standards to teach (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013; Ravitch, 2013; Porter, 2013), the role of the principal in mandated change is vital to implementation. Making required shifts in instruction toward the Common Core necessitates strong leadership (LaPointe & Davis, 2006) characterized by clearly communicated vision, explicit expectations, and strategic decisions (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013). By establishing clear understanding of how effective leaders approach standards-based reform, we are better informed with regard to steps toward and/or pitfalls detracting from successful standards-based reform, and are better equipped to train and develop successful instructional leaders.

Given that each participant purposefully selected for this study led an award winning, elementary level, National Blue Ribbon School (selected by the United States Department of Education as a high performing school), the assumption was made that all participants were instructional leaders. Through thematic analysis of the principal interviews and documents related to principals' practices associated with standards-based reform, this study investigated how these instructional leaders made sense of their role in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Additionally, literature raised the issue of school culture as important within the context of mandated change (Fullan, 2006; Hallinger, 2010); therefore, it may influence principal abilities, actions, and processes. The importance of school culture is noted and recognized within the context of this study; however, the focus of this research is not for the purpose of studying school culture.

The Common Core State Standards, implemented as a new standards-based reform in the United States by schools across the nation bring about a variety of terms to be discussed throughout documentation of this study. For the sake of clarity and definition, I describe and explain those terms as used in this study in the following section.

Key Terminology

The National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) introduced the Common Core State Standards Initiative in 2010 to provide guidelines for teaching and learning intended to better prepare students for college and career. Designed to increase instructional rigor and further develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, the standards contributed to a larger reform movement of education in the United States.

Rigor of academic standards prior to adoption of the CCSS, meaning the level of skills and knowledge at which students were challenged before 2010, were known to be inconsistent

and varied from state to state (Carmichael et al., 2010; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013). A major purpose behind the development of the CCSS was to increase levels of, and balance definitions and perceptions of, rigor across all states (Blackburn, 2011). According to its proponents, the aim of the CCSS is not to make learning harder or impose excessive challenges for students at younger ages; rather the goal is for students to master “deep, authentic command” (Alberti, 2013, p. 27) of skills, concepts, and application with regard to learning. While some argue the shifts required for the CCSS are too rigorous, or that the increased rigor sets “unrealistic expectations” (Ujifusa, 2013b, p. 18) for student achievement, others maintain the standards fail to be as rigorous as intended (Porter, McMaken, Hwang & Yang, 2011a; Alberti, 2013). McDonnell and Weatherford (2013) noted that previous standards in some states were “higher and more rigorous standards than the CCSS” (p. 495). Some states opted out of adoption altogether because they determined the rigor of their standards to be superior, and others since have dropped the CCSS, or paused accountability measures for review and to make recommendations in favor of alternatives. Rigor may be a source for debate over the CCSS, however increased rigor, as noted by Chatterji (2002) is definitive of standards-based reform.

Education reform, as defined by Newman and Wehlage (1995), is a “comprehensive redesign” (p.8) of a school system. Standards-based reform is restructuring that explicitly links what schools teach to student performance (Lawrenz, Huffman, & Lavoie, 2005). Standards-based reforms change concepts and skills taught, thereby restructuring curricula away from requirements of traditional practice that are defined as inferior towards new expectations for teaching and learning designed to increase student learning (Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Lawrenz et al., 2005). In this study, the terms education reform and standards-based reform are

used interchangeably. Together these reforms are defined as changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the purpose of improving student readiness for college and career.

Instructional leaders juggle numerous and various responsibilities on a daily basis including management of personnel, budgets, public relations, and strategic planning, as well as supervision of curriculum (Lynch, 2012). The instructional leader, as defined by Hallinger (2005), based on the model developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), supervises and monitors teaching and learning in the school, facilitates the development of successful goals, and builds school culture dedicated to continual improvement of teaching and learning. The individual in the role of an instructional leader is busy, responsive, and adaptable.

It is also important to distinguish, however, the traditional view of the principal in the more managerial role of a building administrator, from that of an instructional leader (Hess & Kelly, 2007). Commonly, in research and practice, a principal whose leadership style is relatively top-down, directing the managerial tasks and instructional improvement efforts in the school is referred to as an instructional leader (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). In this way the leader's approach to responsibilities with regard to instructional improvement and the academic program define the principal, whether or not the individual has the skill-set to support instructional practice in the school. More recently, instructional leadership is increasingly defined by the leader's skills and knowledge with regard to curriculum, instruction, and academic improvement, or rather by his/her ability of the individual to serve as a leader for instruction (Hess & Kelly, 2007; Grissom & Loeb, 2010). Within this definition, strong instructional leaders possess the skills to be hands-on leaders and involved in the classroom; they observe and interact with teachers, and they are visible within the school and its classrooms (Hornig & Loeb, 2010; Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013). Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013)

noted these “functions that support teaching and learning” (p. 433) as behaviors that define the concept of instructional leadership. The present research is concerned with how principals perceive these behaviors to manifest in their typical workday, as well as to determine how principals view their instructional leadership role: as an approach to managing instruction, or a skill-set empowering their support of instructional practice.

Instructional leaders in this study were school leaders who serve or once served as building-level principals from elementary schools, designated as high performing by the United States Department of Education, and recognized as National Blue Ribbon Schools due to demonstrated and recognized high performance and documented involvement (as evidenced by the extensive application and review process for Blue Ribbon Schools) by the principal in reflective practice. This study refers to the term instructional leader where participants discuss the role of the instructional leader and refers in a more general sense to participants of the study as school leaders. The study directly addresses questions with school leaders regarding their perceptions of how they understand and enact their role as instructional leaders implementing the CCSS as a mandated standards-based reform.

Research Questions

As already mentioned, the purpose of this research was to address the current gap in research regarding on how instructional leaders understand their role and how they enact these understandings in practice. To do so, I deployed qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis, to explore how principals perceive their role in facilitating implementation of the CCSS. On this basis, research questions investigated in this study were:

1. According to principals from highly effective schools, what do they perceive as the role of the instructional leader with regard to the implementation of standards-based reform like the Common Core State Standards?
2. How do those perceptions shape the enactment of their activities/thoughts within their school environment?

To answer these questions, I used the framework of sensemaking theory, as explained by Coburn and Talbert (2006). This theory focuses on how individuals build new frameworks for existing beliefs to “make meaning of new information or events” (p. 471) and hence was useful for explaining how leaders described ways they processed new information and solved matters they perceived to be problems (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Weick, 1995). The study also draws upon activity theory, as explained by Engestrom (1999) and Nardi (1996) and Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004), to understand how individuals make meaning from interacting within their environment. This research explores how individual beliefs are influenced by or evolve within a school environment.

Summary

This study was a timely investigation of instructional leadership in the context of standards-based reform. In particular, I explored how instructional leaders, argued to be a strong influence on teachers and student achievement (Gallagher, 2012), perceived the CCSS and their experiences implementing this mandated change. Emerging themes from this study formed basis for illustrating principal practices that may potentially empower teachers and lead high performing schools to become instructionally effective (Hallinger, 1992b).

In this chapter, I have outlined the development of my interests in the role of instructional leadership in implementation of CCSS as standards-based reform and provided background

information relevant to the CCSS and instructional leadership. Additionally, I have indicated the purpose for this research was to contribute to our collective knowledge of how instructional leaders understand their role and how they enact these understandings in practice. The remaining chapters are organized as follows. The second chapter provides a review of literature relevant to the research. Chapter Three explains the research methodology and accounts for methods used within the study. Chapters Four, Five, and Six present findings of the study based upon themes that emerged during analysis of interview and demographic data. Finally, in Chapter Seven I consider implications for research and practice based upon meaning constructed through ideas associated with sensemaking theory and activity theory.

This research contributes to a body of literature that informs the blueprint for preparing and informing instructional leaders for practices necessary in the development of school improvement and academic achievement (Cuban, 1988 as cited by Hallinger, 1992a). Exploring principal perceptions regarding their practices provides means for describing sensemaking and enactment for instructional leaders in the process of implementing mandated change via the Common Core State Standards.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contextualizes the study in the existing literature relevant to the topic of instructional leaders and their role in the implementation of standards-based reform. This literature review provides an account of what is already known about the topic, specifically involving standards-based reform, the CCSS, and instructional leadership, and it also describes how this research contributes to a gap in the literature regarding how leaders make sense of and enact their understandings of their role as it relates to their practices. Finally this chapter presents limitations of prior existing research involving instructional leadership and standards-based reform.

Standards-Based Reform

The call for education reform is not new, but it resonates today as issue of concern across the nation. At the same time, reform efforts have been known to swing back, as a pendulum does, when old ideas re-emerge and take on a new improved form (Hinchman & Moore, 2013; Slavin, 1989). Tyack and Cuban (1995) see the pendulum metaphor as flawed because they assert that it fails to acknowledge real progress may be made even as ideas shift back and forth. Spillane (2004) indicated that by focusing too heavily on the person and agency associated with implementation of reform, the pendulum metaphor fails to capture the important “distinctions associated with the situation,” i.e., interactions that occur within the “organization structures and traditions” of the school (p. 176). Glidden (1996) however, with concern about sweeping shifts from traditional mathematics curricula to newer mandates, depicted the pendulum metaphor as a strong momentum towards a developing trend. In this study I view the pendulum metaphor as a means for capturing how and why change in education may be hard and often may be met with resistance from teachers responsible for implementing reforms in their instructional practices.

Such regard for the swings and cycles associated with reform may be traced throughout the history and evolution of standards-based reform in the United States.

Since the early 1980s, many terms have been used to refer to reform efforts; the specific term “standards-based reform” reflects a collective effort of individual states to respond to a push towards increased rigor and accountability in instruction (Chatterji, 2002). Horn (2002) stated that “reform” in the education sector is inherently politically driven and no real consensus exists for the true meaning of the term. As we continue to strive towards reform, it behooves us to understand the path curricular standards-based reform has followed historically so we can make meaning of curricular efforts more deeply.

The modern educational system was established in the early 1900s and modeled after the factories of the Industrial Revolution. Industrialized structures, such as bells between classes, lunch lines, and class/ability grouping are still used in schools today. The 1950s brought about some of the first radical reform efforts of modern education in attempts at ending segregation in schools. At the time, the success of the Soviet Sputnik program escalated fear and uncertainty in America in an already tense Cold War atmosphere (Powell, 2007). The ensuing perceived technological gap between the two nations precipitated the launch of NASA’s space program, which led to federal funds distribution for instructional reform in math, science, engineering, and technology education, as well as a focus on enriching instruction for gifted students (Powell, 2007; Ravitch, 2010). The 1960s and 1970s saw some radical reform efforts to make education less stifling for students including the tearing down of walls to create open classrooms, curricula with fewer requirements, and allowance for students to choose/determine what they learned (Ravitch, 2010). As our nation continued to evolve from industrialized structures, there was a

sense that schools needed to improve to keep up with changing times, and at this time a call for national accountability on the part of teachers and students became prevalent.

It was in the 1980s, under the Reagan administration, that *A Nation At Risk*, a report that blamed the education system for what was perceived to be America's slipping position as a world power brought about what would ultimately become a decades-long standards-based reform movement (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The report written by the National Commission of Excellence in Education, under direction of Secretary of Education, Terrel Bell, demonstrated our nation's first collective efforts to restructure schools (Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Ravitch, 2010; Graham, 2013). It was boldly written and intended to call our national community to attention regarding our failing schools and our collective need for more rigorous, measurable learning standards (Graham, 2013). The report addressed problems in schools regarding graduation requirements, teacher preparation, curriculum and curricular materials, and the quality of education for all students. In response, as noted by Newman & Wehlage (1995), new batches of reforms were introduced including "decentralization, shared decision-making, school choice, schools within schools, flexible scheduling with longer classes, teacher teaming, reduction of tracking and ability grouping, external standards for school accountability, and new forms of assessment, such as portfolios" (p. 8). Alarming claims in this report about mediocrity and lack of high expectations threatening our Nation's future provoked a movement for education reform in the United States as a matter of national security. As noted by Tyack and Cuban (1995), the report prompted state governments to generate "more education laws and regulations than they had generated in the past twenty years" (p. 7). For the first time there was a push for "common academic curriculum required for all students" (Newman & Wehlage, 1995, p. 8).

This trend towards greater focus on increasing rigor as well as instructional content and delivery continued for almost a decade. The early 1990s brought about the introduction of standards-based reform with the launch of outcomes or performance-based education (Hurst, Tan, Meek, & Sellers, 2003). It was at this time that those leading the reform movement shifted their attention from what was being taught to how it was being measured.

Additional reforms emphasizing outcomes (e.g., students scoring “proficient” on a state exam) over input (e.g., per student expenditures on materials for instruction) were prevalent in the 90s and included the adoption of state generated standards for learning, assessment for accountability, and government programs created in school finance and teacher training (Hurst et al., 2003). Such reforms put emphasis on the facilitation of learning in student-centered environments leading to reform strategies like block scheduling and project-based learning. The decade also saw a strong push for preschool instruction including Montessori programs, as well as Whole Language instruction, which attempted to immerse students in a literacy rich environment with less focus on rote skills like phonics, grammar, and sentence structure to improve overall literacy for students. By the end of the 90s, ELA and math standards were adopted in almost all states; school finance reforms were established for the provision of fair and adequate resources, and teacher-training programs were geared toward increasing the effectiveness of all teachers. However, as the 90s waned, two decades and many reforms had come and gone, district budgetary cuts were on the rise, as was teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2000; Moran, 2003; Hurst et al., 2003; Graham, 2013). Together these reform efforts did not appear to be working to adequately improve our system of education.

In response, in the early 2000s, under the Bush Administration, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed. The bill, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

(ESEA) prompted a great stress on accountability for student performance on the part of teachers and administrators (Moran, 2003; Rothman, 2012). The bill has not been without controversy. Detractors have argued that the legacy of NCLB has amounted to perhaps the most “misguided effort” (Graham, 2013) in the history of curricular standards based reform. Others argued that NCLB provided necessary improvements over standards in existence at that time. It seems that while NCLB was intended to raise student academic achievement and close cultural gaps in education, many feel that it has done more to harm students than help them (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Graham, 2013). In particular, some have argued that the policy’s complexities interfered with professional decision-making on behalf of individual students, which hindered conditions like smaller class size, professional growth and development for the training of highly-qualified teachers, and equitable measures of accountability, conditions under which all students have the ability to learn (Moran, 2003; Darling-Hammond). Another unintended consequence of NCLB’s increased pressure for higher test scores was a tendency to teach to the test, including limiting the curriculum to tested subjects (Rothman, 2012).

Considering these earlier efforts, one can begin to see that the CCSS as simply the latest and most recent development in a long line of education reform efforts. Thirty years later, the new standards are still trying to address problems identified in *A Nation at Risk* including the “challenge to adopt more rigorous and measureable” educational standards (Graham, 2013). These Common Core standards attempt to address contemporary concerns in education by focusing on critical thinking and problem solving skills, literacy in content areas, and increased accountability for all teachers and administrators. As was the case with *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the Common Core State Standards Initiative introduced in 2010 once again calls for big changes in the way we teach and learn.

Common Core State Standards

The Common Core Standards, developed in 2010 by NGA and the CCSSO, are a set of shared goals and explicit expectations for what students should know and be able to do in each grade level across K-12. The standards were designed to address how we best prepare students for college, attend to the instructional gaps that exist between grade levels and teach students to think and learn strategically (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). They were created with these and other priorities in mind.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative's mission statement states:

The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy. (2012)

The standards do not dictate how to teach. Rather they provide a specific guideline for what students need to “successfully enter college and the workplace” (Hinchman & Moore, 2013, p. 441). They provide research-based guidelines for student knowledge and skills at each grade level (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). The CCSS are currently available for English language arts and literacy and in mathematics (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). Frameworks for social studies standards as well as plans for “Next Generation Science” standards have been in development.

These standards are internationally benchmarked, and they are designed to allow for accurate comparison of results in student achievement from one state to another (CCSSI, 2012; Porter et al., 2011a). Such standards help to address the needs of students with high mobility, in that schools in different states would be adhering, and hence teaching, to the same standards. In the initial phase of implementation, 45 states and the District of Columbia fully adopted these standards (CCSSI, 2012; Jochim & Lavery, 2015). States that did not adopt the CCSS and had not adopted as of 2015-2016 school year, included Virginia, Nebraska, and Alaska, opting instead to keep their own standards, as well as Texas, which is publically opposed to potential interference from the federal government and implementation costs. Minnesota adopted the ELA standards, but not math (due to legislative restrictions until 2015 from earlier revisions to existing math standards); so Minnesota is sometimes included in the literature where “46” states have been reported as having been adopted. In addition the District of Colombia, the American Samoa Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands have adopted these standards; Puerto Rico, as of 2015-16, has not. The Department of Defense has also adopted the standards. The state-led mandate was introduced with initial support from organizations such as the College Board, the National Parent Teacher Organization, and the Association of School Administrators (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010).

Today, as the standards are being implemented under mounting opposition, some states have called for limited participation or have revoked the standards altogether (Jochim & Lavery, 2015; Rentner & Kober, 2014). Although Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina initially adopted the standards, each state has since officially opted out in favor their own standards. To date, 10 states: Alabama, Alaska, Oklahoma, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Utah, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Florida have pulled out of their original testing consortia, meaning they would

not be implementing tests designed by Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) nor by Smarter Balance, as were the original agreements (NPR, 2014). By the start of the 2014-15 school year, more than 20 states had introduced bills before their respective state governments to repeal involvement with the Common Core. Indiana was the first to drop out in March of 2014, followed soon after by the remaining three states mentioned above. Two states, Missouri and North Carolina, have passed bills as of 2015 to review and replace the standards, but neither state has repealed them, and the rest have officially failed (NPR, 2014; Jochim & Lavery; 2015). Taken together, as 2015 approaches an end, eight states have either opted out or pulled out of CCSS adoption including: Texas, Alaska, Nebraska, Virginia, Minnesota; as well as Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina.

Despite varied success regarding standards adoption across the nation, educators initially anticipated the CCSS with optimism and enthusiasm (Coleman, 2011; Gewertz, 2012; Jochim & Lavery, 2015). The standards were designed with explicit focus on greater depth over breadth of study, which results in student ability to develop expert knowledge and skills in each subject area (Porter et al., 2011a; Stage, Asturias, Cheuk, Daro, & Hampton, 2013). Several shifts, a number of which have evolved over time, in the areas of ELA and Mathematics were required to align curriculum and instruction with the standards. Focus on reading informational texts as well as writing using critical arguments and in-depth research with emphasis on analysis and presentation were included in shifts towards English language arts and literacy standards (Stage et al., 2013; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). English/language arts standards now emphasize use of evidence-based writing and answering questions based on reading from texts (NPR, 2014). In mathematics there now exists a greater focus on coherence rather than mere content acquisition (Beane, 2013; Stage et al., 2013). Algebra is no longer approached until high school, and

calculus is not fully covered in high school (NPR, 2014). These shifts present a challenging adjustment for teachers and for students (Gewertz, 2011), and implementation is contingent upon a full integration of the standards into school curricula and classroom lessons (Alberti, 2013). These rigorous shifts, anticipated to better prepare students for college and career, were once looked upon favorably by many (Jochim & Lavery, 2015) However following the rollout of the standards by each participating state's government, they have become a source of contention and debate.

Increased rigor and expectations for academic achievement in each grade level is one such source of great debate. Defined by Blackburn (2008) as cited in the later article "Common Core State Standards...Only the Beginning," academic rigor is the establishment and cultivation of an educational environment in which high levels of achievement are expected of and demonstrated by students through support from teachers (Blackburn, 2011). The CCSS have intentionally increased rigor in the classroom and set guidelines for a strong foundation on which students may achieve a high quality education (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010; Porter, McMaken, Hwang & Yang, 2011b; Blackburn, 2011). In English/language arts, as well as in mathematics, changes brought about by the new standards were characterized by the slogan "fewer, higher, deeper" or a smaller number of standards with increased rigor and a focus on understanding and application (NPR, 2014). While educators often agree that an increase in rigor overall is necessary to better prepare students for college and career, a growing number of educators and parents have questioned the level and pace at which rigor is increased within each grade level (Beane, 2013; Harris, 2010; Kirylo, 2010). In other words, though greater challenge could be acceptable, some have felt the shifts required for students to meet the standards in each grade level to be too overwhelming.

In recent past, lack of rigor was considered an obstacle holding students back from achieving college and career readiness and therefore became an impetus for the push for common standards (Blackburn, 2011). Given that the standards are a response to years of “stagnant” progress in our nation’s teaching and learning, it’s no surprise that academic rigor, a major reason for the push for the CCSS, is a source of great debate (Blackburn, 2008; CCSS, 2014). Some say the increase in expectations is too great (Kirylo, 2010) while others argue the standards are less rigorous than reported (Porter et al., 2011a). Some expect that the higher expectations will increase accountability pressure and will lead teaching of higher order skills like “curiosity, exploration, perseverance, critical and creative thinking and complex problem solving” (Brooks & Dietz, 2013, p. 66) to be relinquished in favor of teaching to the test. While testing can provide useful information on what students know and can do if they are designed appropriately, it is also true that in high-stakes situations tests can often lead to negative consequences that may threaten quality instruction, diverse curricula, and integrity within administration of assessments (Kirylo, 2010). Educators overall may support the notion of helping students achieve at higher levels; however, as noted by Rentner and Kober (2014) the scope, implementation, and ability levels with regard to teaching and learning at these higher levels is one source of contention, among many others, between CCSS opponents and CCSS supporters.

Supporters of the standards see them as a brilliant refinement of teaching and learning that lead to student mastery of requirements for college and career (Alberti, 2013; Gewertz, 2012b). Supporters have maintained that a majority of states are on track with regard to implementation and showing progress. They have remained positive about the potential for improvements in student performance and the value of transparent data (Ujifusa, 2013b). For

advocates, the CCSS provide a foundation of instruction that has reached beyond superficial test prep of recent yesterdays, strengthened instruction, and led students to achieve deep and meaningful learning (Conley, 2011). Advocates have also argued the standards provide for greater competitiveness on a global scale and open doors for greater learning opportunities to all students regardless of where they live (The Common Core Curriculum, 2012; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013).

Over time, criticisms of the CCSS have grown rapidly for opponents (Rentner & Kober, 2014). They have expressed concern over testing demands and adoption of standards (touted with a scientifically-researched base) absent of sufficient research and development to support pedagogical recommendations (Gewertz, 2012b & 2013; Goatley & Hinchman, 2013). They have objected to implementation without pilot testing (Ravitch, 2013). Attributing rapid diffusion of the standards to Race to the Top funding, opponents have asserted that linking the standards to federal funding indicates interference from federal government, which increases their federal power and threatens autonomy at the state level (Cody, 2013; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013; Ujifusa, 2013b).

Educators have expressed concerns about the standards associated with implementation process. They have indicated a lack of time and support necessary for teachers to make curricular and pedagogical shifts required to teach the standards (Beane, 2013; Fetterolf-Klein, 2015), especially to students with special needs (Gewertz, 2013; Goatley & Hinchman, 2013). Some have argued that introduction of increased rigor at an accelerated pace affords insufficient time for students to secure basic skills before mastery level performance is expected (Beane, 2013; Harris, 2010), while others have criticized the standards for “setting a floor not a ceiling” in that, the standards fail to prepare students for college courses, like calculus for example (NPR, 2014).

Educators have also expressed concern regarding increased test burden and questions regarding test use (Cody, 2013; Kohn, 2013; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013; Ravitch, 2013; Ujifusa, 2013a). Test burden has been noted especially as a concern in states that are double-testing using both the old state tests and new tests developed by testing consortia. Overall, the research indicated that matters of time (or lack thereof) and sustainability are of greatest concern for educators (Fetterolf-Klein, 2015).

The CCSS are dependent upon thorough, fully integrated implementation to effect student growth and development (Conley, 2011; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013). Alberti (2013) cautioned against “full-speed implementation without understanding of the changes that the standards require” (p 24). Many acknowledge the likelihood that the standards will result in standardized assessments, curricula, materials, and ultimately prescriptive teaching methods (Stage et al., 2013; Beane, 2013). Additionally these standards require entirely new systems of testing and evaluation of performance (Porter et al., 2011b) for both teachers and students, and in turn will likely require costly new textbooks and teaching resources as well as support for teachers to help them effectively make use of these new materials and implement these new assessments. Ultimately successful implementation of the CCSS will depend largely on strategic implementation of strategic standards-based reform (Gewertz, 2012b), and the success of the CCSS is dependent upon successful implementation (Conley, 2011). As the instructional leader of the school and hence the person arguably leading any form of mandated change, the principal plays a significant role in implementation success.

Role of the Principal as Instructional Leader

Principals play an important role in the implementation of the CCSS as an education reform effort (Bryk & Driscoll, 1985; Fullan, 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Spillane & Hunt,

2010). “Public demands for more effective schools have placed growing attention on the crucial role of school leaders in promoting powerful teaching and learning” (LaPointe & Davis, 2006, p.3). Edmonds (1979) asserted that strong leadership is a critical factor for schools to be instructionally effective (Kearney, Kelsey, & Herrington, 2013). Research demonstrates that the principal directly influences academic achievement from students (Marzano, 2005; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Consequently, the role of the principal as an instructional leader is especially significant with regard to curricular and instructional change associated with the CCSS.

Research literature discusses instructional leadership in many different ways, however a sufficient definition has yet to be commonly accepted (Marzano, 2005). In recent years the definition of effective instructional leadership has evolved to include not merely an instruction-centered approach, but a skill-set comprised of expertise related to instruction. These days instructional leadership requires principals to be adept at building teams, establishing vision/mission/goals, cultivating leadership skills in teachers, and using data to inform instruction and school improvement (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013; Portin, 2009). Effective instructional leadership strongly influences the quality of instruction and student achievement (LaPointe & Davis, 2006; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Coelli, Green & Warburton, 2007).

Hallinger (1992a) defined the instructional leader as the “primary source of knowledge for the school’s educational program” (p.6) and went on to explain the role of an instructional leader to comprise “high expectations for teachers and students, close supervision of classroom instruction, coordination of school curriculum, and close monitoring of student progress” (p. 4). According to Hallinger’s leadership for learning model for instructional leadership (2010),

leadership contributes to learning and school improvement through four dimensions: “values and beliefs, leadership focus, contexts for leadership, and sharing leadership” (p. 125). As Hallinger suggested:

1. Values not only determine what is important for the school, but also shape the thoughts and actions of the principal.
2. By maintaining a focus of three key areas including “vision and goals, academic structures and processes, and people” (p. 129), principals significantly impact student-learning outcomes.
3. Awareness of context with regard to individual school environment and culture allows principals to adapt their styles according to need.
4. The capacity to which others are allowed by principals to share in decision-making indicates the degree of shared leadership.

Under the construct of Hallinger’s leadership for learning, instructional leadership is an open system influenced by school environment along with social/organizational culture. Hallinger maintains instructional leadership is moderated by personal characteristics such as “beliefs, values, knowledge, and experience” (p. 127), and “explicitly aimed at the improvement of student learning” (p. 128).

Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, and Porter (2011) define the characteristics of an instructional leader as effective when he or she:

- “[F]acilitates the creation of a school vision that reflects high and appropriate standards of learning, a belief in the educability of all students, and high levels of personal and organizational performance” (p.1)

- “[E]mphasizes ambitious goals, ones that call for improvement over the status quo. In particular, instructionally anchored leaders make certain that goals are focused on students, feature student learning and achievement, and are clearly defined” (p.1)
- “[E]nsures that responsibility for achieving targets are made explicit and that timelines for achieving objectives are specified. In short, they make sure that the school vision is translated into specific, measurable, concrete, end results. They also ensure that the resources needed to meet goals are clearly identified—and made available to the school community” (p.1)

Other researchers characterize instructional leadership in various ways. Cuban (1998) noted that instructional leadership requires a balance of more traditional political and managerial responsibilities with instructional responsibilities. The instructional leader should be focused on curricular development and improvement more than management and personnel (Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Neumerski, 2012; Lunenburg, 2013). Smith and Andrews (1989) identified four important characteristics of the role including communication, service/support, provision of resources, and active participation/visibility (Marzano, 2005). Bennis emphasized instructional leadership must include establishment of shared vision, command of a clear voice, strong moral code, and adaptability to persistent change (Marzano, 2005). Blasé and Blasé (1999) characterized instructional leaders as authentic, collaborative, and supportive in their actions and interactions. Block asserted the importance of instructional leaders asking the right questions and providing space for learning-focused discussion (Marzano, 2005). This literature in combination with numerous supporting sources substantiates the notion that instructional leadership may best be defined based upon various aspects of this extensive role.

Similarly, research shows that there are many facets beyond instruction to quality leadership in education. One facet of leadership, according to Kotter (1996), is reflective practice. Effective leaders are realistic and reflective of their individual performance; they listen carefully and open their minds to continual learning (Kotter, 1996). Leaders engage in critical reflection regarding what is working and what is not working as an essential part of daily practice (Day, 2000; Day, Hadfield, Harris, Tolley, & Beresford, 1999). Through the process of reflection, individuals engage in thinking to make sense of experiences or situations, which are often complex in nature (Schön, 1983; 1987). By reflecting on experiences, leaders continually learn about and improve their practices (McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Schön, 1983). Reflection is a reasoning-out process, which allows the individual to compare and contextualize their experiences (Dewey, 1933). Through critical reflection, school leaders often faced with complex decisions are able to scrutinize introspectively and clarify values as they learn from their experiences (Coldron & Smith, 1995). Reflection thereby allows individuals to learn from experience and come to a reasoned decision or strategy (Dewey 1933; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Schön, 1983).

Leaders learn from their experiences through reflection as it occurs during, after, and even in some instances, before the action or event that prompted the reflection (McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Schön, 1987). Reflection-**on**-action looks back after an event or practice, allowing leaders to consider how actions may have been a factor in a given situation (Killion & Todnem, 1991; Schön, 1987). Alternatively, reflection-**in**-action happens in the present, allowing leaders to think in on their feet and respond as a result of reflection (Killion & Todnem, 1991; Schön, 1987). Reflection-**for**-action, similar but identical to planning, occurs prior to an event allowing leaders to consider future actions (Killion & Todnem; McAlpine, 2000). As noted by Vaill

(1989), learning through experiences makes it possible for leaders, through their reflective practice, to be strategic in their role as instructional leaders. Reflective practice, therefore, supports instructional leadership.

Effective leaders strategize rather than simply react, they are productive as opposed to busy, and they are proactive rather than reactive when it comes to chaos, management, and improvement (Corbin, 2000). As noted by Blasé and Blasé (1999), according to Glickman (1992) instructional leaders ideally engage collaboratively with teachers and cultivate a “supportive environment” for curricular and instructional change to take place (p. 351). Instructional leadership aims, according to Neumerski (2012) are “tied to the core work of schools: teaching and learning” (p. 316). Therefore, to be effective, it is essential for the leader to be strategic about establishing a direct connection between instructional leadership and instruction (Neumerski, 2012). This connection may be achieved, by the leader, through the strategic establishment of a vision for the school. Instructional leaders must achieve investment in a vision for education and acquire strength and consistency in management skills (Oplatka, 2007). The principal as the instructional leader establishes the vision (Cantano, 2006; Marzano, 2005; Weiner, 2011) and sets expectations for behaviors and interactions within a school (Knuth & Banks, 2006). These behaviors and interactions compose the culture of the school.

A school culture is established by the instructional leader, which is characterized by a shared, understood, and accepted set of norms, symbols, beliefs, rituals, and history (Owens, 2004; Peterson, 2010; Schein, 1990). Creating a shared understanding and acceptance for the school vision is among the most important facets of establishing a school culture (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Marzano, 2005; Vandenberghe & Staessens, 1991). Culture is built within a school over time as the school community, composed of school leaders, teachers, students and parents, works

together (Owens, 2004; Peterson, 2002; Schein, 1990). The culture is inherently understood by the school community, making it hard to define and harder to change (Fallon, O’Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012; Gonder & Hymes, 1994). Through shared vision, cohesion (i.e., shared understanding) is established within the school culture (Burt, 1987). With cohesion, contagion can result through behavioral communication as teachers influence one another (Galaskiewicz & Burt, 1991). Effective principals may transform the current instructional beliefs and practices within their school, by using the standards in discussions about what effective instruction looks like in the classroom along with formative evaluation (or evaluation that informs instruction) and individualized instruction (Brooks & Dietz, 2013). However it is important to remember that change may not be sustainable unless it is consistent with school culture (Lawrence, Huffman & Lavole, 2005; Schneider, Brief & Guzzo, 1996). Without establishment by instructional leaders of a school culture accepting of change and focused on shared goals for student achievement, schools can struggle to make changes that lead to positive outcomes for students. Therefore it is essential that the instructional leader cultivate a school culture capable of working toward curricular improvement and student achievement (Kotter, 1996; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Peterson, 2002).

Cultivation of a sustained school culture and school improvement, which may be perceived as successful within the school community, is dependent upon establishing authentic relationships built on trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tarter, Bliss, & Hoy, 1989; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Trusting relationships enable instructional leaders to be considered credible by teachers, and trust is also critical for stakeholders within the school community, who are often parents of students in their school (Oplatka, 2007). Implementing successful standards-based reform is dependent upon a school culture that embraces

collaboration, where leaders, as part of their job responsibility, see to it that teachers are part of the change process. Trust requires willingness on the part of teachers to be vulnerable (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). In accordance with Maslow's (1968) theory, which puts basic needs ahead of abilities in higher order thinking, leaders who are transparent and consistent in their actions allow teachers to feel safe (Edmonson, 2003; Edmondson, Bohmer & Pisano, 2001; Morrow, McGonagle, Dove-Steinkamp, Marmet, Barnes-Farrell, 2010; Sosik & Dionne, 1997). With mutual trust fostered by the instructional leader, shared visions may be established within a school culture and the real work of bringing about standards-based reform may occur.

Peterson (2002) noted that a positive school culture is epitomized by its "meaningful staff development, strategically implemented standards-based reform, and the effective use of student performance data" (p. 10). Heavy testing load brought about by the CCSS as well as (separate but related) evaluations of teacher performance, based in part on CCSS test scores, interfere with opportunities to build a school culture centered around learning (Brooks & Dietz, 2013). In order for standards-based reform like implementation of the CCSS to succeed, many factors are relevant and important within a school, but Fullan (2006) notes, regardless of how effectively other matters are addressed, without attending to matters of school culture, the change is "bound to fail" (p. 4).

Taken together, once we conceive the many facets of modern leadership, we can then understand the conceptualization of the principal's role as constantly evolving towards instructional leadership from a more authoritarian, supervisory approach of the past. Effective instructional leaders may make significant impact on standards-based reform through frequent and concise communication with the school community and creation of collaborative structures that allow for sharing of professional materials and ideas (Coburn, 2005; Dunkle, 2012; Gewertz,

2012a; Reed, 2013). Strong instructional leadership, as noted in Edmonds (1979) and cited by Neumerski (2012) and Hallinger (1992a), characterizes effective schools. Instructional leaders establish school vision and cultivate positive sustained school culture, which vitally influence successful implementation of mandated change. In this way, our current collective knowledge tells us that “principal leadership matters” (Porter et al., 2010, p. 136). By developing deeper understanding of leaders’ perceptions regarding their practices and implementation of the CCSS, we learn more about ways in which instructional leaders approach standards-based reform. While we may learn much from existing research, this study contributes to a body of literature where gaps in our understanding of principal leadership exist.

Limitations of Prior Research

A limited amount of existing research is available on the specific topic of CCSS implementation, as across the United States adoption is still relatively new. As a hot topic generating discussion and debate in their first years of implementation, new research on the CCSS and its impacts continues to be published. Additionally, accessible information from 2011 and before is limited to predictions and extrapolations based on related research and experiences from the past. Although the pool of research from 2012 to the present day is quickly adding substance, studies of the standards over time or their impact on student achievement have yet to be conducted.

Additionally, literature on instructional leadership practice, as it examines the perspectives of leaders in the field is another research base that is just beginning to form. We know a lot about how instructional leadership is defined according to literature, but very little research exists regarding what school leaders actually do in their instructional leadership roles (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Hitt & Tucker, 2015; Urick & Bowers, 2014). Research is also lacking

regarding how school leaders engage in reflective practice and if/how their reflective practice impacts academic achievement (Singleton, 2012). With more scientifically based resources for how leaders facilitate change and improvement, as well as how they think about and improve their professional practice, the field of education is better prepared to educate and prepare future leaders. With research lacking in the areas of professional practices involving instructional leadership and critical reflection, future leaders know less about the realities of their responsibilities and practitioners lack such resources to utilize in their efforts toward schools in need of improvement.

Summary

The Common Core State Standards, established in 2010 by the National Governors Association and the Council for Chief State and School Officers, provide guidelines for high quality education that prepares students for college and career. The standards increase rigor for students, accountability for teachers, and responsibilities for administrators (Derrington & Sanders, 2011). Instructional leaders in states where these standards have been adopted are now responsible for implementing strategic shifts within their schools and districts toward these standards for learning. Given their influential role with regard to student learning and school improvement (Spillane & Hunt, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Edmonds, 1979) effective instructional leaders focused on CCSS implementation may be the key to achieve curricular shifts necessary for implementation of the standards which may be deemed as successful within a given school district (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001; Coburn, 2005; Cobb & Jackson, 2011, Killion, 2012). By exploring the attitudes and experiences of leaders in relation to implementing the Common Core, this study informs how such leaders engage in this process and lends insight into implementation outcomes and how to enhance them.

Existing research in related areas is relevant, and it is likely to continue to support further research of the CCSS in new and interesting ways. However, much will be gained from current studies awaiting publication and from researchers who continue to study topics related to the standards. Studies that investigate student achievement and impact of the standards on learning will expand upon and improve current ideas of what we think we know but have yet to fully understand with regard to the Common Core State Standards.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative methods, specifically thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, to describe the views of principals regarding their role as an agent of curricular and instructional change in the implementation of the CCSS. The chapter provides an overview of the qualitative study design including conceptual frameworks of sensemaking and activity theory utilized to organize and Implement the research. The chapter also provides a detailed description of the purposeful sample of reflective school leaders from high performing schools used to achieve rich and meaningful data about the role of instructional leaders in standards-based reform. It describes procedures associated with the study methods including data collection and analysis. Finally I discuss strengths and limitations of the study.

Conceptual Frameworks

This research was informed by sensemaking theory and activity theory. Combined, these two theories work as a framework for understanding how leaders make connections, process new information, and make decisions through interactions in their school environment. The ideas of Coburn and Talbert (2006), regarding sensemaking theory, or how individuals build upon existing beliefs to “make meaning of new information or events” (p. 471), was used as a lens to frame this study. The study also relies upon the ideas of Engestrom (1999), Nardi (1996), and Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004), to describe how individuals make meaning from interacting within their environment. A conceptual framework supporting the exploration and capturing of leaders’ perceptions of their practices was required for the investigation of how instructional leaders, from their individual perspectives, implement standards-based reform.

As noted by Coburn and Talbert (2006) based upon the ideas of Vaughan (1996) and Weick (1995), the theory of sensemaking involves how individuals draw upon existing

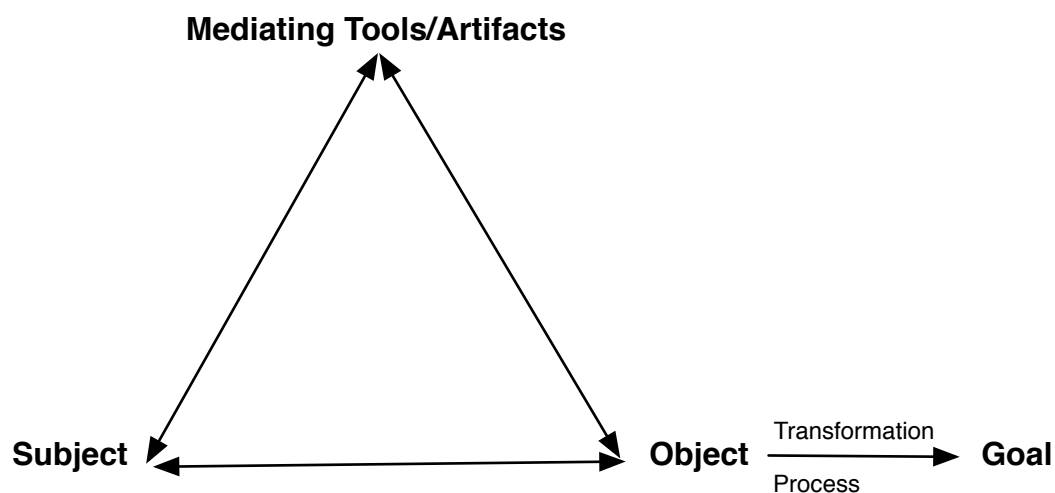
knowledge and beliefs to construct meaning from new experiences and information presented before them. A school leader's ways of thinking about information or events he/she encounters are influenced by the school environment and culture in which he/she interacts on a daily basis. As noted by Coburn and Talbert (2006) culture and environment influence the understanding of individuals and groups in erratic rather than equal ways, because they are "embedded" within school policies, curricula, and professional interactions. Additionally culture and environment are "promoted by reform efforts that put forth ideas about what schools and districts should or must do" (p. 472). As understood through Activity Theory, individuals make meaning from interacting within their environment and in the interest of sensemaking and cognition may not be abstracted from it (Spillane et al., 2004).

As a socio-cultural lens, activity theory "focuses on the interaction of human activity and consciousness within its relevant environmental context," and it proposes "conscious learning emerges from activity" rather than as a development preceding or a prediction of the activity (Jonassen & Roher-Murphy, 1999, p. 62). Spillane et al. (2004) argued that a principal's practice, "both as thinking and activity," emerges through interaction with their environment and the people in it (p. 8). Engestrom (1999) and Nardi (1996) suggested thorough analysis of activity is the best way to research practice and change, which impact established or desired culture, such as that of principals implementing standards-based reform in schools. Activity Theory is "a theory of activity-based learning," (Jonassen & Roher-Murphy, 1999, p. 78). It provides a frame for understanding the structures, mechanisms, and interconnections related to activity (Nardi, 1996). Use of Activity Theory as a conceptual framework for this study, provided insight into conditions for productive learning within a school or district (Uden, 2007). By describing

leadership practices, or activities, “a potentially powerful explanatory framework” is put forth, “providing insights into how school leaders act” (Spillane et al., 2004, p.4).

Jonassen and Roher-Murphy (1999) noted, based upon the ideas of Nardi (1996), that activity involves a subject or the individuals involved in an activity, an object or desired result, and mediating tools/artifacts used in an activity relative to the chosen goal. Figure #1 demonstrates a system of activity where a goal or desired outcome is the result of a transformation process as the relationship between the subject and object is mediated by tools/artifacts (Engestrom, 1999; Jonassen and Roher-Murphy; Nardi).

Figure 1 Activity Theory System



To explore implementation of standards-based reform from the perspective of the school leader, I used theories of sensemaking and activity as a necessary structure for framing the study. Sensemaking theory and activity theory are utilized in design of the methods for the study for collection and analysis of data. Additionally, activity theory informed the design of the study protocols. Together, sensemaking theory and activity theory provide a framework for conducting a study that is rich and explanatory in nature.

Methods

To achieve rich descriptions of participants' perspectives, qualitative methods, informed by the research questions, were used in this study to investigate the perceptions of school leaders regarding their role in the implementation of the CCSS. A qualitative approach provided "soft-data" or data that is "rich in description of people, places, and conversations, which are not easily handled by statistical procedures" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 2). In this way, qualitative methods provided means for determining how instructional leaders made sense of their role and how they said they enacted those understandings in their practices within their school environment.

As previously noted, sensemaking theory considers how individuals make sense of new information (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012) and thereby influences decision-making. Decisions leaders make while interacting within their school environment were central to the purpose of the study, to contribute new knowledge about how leaders' understandings play out in their reported practices, thus the reason sensemaking was used in design and implementation of methods for this study. Because situational and organizational contexts influence understanding of events and information by individuals (Coburn & Talbert, 2006), sensemaking and activity were a fitting pair for designing and conducting methods for exploring leaders' perceptions in this study.

Activity theory, as a framework for the overarching approach to framing participants' perceptions, served to guide interview protocol development. Protocols were designed to encourage deep reflection by participants about the scope of their ongoing leadership practice and how elements within those dynamics relate to one another (Spillane et al., 2004). Especially useful for describing the connections between consciousness and activity (Nardi, 1996), activity

theory incorporates *intentionality, history, culture, and mediation of artifacts/tools* as contexts for constructing consciousness from everyday practices (Jonassen & Roher-Murphy, 1999; Nardi). Table 1 provides sample general questions as they relate to each component of the system of activity previously demonstrated in Figure 1, which was illustrated as part of the conceptual framework (Jonassen Roher-Murphy, 1999; Uden, 2007). Please note, questions included in Table 1 were *not* used as interview questions, rather they were used to design protocols according to the philosophical activity theory framework described here.

Table 1 Protocol Design

Activity System Component	Sample General Questions	Activity Theory Context
Subject— Instructional Leader/Principal (Blue Ribbon Schools)	Who are the people in the school?	History, Culture
	What is the culture of the school?	Culture, History
	What CCSS implementation activities, if any, have taken place in school?	History, Mediation
	<i>Information about principals, actions, physical environment of the principal</i>	
Object— CCSS Implementation Process	What are the implementation activities?	Mediation
	What are the expected outcomes of activities?	Intentionality
	What criteria, if any, are in place for evaluating CCSS implementation activities?	Mediation
	How has/will the object transform(ed) teachers/students toward fulfillment of intentions of the instructional leader?	Intentionality
	<i>Information about objective including materials/ideas that were transformed to achieve goal/outcome</i>	
Tools/Artifacts	What physical tools/artifacts are used in various activities? Are they available to people in the school?	Mediation, Culture
	What psychological tools/artifacts are used in various activities? (Methods, Procedures, Languages, etc.) Are they available to people in the school?	Mediation, Culture
	How are tools intended to be used? How are they actually used?	Intentionality, Mediation, Culture
	<i>Tools include any curricular materials or communication devices involved in implementation process</i>	

The study's research questions, which explored instructional leaders' perceptions of their role in the implementation of standards-based reform, determined the sample of participants. To explore leaders' decision-making and understanding regarding their practices, the study called for deep reflection from participants, and therefore a purposeful sample of reflective leaders from higher performing schools was recruited to achieve meaningful data. The participants were recruited via formal invitations sent through postal mail and via email. Data were collected in the form of semi-structured interviews conducted with instructional leaders and analysis of available documents including demographic data that provided a means of describing schools led by participants. Because interactions within a group influence decision-making of individual members of that group, it was important to probe for responses that explain those interactions and decisions specific to CCSS implementation. As such, it was also necessary to analyze data for interpretations of what those decisions and interactions mean in the context of leadership practice and how it happened. Therefore, as stated in the previous section, sensemaking theory and activity theory informed the processes of data collection and analysis. Outlined in Table 2 below, the recruitment and the data collection process took place during the fall of 2014.

Table 2 Management Plan

Participant	Recruitment		Data		
	Email Invite	Follow-up Email/Phone	Interview	Follow up Interview	Document Analysis
Principal (Blue Ribbon)	August 2014	August/September 2014	September 2014	As needed	Ongoing/ Summative October 2014

A purposefully selected group of principals from schools having achieved measured and vetted excellence were recruited for this research. By studying the perspectives of a variety of

instructional leaders, the research served to describe the “basic social processes” (Creswell, 2002, p. 445) involved in implementation of standards-based reform and explain how, based on their perceptions, instructional leaders understand and interact with mandated change as it pertains to curricula and instructional practice (Glaser, 1992). The purposeful sample for this study was selected due to their recognition as leaders of high performing schools, and as such, having experienced perceived success, the participants were asked to describe their respective implementation processes and strategies and reflect upon what they thought worked well and what did not. Selection of participants in this purposeful fashion proved critical to achieving meaningful data.

Participants

A group of school leaders with experience at the building level as principals at elementary levels of instruction were selected to participate in this study. Principals specific to a unique population of high performing schools, involved with the implementation of the Common Core, were invited to participate. In some cases, the school leader had recently moved on to a district level position and, at the time of the interview, was now serving in a new role and/or district.

This purposeful sample, assumed to be instructional leaders based upon their school’s status as a nationally recognized elementary school for high performance, were chosen from a population of principals comprising schools recognized through the National Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence Program. Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence (BRSE) are nominated by their Chief State School Officer for recognition as Exemplary High Performing Schools and must meet performance award criteria including: scoring in top 15 percent of all schools within the state for both reading (English language arts) and mathematics, scoring within the top 40% of

all schools within the state for subgroups (which include but are not limited to students with special needs, English-language learners, etc.), and the graduation rate of a high school must be in the top 15 percent of all high school graduation rates within the state (RMC Research Corp, 2014). BRSE define themselves by “best practices in education including an emphasis on the principal's leadership role, the articulation of clear and well-defined academic standards, and the involvement of parents and community members in the life of the school” (Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, 2014).

In accordance with the goals of the CCSS, United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, recognized BRSE as “...leading the way to prepare students for college and career” (United States Department of Education, 2013). The assumption is that the BRSE program is in and of itself a national school reform program designed to be a non-threatening, collaborative approach to school improvement. Principals of BRSE “...articulate a vision of excellence and hold everyone to high standards, [and] they stay close to the real action of teaching and learning” (RMC Research Corp, 2014). Due to varying definitions and perceptions of success, as well as the insufficiency of test scores alone, socio-economic status, and/or available resources as measures of success, status as a Blue Ribbon School was used for this study as a measure of high performance.

While participants from this study, in at least four cases, represented schools with free and reduced lunch eligibility at greater than 25% (see Table 3 below), it should be noted that the Blue Ribbon Schools program has been criticized as being more attainable for schools with students from wealthy backgrounds. Kirkpatrick's criticism of the program noted one year in which eight Pennsylvania schools were selected for BRSE awards, but only one of those eight schools represented students from backgrounds with lower socio-economic levels (2000). As this

research did not study Blue Ribbon schools, rather it specifically focused on perspectives of leaders within these schools, BRSE recognition was determined to be a fitting measure of reflective leadership practice (by means of the comprehensive application process) and leadership experience in a school recognized for academic achievement, i.e., the purposeful sample of participants sought for this study.

A total of 36 principals of elementary schools from a northeastern state, having all been awarded distinction in various years between 2010 and today, were invited to participate. Invitation letters were sent via postal mail to each school and follow-up invitations were made via email. Follow-up to all invitations was conducted by phone and in person when necessary. Recruiting was also accomplished in August and September of 2014.

Twelve instructional leaders from various BRSE schools in a northeastern state agreed to participate. School leaders who participated in this study, in many cases, still served the school for which they were selected as a participant in this study. However, in some cases, participants now served at the district level as Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction or Superintendent of Schools in the same or different districts.

While race/ethnicity was not a criterion for inclusion within this study, principals were invited to participate from various race/ethnicity groups; however, in this study all individuals agreeing to participate were Caucasian. While school type was not a criterion for inclusion within this study, principals were invited from various district/school types including rural, urban, suburban, and charter, however the majority of participants (as shown below) were from suburban districts. Table 3 provides an overview of the participant group's composition. The Participant Information section includes information about the individual, which was current at the time of the interview. All participants were invited based on their work as a principal in a

high performing school and for having demonstrated their activities as a reflective practitioner. The School Information section includes demographic data about the school for which the participant received recognition as leader of a high performing school. In the cases where the participant's current role is other than principal, it may be concluded that the participant is no longer working in the school for which he/she was recognized for high performance and invited to participate, however it may not be concluded that the individual no longer works within the same district. Where change in job is applicable, in some cases leaders remained within the district, but in other cases leaders were employed in a new district.

Table 3 Characteristics of Participants

<i>Participant Information</i>				<i>School Information</i>							
Participant	Leadership Level	Yrs	Sex	Area	Type	Total	FR	EL	SE	TO	
1	Candace	Building	8	F	S	NA	526	5%	1%	5%	3%
2	Emmitt	District	3	M	R	Title I	221	68%	0	14%	16%
3	Jack	District	2	M	R	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
4	Brad	Building	9	M	S	Title I	465	3%	3%	6%	18%
5	Trevor	Building	6	M	S	Title I	495	8%	0	9%	3%
6	Sam	Building	7	M	S	NA	425	13%	4%	18%	2%
7	Meg	Building	13	F	U	NA	550	44%	11%	28%	4%
8	Dale	District	2	M	S	NA	422	14%	3%	7%	%
9	Kristen	Building	12	F	S	Title I	290	8%	8%	13%	2%
10	Sheila	District	2	F	S	NA	277	11%	1%	11%	4%
11	Laura	Building	14	F	U	Charter	216	26%	0	10%	3%
12	Stella	Building	5	F	U	NA	550	44%	11%	28%	4%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NA= Not Applicable • Years=Years Experience in Current Role • *S=Suburban, U=Urban, R=Rural 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total=Total # Students • FR=Free & Reduced % 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EL=Eng Lang Learn % • SE=Special Ed % • TO=Turnover Rate 				

Information for each school including: contact information, demographics, school mission, school Website link, and comprehensive anecdotal data was provided by each participant and used for document analysis. Analysis of this information led to greater understanding, in the bigger picture of the elementary schools and the respective principals who

led them to national recognition as Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence. Information analyzed was used to create Table 3 above.

To support confidentiality for all participants, in Table 3 above and throughout the study, pseudonyms were used in all cases, and references to any identifiable information have been changed. We learn from the table that six participants were female and six participants were male. Four out of 12 participants had moved out of their principalship into a district level position. All participants still serving at the building level are still currently practicing at the high performing school for which they were awarded BRSE. Three out of 12 school leaders had more than 10 years in their current role, however the years listed for experience in the table do not indicate total years of experience for all participants. Their years of experience listed in the table signify only the years each participant served in the role in which they are currently employed.

All schools represented in the study were awarded distinction as a BRSE as recently as 2015 and no further back than 2010. Seven out of 12 schools represented in this study were suburban, and of those schools four were characterized as a Title I school. Three urban schools and two rural schools were represented. One of the urban schools represented was a charter school. The populations of the schools ranged from 216 (smallest) to 550 (largest). Not all schools served the same grade levels, however all served elementary levels of education. Findings reported in some cases reflected perspectives of principals who have since moved on to discuss their practice from their current role at the district level, and as such the data comprises opinions and experiences of school leaders at all levels of P-12 education. Free and reduced lunch percentages ranged from 3% to 68% of students. In seven of those schools less than 20% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Students with English as a second language, in all schools (where information was provided), equal less than 12% total. Special education

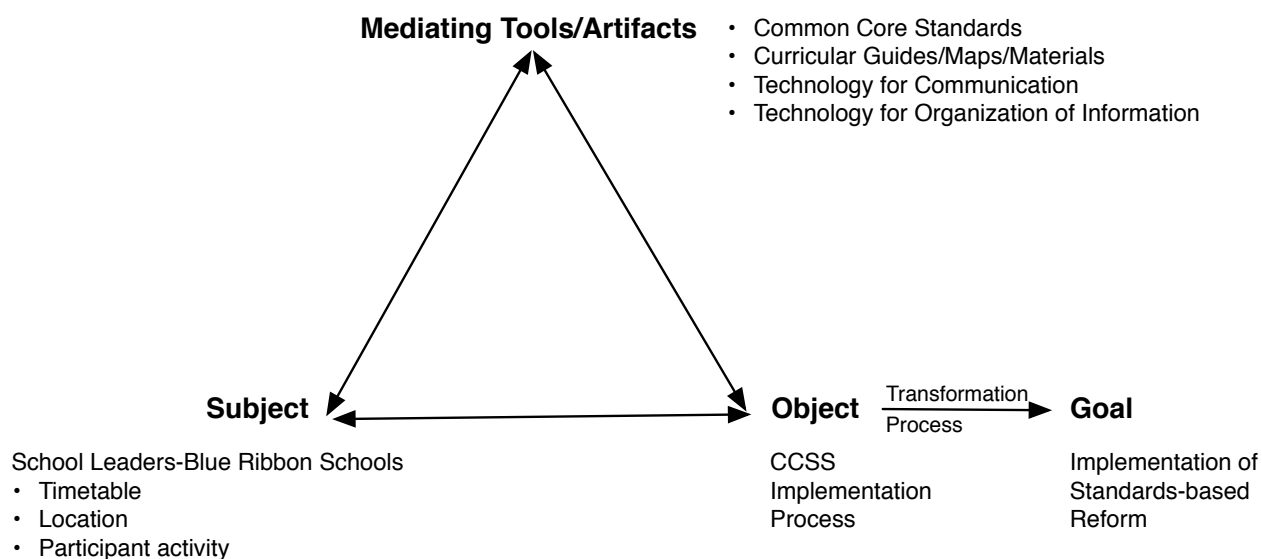
population of students ranged from 5% to 28% of students. Turnover rate for most schools was under 5% of students, however in two cases turnover rate was more than 15% of students. No schools or locations were named in this study.

Data Collection

The implementation process of any standards-based reform is a complicated by the interactivities of principals and teachers as well as other school community members (Nardi, 1996). Therefore, when exploring principals' views pertaining to implementation of the CCSS, it was also important that data collection was designed to investigate possible perceptions regarding those interactivities within the culture of their school.

Figure 2 demonstrates the system of activity relative to the topic of principals implementing the CCSS in a K-12 school (Uden, 2007). As demonstrated in Figure 2 below, data collection was conducted in keeping with the subject, artifacts, and objects within the activity theory system for instructional leaders implementing CCSS.

Figure 2 Activity Theory System for Instructional Leaders Implementing CCSS



Within the basic analysis of the activity system as social structure demonstrated in Figure 2 above, Engestrom's (1999) principles of activity theory informed the process of data collection and use of protocols (Appendix B), in that I observed and recorded and/or analyzed data for instances of principles including: multi-voiced utterances and inner speech, historical analysis, contradictions ("problems, ruptures, breakdowns, clashes" as referenced in Nardi) as a source of change, and expansive cycles (Engestrom, 1987) of organizational transformation (Engestrom; Guldborg, 2010). Although interviews were semi-structured to allow for themes in the research to emerge organically; a strategic, well-designed and administered protocol, based upon Engestrom's principles explained above, as well as the basic system of activity described previously, served as guidance for acquiring rich and meaningful data.

In depth interviews were conducted with each participant. Interview protocols were designed to investigate perceptions of each subject about their role as an instructional leader. Data within this study explored the "interaction of leaders' thinking, behavior, and their situation" (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 8) to develop understanding of how they perceive their role in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

The study comprised one to two interview hours per subject, or a total not exceeding 24 hours of interview data. Semi-structured interviews occurred in the fall of 2014. All interviews were digitally recorded using LiveScribe technology and transcribed. All data was stored on a password-protected server behind a secure firewall, and at the conclusion of the study all data including any identifying information was destroyed.

In addition to capturing subjects' perspectives and experiences in research notes and digital recordings, documents were analyzed including demographic and narrative information specific to each school. Artifacts are items and objects representing the "ideas and intentions"

comprising the principal's leadership practices, including language, systems of communication, buildings, as well as tools within the environment (Spillane et al., p. 23). These artifacts were considered with regard to data analysis as they simultaneously enabled and constrained leadership and practice in schools (Spillane et al.). Artifacts were utilized where appropriate in data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data and documents were analyzed thematically using the constant comparative method, which “simultaneously codes and analyses data to develop concepts by continually comparing specific incidents in the data,” thereby allowing the researcher to refine concepts and integrate relationships between their properties into a “coherent explanatory model” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 126). According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is especially useful for creating connections and establishing themes from data that may initially be perceived as lacking coherence or consistency.

Using MAXQDA software as a tool for managing data, coding was conducted to generate categories and hypotheses, which were based on the ideas of Glaser and Strauss (1967). A meaningful thematic code “is usable in the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of research” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 31). Data were first coded into categories generated two ways: by my own interpretation of the data as the researcher and by the language (artifacts) derived directly from the data. The coding process included assigning a category to each code, and each category comprised a label, definition, description of qualifications/exclusions and illustrations/examples (Boyatzis, 1998). As instances of the same category were found ideas were refined by the process of writing memos.

Next, categories and their emerging properties were integrated with other categories of analysis to reveal irrelevant properties that were removed as well as patterns for how categories interrelate, or how data instances fit within defined code categories (Pusch, 2003). In this way emerging theories were delimited into a smaller set of specific concepts. Presentation of findings was based on the interpretation of these strategically created code categories, ideally as close to the raw data as possible for increased reliability.

Finally, as noted by Pusch (2003), based upon the ideas of Shelly and Sibert (1992), a working hypothesis was formed from questions raised during exploration of these interrelationships, which ultimately informed conclusions of the study. Interpretation of data was approached based upon the ideas of Boyatzis (1998).

Because the Common Core State Standards is a relatively new standards-based reform effort and much has yet to be definitively explained, Boyatzis' inductive process (1998) involving line-by-line analysis of interview data for building data-driven codes from raw data was most useful for this study. "The closeness of the code to the raw information" in the inductive process results in higher reliability in the interpretation of data (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 30). Deductive analysis was utilized when coding data related to "macro-school-level functions," or the overarching characteristics shaping what leaders do, for example, establishing school culture or supporting teacher growth.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The trustworthiness of the research may be accounted for using the ideas of Lincoln and Guba (1985) including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility regarding collection and analysis of data, or "confidence in the truth of the findings," (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) can best be supported by development of the study through a research base of

empirical literature. Member-checking was also utilized during data collection to establish validity regarding account of information including interpretations, conclusions, and especially regarding information relevant to emerging themes. To account for potential pitfalls of member-checking based on criticisms reported by Angen (2000), I approached all interviews as a listener and a facilitator of conversation within each interview, used only to understand what the participant was saying. I used active listening strategies throughout the data collection process using phrases like, "...so do I understand correctly that you said," or "I heard you say and please correct me if I misunderstood," to minimize misinterpretation. My own stories and experiences were left entirely out of the any and all conversation so as to avoid conflicting views or a need for participants to agree or disagree with my opinions as the researcher or with my views on the research. As noted above, to fully demonstrate trustworthiness of the research, information regarding transferability, dependability, and confirmability, based on Lincoln and Guba (1985), are accounted for in the paragraphs that follow.

In an effort to establish transferability, or what Lincoln and Guba (1985) establish as a type of external validity within the research, detailed descriptions were used in the report of findings so that where applicable, conclusions by readers could be drawn relative to other school types and grade levels where appropriate. While this cannot technically be referred to as thick description, according to the definition provided by Holloway (1997), which states that culture and relationship patterns are described explicitly in context, attempts were made throughout to use sufficient detail to describe culture and relationships as needed.

Given the nature of this research, conducted for dissertation, three experienced scholars serving as committee members were involved with the whole of the research process and conducted thorough reviews of the product throughout its development. As such, a great strength

of this research is its external audit, which was conducted multiple times throughout the process of development. This method of inquiry audit establishes dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was also established where researcher reflexivity was relevant. Research design included methods that allowed for producing results based upon participant perceptions, and wherever possible I have presented their views as they shared them. However as an experienced teacher and principal, I accept and acknowledge the potential for my views to be skewed by my own experience, values, and perspectives as an instructional leader. When potential for my own thoughts and conclusions based upon their ideas was realized, I backed up my claims with research. Interviews were conducted with professional courtesy and sensitivity, and as the researcher I made a conscious and concerted effort to listen rather than contribute to discussion.

As further evidence of my reflexivity, because I was aware of the possibility for personal opinions formed during my own professional experiences to influence discussions, I made a concerted effort to maintain my role as the researcher by observing proper boundaries for actively listening and appropriately probing for thoughtful authentic responses. While conducting interviews, I spoke primarily to guide the discussion toward meaningful data or probe for clarity and/or elaboration from participants. Data analysis is presented from the perspectives of the participants, and conclusions are based upon what the data shows from those perspectives shared by participants and the literature relevant to those results. Cultivation of trusting relationships with participants was important, as all were educators in a position of power within their school communities. Failure to gain trust would have had the potential to illicit more guarded replies or ceased to reach the heart of the important issues with regard to both the

research and to the participants themselves. Therefore, I am confident matters of reflexivity were adequately addressed within this research.

That said, I acknowledge a limitation of this study results from the fact that I genuinely liked and respected all of the participants in this study. Further, I admire their dedication and passion for their work. As impartial as I dedicated myself to being during data collection, analysis, and reporting of this research, I admit that I found myself largely in agreement with their leadership styles, and recognize that position may be evident within the research. In fact, it should be noted that within the study, my assertions may be affected by my favorable opinion of participants as professionals. Additionally, I recognize that failure to establish rapport with more individuals through more assertive or perhaps even more innovative recruiting efforts may have impacted the total number of participants. Satisfied with the data saturation achieved from 12 participants, I determined it unnecessary to recruit further or in different ways.

Design of the research was based on Creswell's writings on qualitative methods of study (2002), collection of data is framed by activity theory, and analysis is guided by the ideas of Boyatzis on thematic analysis. The study also used purposeful participant selection to increase the potential for rich data to better inform conclusions that answer the study's research questions. Additionally, the study utilized reliable management tools such as EndNote for organizing literature and MAXQDA for analyzing data.

This study was limited to data from the perspective of the individuals interviewed, which in comparison to the greater population of instructional leaders is a small group in number. There is currently little, if any data for comparison from a first-hand perspective to contradict or corroborate the views of respective participants. However it is essential to fully understand the role of the principal, as it makes sense to the individual in that role. Additionally, the qualitative

data obtained in this study is based on the perspectives and experiences of school leaders, and therefore comprise more powerful details and compelling nuances than that which might have been obtained from other methods of investigation. Later studies may build on this foundation to ask to what degree these views translate into externally observed behaviors including how others within the building view the leader and his/her activities relative to CCSS implementation. Data from this study may inform future research investigating perceptions of teachers and/or other members of the school community regarding the role of the principal in the implementation of standards-based reform like the Common Core State Standards.

Another limitation of this study involved lack of diversity the participant pool. School sizes averaged between 300-400 students. Three out of 12 schools noted greater than 20% student populations receiving free and reduced lunch. Student populations exceeded 10% English language learners in two out of 12 participating schools. It should also be noted that out of 36 potential participants, 12 individuals agreed to participate. While 12 represents 1/3 of the population, those individuals who did participate provided interesting and meaningful data, and data saturation was achieved.

The study revealed patterns in ways instructional leaders made sense of, and in turn, reported enacting their implementation of standards-based reform (Coburn, 2005). These patterns provided insight into the larger issue of the variability and consequences a top down instructional reform may have on leadership practice. With regard to best practice and/or goals of the CCSS it was important to determine how, if at all, and in what ways these principals' perceptions disconnect or deviate from what we know from existing research is necessary on successful implementation. The study was conducted with intent to inform future research that may include observation of principals' actions pertaining to implementation of the CCSS and survey research

for comparison between principals' and teachers' views. It also contributes to a knowledge base regarding the overarching topic of standards-based reform and perceptions and processes of instructional leaders.

Summary

Educational standards have the power to “guide state assessments and accountability systems; inform teacher preparation, licensure, and professional development; and give shape to curricula, textbooks, software programs, and more” (Carmichael et al., 2010, p. 4). This study utilized qualitative methods, specifically thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews and document analysis, to explore how principals perceived their role as an instructional leader in the implementation of the CCSS. Sensemaking theory and activity theory provided a conceptual framework for the study. Sensemaking aids in understanding how leaders make sense of new information, often coming from external policy mandates (Coburn, 2005; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012), and make decisions in their environment. Additionally, activity theory provides a frame for understanding principal practices (or activities) as embedded within the context of a school or district (or social practice) and mediated by tools/artifacts (Uden, 2007).

Principals, selected from National Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence at elementary levels of education, assumed to be instructional leaders (based on their school's status as a nationally recognized school for high performance), and having demonstrated reflective practice, composed this study's purposeful sample. Descriptions and conclusions from this study inform future investigations with regard to principals engaged in the implementation of standards-based reform and their practices as a result of sensemaking and enactment of their role as instructional leaders. Ideally the research may inform investigations that generalize back to the greater population of instructional leaders, to ultimately inform the training and development of school principals as

instructional leaders. This study contributes to a body of literature on instructional leadership practices that is only beginning to be established and/or developed, and therefore also holds the potential for development of seminal works in this topic of study, informing research in education that is timely and relevant.

Emerging themes from this study were synthesized in response to previously identified research questions, and the data is presented in three separate chapters that follow. For analysis of this study, data were coded into emerging themes, which were constantly compared to achieve greater understanding of decisions and behaviors of participants. Themes that emerged from the data described how leaders perceived their role in relation to implementing the Common Core State Standards and how these perceptions have shaped their understanding of their behaviors in their school environment.

As noted in the introduction chapter, the overarching research question for this study explores the role of the instructional leader in the implementation of standards-based reform like the Common Core State Standards from the perspectives of school leaders themselves. To better understand that question, the research also explored leaders' perspectives regarding how they enact change in their school environments in light of the challenges they ultimately encounter related to implementation of change in their daily professional practices. To answer the questions the chapters that follow will discuss: (1) how school leaders conceptualize and understand the CCSS and what implementation looks like in that context, (2) how school leaders think about their role given how they think about change and how they value the CCSS, and (3) how they create conditions to facilitate change for the school so that others can learn and grow.

CHAPTER IV: INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION

As noted previously in this research, effective leaders positively impact implementation of standards-based reform in their schools by focusing on behaviors that produce shared vision among staff, facilitate teamwork and collaboration, and manage the curricular and instructional change (Marzano, 2005). In this chapter I discuss how school leaders defined and characterized their role as instructional leaders, with special interest in how they perceive their role in relation to standards-based reform. I also present how they describe implementation of the Common Core State Standards in their schools and/or districts and the challenges leaders felt they encountered related to the implementation process. Participants described implementation of reform and their role as instructional leaders in wide-ranging ways. Their descriptions provide insight into how instructional leaders make sense of their role and may then enact these understandings in their practices.

Role of the Instructional Leader Relative to Common Core Standards Implementation

I discuss the role of the instructional leader two ways. First, I present how participants define the role as instructional leaders from their perspectives as professionals in a school leadership role. Second, I discuss how participants describe themselves, or not, as instructional leaders in their daily leadership practices. Whenever applicable, responses from participants were analyzed to extrapolate what leaders' conceptualizations meant in the context of curricular and instructional change associated with Common Core State Standards implementation.

How leaders define instructional leadership. While (as cited previously) a standard definition of instructional leadership has yet to be accepted, this study explored a definition from the perspectives of the individuals who filled the role each day. Participants' definitions of the

term “instructional leader” differed, indicating that they likely conceptualized the role of the instructional leader in different ways. First, there was a group of participants who defined the instructional leader’s role as primarily supporting teachers to acquire the skills and knowledge to be effective. Candace explained her perspective on this matter.

Should you, as a leader, certainly try to gain as much knowledge as you can so, you can support your teachers and students, and so that you can have intelligent conversations and all those things? Yes. It has to come from the grassroots up. So, having those teacher leaders, I think it’s huge, and supporting them, and fostering that in them is huge. (Candace, November 2014)

Here, Candace explained, the work of the instructional leader was to support teachers including in the pursuit of new content knowledge and engagement in professional conversations. She seems to discuss the role of the instructional leader as one of service to the professional community within her school. Serving as a support for teachers puts the leader in a position to guide them through curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform. As Candace referred to cultivation of teacher leaders, she implied she felt her role was to nurture their leadership skills and support them as professionals. Having skilled teacher leaders in the school to support change efforts also potentially contributes to positive change related to implementation of new curricular and instructional standards.

Dale too saw the role of the instructional leader as oriented toward support. Though, for Dale, this support was to enhance academic achievement.

There is a difference between being an instructional leader and a manager. As a building manager the day is defined for you. You know, you have these fires to put out. From a leadership perspective, I told the board I am not going to spend my day answering the hundred emails I get per day. That is not going to define my day. What is going to define my day is moving the district forward in its academic program and being an instructional leader.

Leadership in its simplest form is influencing others. Strategic planning, day in and day out interactions with teachers and administrators, our job is

influencing others to share that laser-like focus on academic achievement.
(Dale, October 2014)

From Dale's perspective we see that creating conditions for others to learn and grow is an essential duty for the instructional leader. He distinguished leadership from management by putting leadership out front, characterized by proactive actions oriented toward academic achievement, while he characterized management as more reactive actions striving to catch up from behind. Enacted as described, this philosophy may be applicable to successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Creating conditions for others to develop understanding of the standards and how to instruct accordingly is an essential duty for the leader facilitating standards implementation.

Like Dale, Brad also defined the role of the instructional leader as influencing others. For Brad, instructional leaders were active with regard to sharing knowledge and cultivating skills pertaining to effective instruction.

The instructional leader should be identifying and finding those practices that work and then spreading those practices to impart more wide skills where everyone is using those skills. (Brad, November 2014)

Beyond spreading influence, Brad explained that his influence as an instructional leader included identifying skills necessary for change associated with reform and distributing those skills. In this way, Brad's influence over others was directed toward continual change, which, as the study will continue to show, was critical with regard to implementation of the CCSS.

Just as Dale and Brad defined the role of the instructional leader in terms of its influence on those individuals and practices that factor into implementation, participants were clear that being an instructional leader was an all-encompassing role. Jack demonstrated his understanding that an instructional leader juggles many different facets of leadership at once.

I think that instruction leadership is the same thing as leadership in general.

You're just focusing on a specific side of the instructional piece.

But to be an instructional leader, in the world that we live in, it means you have to be leader in all other areas, whether it's social pieces, the behavior pieces of students. It's not strictly the curriculum side of things. It's all that too. (Jack, October 2014)

The various "pieces" of instructional leadership practice to which Jack referred broaden the scope of the role to be all encompassing. In the context of change associated with implementation of the CCSS, an expansive role may present some challenges pertaining to effectiveness and efficiency in that it is possible for Jack, an instructional leader, to be spread thin in many facets of his daily practice. Juggling many tasks and responsibilities, it may also be challenging for leaders to prioritize and devote enough attention to each of their many important tasks. Jack plainly states that the realities, from his perspective, associated with the role include these and other challenges. Overall, participants in this study agreed with Jack's sentiment that the responsibilities of leaders in education are multifaceted and far-reaching. Information to be presented later in this section, including comments from Candace and Trevor, reinforced these views.

Beyond support, there were also a number of participants who framed the role of the instructional leader as a master strategist, working hard to identify strengths and weaknesses and correct them when needed. For example, Laura spoke in general about how she expected all educators must surely see the role of instructional leader.

I think that it's something that all administrators and teachers feel, and it's that little slice of kids that you don't reach for whatever reasons. The ones that keep you up at night and you're brainstorming, "What approach do I need to take because whatever we're doing isn't working?" Those are challenges that I don't think are ever going away. (Laura, November 2014)

Laura defined of the role of the instructional leader as one of constant evaluation regarding the leader's obligation to meet student needs. In the context of standards-based reform, instructional

leaders focused on evaluation of programs and practices would, as Laura described here, strive toward continual improvement and likely influence staff to do the same.

It should be noted that Laura's answer spoke to instructional leadership from the administrator and teacher perspective. It does not appear that she assigned the role to a building or district level leader as a result of positional authority. Rather Laura appears, in concordance with many others within the study, to have conceptualized the role based more on skill than title, which may indicate that instructional leadership is a shared practice among those within a school/district responsible for student learning as much, or perhaps in some instances more than, it is just a duty for individuals with building/district level leadership titles. She continued on to define the role of instructional leader more figuratively.

Largely an instructional leader... cheerleader is a big role, motivator, keeping people feeling as though the work is hard and that they need to work hard at it, but that it's worthy work and satisfying work. [The role also entails] helping them to also see the bigger picture. (Laura, November 2014)

Here, Laura presented metaphors for what the instructional leader should do and be like. It can be inferred from her choice of metaphors that, to Laura, the instructional leader is supportive, encouraging, and inspiring. By referring to "the bigger picture" and the leader's role in demonstrating instructional leadership for others, Laura alludes to accountability and the task of holding others to it as a necessary duty of the instructional leader. Laura's regard for autonomy is not unlike earlier sentiments expressed by the other principals (e.g., Dale's view that the instructional leader's duty is to create conditions for improvement and Trevor's wish to help teachers to develop autonomy).

These various definitions suggest that instructional leadership is hard to define. Participants seemed to recognize this fact and Sheila directly spoke to this issue.

I think the role of the principal as an instructional leader is challenging,

because really you need to sort of have your finger on the pulse in so many different places.

To me, the term instructional leadership is not easily defined. I think an instructional leader probably bends, shapes, and changes based on what the current reality is. What works as an instructional leader for one building culture, may not necessarily work in another building culture. Often times I think that we see books about instructional leadership and we tend to want to think that there is an answer. I don't know that there is an answer. (Sheila, October 2014)

Like Dale, Brad, and Trevor, Sheila stated that it is important that the instructional leader influence many facets of the school community. As noted previously in this research, participants corroborated here that currently there does not exist a universally determined and accepted definition of instructional leadership. This research, however, sought out that elusive definition and participant responses illuminate a path toward it. Sheila highlighted adaptability as a key component of the role. Other leaders focused on influence as a key component: Trevor by facilitating buy-in from staff, Dale through creating conditions for improvement, and Brad through identifying skills necessary for achievement. Their collective focus on influence and adaptability seems to suggest that participants agreed that the path toward understanding and defining the role of the instructional leader centers on change and the ability to produce it.

How leaders characterize their role as instructional leaders. Beyond defining the role of the instructional leader in a general sense, leaders went further to characterize the role based on their experiences and how they enacted instructional leadership in their daily practices. They seemed to characterize their role based largely upon a measure of authority. When asked to explain their role as an instructional leader, participants responded in one of two ways. Either they asserted their authority as instructional leaders and explained how it factored into their practice, or they rejected the term instructional leader and explained how they support their instructional staff. As the section continues, examples of this dichotomy are illustrated.

First, as illustrated by Brad, there was a group of participants comfortable embracing the term instructional leader to define their role and position him/herself as having the authority to set the vision/mission and direct resources toward enactment. He explained that characterization of his role started with his philosophy on instruction, which was oriented toward student achievement.

That's how I view myself, yeah. I think the current vision of the school will be close in line to meeting my vision. I guess it's where I came from, my goal was instruction; it was to meet students at their own levels.

From that piece I think I've mentioned I use the word "we" a lot because that's literally that's like believing that wholeheartedly [content experts/teachers] will know a lot more about literacy and a lot more about math.

Grade levels are moving in different paces, and it's our job to ensure that no grade level gets behind. That's where the "I" instead of "we" comes in, where I have to serve as more of an accountability keeper. (Brad, November 2014)

Here, Brad addressed how he characterized his role as an instructional leader in terms of authority. He stated that he viewed himself as coach or captain of the team in his school and therefore spoke primarily from a "we" perspective. Brad discerned between times when decision-making may best be accomplished as a group and other times when he, as the instructional leader, needed to be the decision-maker. He explained that this largely became necessary in matters of upholding accountability and explained this was when the "I" perspective became relevant.

Meg also positioned herself in this way and also did not hesitate to accept the term instructional leader to characterize her leadership role in her school. She associated the term with being the one who was ultimately accountable for the school's performance.

Yes, I am. I am one of the people. I am an instructional leader. I know that ultimately the buck stops here. I am the one that's paid. I am the one that has to make the final decision with it, the hard decision. I try to do it

distributively, but then I try to get the pulse of it. (Meg, October 2014)

While Meg was accepting of the term “instructional leader,” she was quick to distinguish herself as “an” instructional leader and not “the” instructional leader. This segmentation indicates that she acknowledged a joint approach in her building to instructionally related decisions and processes. She rested, however, with the fact that final decisions are hers to make. This revealed that she was willing to assert authority to exemplify her role as an instructional leader in her school.

Like Brad and Meg, Trevor also seemed to equate instructional leadership with a more authoritarian form of leadership and recognized the need to be the overarching decision-maker at the school.

It is kind of fun being the instructional leader. [As the instructional leader, I am typically] dealing with a lot with things. You sing one minute and book an opera the next minute. So, I like that. I like the role of playing multiple, rather than being one of eight cogs in a wheel, so to speak. (Trevor, October 2014)

Here, Trevor seemed to be unintimidated regarding accepting the multi-faceted role of instructional leader. Due to his stated preference for being in a leadership role, Trevor seems to characterize instructional leadership and school leadership as one in the same, rather than, as some might, consider instructional leadership a facet of the role of the school leader. Whether this indicates that he and Jack, who presented a similar framing, did not recognize a need to distinguish between the two or simply that they embraced their role for all that it is, willingly and readily, may be dependent upon the individual.

While all participants held instruction in high regard and accepted that, in their role as the school leader, they bore responsibility for it, a second group of principals hesitated to consider themselves instructional leaders, defining the role a bit differently than the first group. For example, Candace rejected the term “instructional leader” because she viewed her role as one of

support and not that of authority figure or expert in all content areas. In this way, these leaders positioned themselves as having an egalitarian or democratic leadership orientation.

I think my job, as an instructional leader, is to support them in their professional growth, support my own professional growth and kind of model that for them, walk alongside them with that. It's not for me to know more than [the teachers as content experts] and to guide them and teach them in that way, because I don't have that capacity and I don't know if that's possible either.

The feeling that a principal needs to be an instructional leader... I think it was always interpreted that principals would be the instructional experts in some ways. I in no way fool myself into thinking I'll ever know more than the third grade teacher who is teaching it every day, because I'm just not going to. That's just impossible. It's impossible across, in my building, five grade levels. It's impossible across five plus content areas. (Candace, November 2014)

Here, Candace states it is not her responsibility as principal to know more than her teachers about instructional content or strategies, which seems to present her reluctance for being the authority on matters of instruction, positioning herself more democratically than autocratically in her leadership role. In other words, she seems to equate the term "instructional" with "instructional expert" and holding some form of authority over others she is not willing to command. She also seems to suggest that, because any given leader is only one human being, and thereby limited in their ability to know and be all things at once, there are boundaries that should be placed upon expectations for leader, boundaries that currently do not exist. Given the integral role of the leader in standards-based reform, levels of effectiveness come into question for leaders who are spread too thin.

A number of participants shared Candace's reluctance for the term "instructional leader" and the implications it would have regarding their relationship to being an expert or having ultimate authority, which leaders seemed to connect with it. For these reasons, Sam too hesitated to call himself an instructional leader.

You know what? I don't consider myself as an instructional leader. It's not that I couldn't be. I could go back and forth on this because now, I don't know how do you define an instructional leader?

Like am I a curriculum leader? No, because I'm not passionate about this. Do I wish that I were more passionate about curriculum? Sure. Do I feel guilty sometimes as a principal in not being that crazy about curriculum? Sure.
(Sam, October 2014)

Here, Sam initially rejected the term “instructional leader” to describe his role. Like Candace, it seemed Sam was reluctant to accept responsibility for being an authority on curricular matters. Sam worried about needing to be an expert in all knowledge and skills. With a strong sense of duty to serve as a support to his teachers, Sam also seemed hesitant to put himself above or ahead of them in expertise.

As Sam continued, he paused to question his understanding for the term “instructional leader.”

But in terms of instruction, in terms of what's happening in the classroom on a day-to-day basis with kids, whether they are in need of support or whether they are average kids or whether they need enrichment, I am an instructional leader, because I am part of what we call At-Risk meetings with kids. We talk about a particular student and what they need, “Okay, what if we tried it in the classroom? What could we do differently? Have you tried this? What if we did this, or what if we used this person and what if we tried this or changed location for that?”

So, in terms of the instruction and what's happening with supporting kids. I'm extremely involved in that and I feel like I'm a huge part of that. So, maybe I am an instructional leader. Who knew? (Sam, October 2014)

After pausing for a brief period of dissonance to consider the true meaning of instructional leadership and his role in that context, Sam began to change his position. Although he did not wish to consider himself a content expert on matters of instruction, he was willing to accept responsibilities associated with leading instruction. As he worked through his thoughts, he proved his willingness to embrace his conceptualization of instructional leadership in

responsibility more so than in title. Participants, regardless of whether they accepted or rejected the title of instructional leaders, have asserted the need for clarification regarding a commonly accepted definition for the role.

Taken together, the role of the instructional leader was characterized and defined in different ways by different participants. At least two participants, as noted within this study, equated the idea of instructional leadership as too authoritarian in nature, which posed a potential threat to the professionalism of their teachers and their collaborative relationships with those teachers. Others viewed the assertion of authority in the role of instructional leader as a necessary and comfortable component of the role. Overall, participants valued their role as one of support and took seriously their responsibility to model best practices for teachers and others in the school community. Participants also described how the role of the instructional leader was essential to the implementation of standards-based reform within their schools/districts.

Implementation Procedures in Schools

As previously identified in this study, increased rigor regarding what students are expected to know and be able to do by the end of each grade level, as called for by the CCSS, needs to be addressed by those implementing the standards in schools. School leaders from high performing schools in this study identified “unpacking the standards” as a necessary strategy for implementing the standards as defined by participants. Unpacking is the process of considering each standard, one by one, as it relates to and is addressed (or not) within a corresponding grade level’s curricular map. Leaders also identified teacher collaboration as an essential element in achieving curricular change associated with this standards-based reform. Participants revealed that when teachers collaborated to unpack the standards they were empowered to take ownership of the standards to effectively integrate them into instructional practice in a way that purchasing

curricular programs designed to meet the standards does not. This, in turn, allowed them to work to increase rigor as required by the standards.

Through common planning time, Trevor's teachers refocused their collaborative planning efforts to address gaps in their curricula.

I would say I have noticed an increase in rigor, but I've also seen, in a great way, alignment of instruction from classroom to classroom. As much as we have a fantastic building, it is nice to see a common theme amongst each classroom, but with each teacher's own spice added to it. Rather than seeing teachers specialize in certain projects or themes, for example, one is more of an expert at poetry, so s/he is spending three months on poetry, while others do something different.

We've always had just as much common planning time, but the standards have put us all on the same page. It's nice to see that the same skills are being taught in any one of our classrooms. I find it very valuable. It's good for kids. (Trevor, November 2014)

For Trevor's school, the collaborative work teachers did depended upon shared goals and alignment of instruction within and between grade levels. According to Trevor, these results positively impacted students and their academic achievement. Trevor emphasized that amount of common planning time had not changed for teachers, but he also implied the ways teachers used common planning had changed to incorporate greater collaboration and more focus on alignment of curricula. In this way, Trevor implies that the quality of their planning time and effectiveness of instructional practices across classrooms now being accomplished was improved by collaboration, which may result from organizing such collaborative efforts on a regular basis.

Sheila, a newly appointed district level leader, also spoke to how, when she was a principal, her school collaborated to address rigor.

When we implemented the standards, I was still a building principal. We had the team from [State Education Department] come over and they presented about those shifts. But really the rubber hits the road at the building level, because you got to unpack the standards and you have really got to figure out what they mean.

I can remember sitting around the table during summer work at that time and reading through the Common Core and thinking, “okay so what does that really say?” I mean, really, it is not easy work. We wondered, “How does that match Fountas and Pinnell’s Continual Literacy?” and “Where does our current core English Language Arts Program fit with all of that?”

I will say one of the things that I think helped us over there was that we have enough strong personalities and instructional leaders among all of us that people weren’t satisfied to go the easy route or to go with the status quo. So, we were really looking to really define truly the essential learning. That was hard and long work. (Sheila, October 2014)

As was also the case in Trevor’s school, Sheila’s teachers aligned their curricula through development of shared goals. However, through unpacking the standards, her teachers also developed shared understanding for what the standards meant. This shared understanding proved critical for teachers to align their instruction with the Common Core.

Through the process of unpacking the standards, her teachers aligned them within their curricula for themselves. They did not purchase a canned/scripted program that claimed to do the work of explaining and aligning for the teachers. They did, however, align existing curricula, like that, mentioned by Sheila, which was founded upon Fountas and Pinnell’s Continual Literacy with shifts called for by the CCSS. By doing the work of unpacking and developing shared understanding, as Sheila described, teachers were able to collaborate to determine how to make shifts within existing curricular programs.

Other participants reinforced these observations. Like Sheila and Trevor, Dale favored facilitating opportunities for teachers to collaborate and take ownership of the standards.

We followed the Backwards Design approach and started with assessment. We are starting to implement the common assessments called for by the state and have the performance task drive the change. Rather than buying books that say they’re Common Core aligned or adopting curriculum that people are skeptical about, we get teachers to buy in to performance task that are aligned with Common Core and then ask them to determine how we get to the next step. That starts the culture of change and helps with pedagogy and

curriculum to go after higher standards. (Dale, October 2014)

Backwards Design, a model for designing instruction developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2000) starts with assessment and designs instruction around what students are required to know and be able to do. Beginning with the end in mind (Covey, 1989), the curricula are determined based upon what evidence will be required to demonstrate learning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2000). By utilizing Backwards Design, Dale's teachers were able to design instruction that prepared students for how they would be assessed. By addressing matters of assessment in their efforts to implement the standards, Dale led his teachers to what he believed was greater efficiency in their instructional practices. According to Dale, for his district, this approach seemed to aid in aligning curricula to address shifts in rigor called for by the CCSS.

As Dale described the process, unpacking the standards is asking teachers to determine how to get from a performance task called for in a given standard to the next best step. He implied that this process is key, not only in CCSS implementation, but also toward making curricular change within his district. Kristen provided another example of how curricular change, like CCSS implementation, happens within her district.

In Kristen's district curricular change requires a formal process of research, presentation, and acceptance from leaders serving on curricular leadership teams. She described one such initiative for aligning curricula with the CCSS in the form of a new literacy program developed by a team of teachers from her school.

We have teacher teams working together on study teams. Over the summer a whole team of teachers investigated [the literacy program] Words Their Way, and they are also going to see schools using this in [a nearby] area. We are putting a proposal together for how we can roll this program out in our district. Then the team writing the proposal works through our ELA cabinets. We have cabinets for every subject area that meet on a regular basis, and discuss changes in implementation of initiative. It's supported throughout the entire district. No school is doing something totally different than everybody

else. (Kristen, October 2014)

Calling to mind earlier comments from Sheila and Trevor, Kristen described commitment, collaboration, and shared goals for student achievement as key to shifts made by her teachers to align curricula with the CCSS. Sheila noted that such efforts are fully supported in her district, which implied that she characterizes district support and alignment of district policies as significant regarding standards-based reform. Other leaders (including Candace, Brad, Jack, Emmitt, Trevor, Dale, and Kristen) in this study also made mention of district support throughout the study, distinguishing it as a factor in what they perceive to be successful reform efforts.

Kristen noted that a deliberate approach to curricular and instructional change associated with implementation of the CCSS proved key to what she perceived as success in her school.

We have taken a kind of a slow approach to this so, as to not overwhelm people, and we're providing quite a bit of professional development for folks as well. I think our teachers are advocates of common core. They still have some questions once in a while like, "Whoa, why did we do this?" But they talk a lot in our school, and with the other schools in the district.

We had a writing initiative in our school. We now have a staff member who is part time professional developer in the language arts area. She provides that support right in the classrooms. Last year she did a sabbatical so, she rotated in through identified classrooms with volunteer teachers, and supported them in implementing the writing for study.

With math we didn't have a professional developer, per se. But we did employ somebody who came in and met with teachers on a regular basis just to answer their questions. We have an outstanding K-12 math supervisor. He is very supportive, and actually in the next month is going to be providing more workshops for teachers on accessing materials, and the application of Common Core Standards, which aren't tremendously different. (Kristen, October 2014)

Calling to mind the way Trevor spoke to the importance of autonomy for teachers, the process reported by Kristen encouraged teachers to take the initiative in their professional development

and provided them a say in curricular change in their district. Kristen discussed various professional growth opportunities necessary to support her teachers in their shifts toward the Common Core. She explained, from her perspective, that successful shifts toward increased rigor required by the CCSS were made achievable through help from staff appointed throughout the district, including a K-12 math supervisor.

As similarly described by Sheila and Trevor, Brad also highlighted that his school's shift to the Common Core also included extensive professional growth, meaningful teacher collaboration, and careful unpacking of the standards. In this way these leaders' perspectives served as somewhat of a structure for making sense of these shifts called for by the CCSS.

Oh, we've had a lot of district level professionals come in. They have coordinated a lot of professional development opportunities for us to make the shifts. The key to that whole thing for us [at the building level], that serves as a staircase of complexity, is determining and understanding the meaning of the standards.

It's like, what does that mean and what does that look like? That's how we spent our time. Honestly, the first few years the way to find out what that looks like is to see what the state measures and how they go about measuring. So we can understand what they mean by this or that. (Brad, November 2014)

Echoing Dale's previous reference to Backwards Design as a means of utilizing assessment in helping others understand the standards, Brad also mentioned the importance of using measures of student achievement when planning and developing curricular change associated with standards-based reform. According to Brad, without understanding how learning is assessed, teachers have limited understanding of what to teach and students of what they are expected to learn. Consistently, participants singled out shared understanding of the standards as essential to what they perceived as successful implementation. Brad's comments here support this position.

The Common Core Standards, initially received by educators with optimism, have come under harsh criticism from those who believe the standards to be flawed, which in turn has

caused challenges for leaders implementing the standards in their schools and districts. The matter of public opinion has only worsened as a result of standards implementation at a time when a new system of teacher evaluation, including higher accountability for student test scores also took place, and this further figures into challenges faced by schools regarding implementation. School leaders from high performing schools in this study credited teacher collaboration and unpacking the standards as necessary factors in implementing curricular change associated with this standards-based reform. In contrast to the public discourse on testing, participants revealed challenging aspects of efforts to facilitate implementation of the CCSS.

Challenges Specific to Common Core State Standards

When asked about the Common Core, participants typically responded with positive opinions of the standards as guidelines for learning, followed by criticism and disappointment regarding the implementation process as initiated by their state governments. Leaders described the challenging circumstances their schools faced during implementation, and they explained ways in which they led the transition to the Common Core.

For example, one critique voiced by the participants was that the standards were well intentioned but poorly explained. Candace argued this position.

I think there are a lot of really good things about the standards. I think if you actually look at what these learning standards are, and what they are asking for of kids to do, I don't know how anybody can ever find fault in those, if you actually read them.

I think you get parents or people who hate Common Core and they proclaim it's so hard, and so this, and so that. I don't think they even really understand what that is or means. I think if you actually read the standards, well, who wouldn't want their child to know those things so, that they could be competitive in this international world? (Candace, November 2014)

Candace and other participants seemed to suggest that it was the school leader's responsibility to manage this resistance within the school community and lead their schools on a path to

implementation that may be considered as successful as called for by the Common Core. She went on to elaborate on this matter.

I think, particularly in [this] State, it's the pace at which they were implemented. I think they just jumped out so quickly and things were implemented way too fast with perhaps not enough input from educators in the field. In [this] State, we like to be ahead of everything, which is great in a lot of ways, but then we tend to make more mistakes when we do that.

I do say it with that respect for the people who work at the State. But just maybe that disconnect, between who is making the decisions and who is implementing at the school level, is a problem in terms of some of that.
(Candace, November 2014)

Candace shared an important observation, stating she felt the biggest problem with implementation disseminated by the government in her state was that 1) those making decisions regarding roll out of the standards were not on the same page with school leaders and teachers, and 2) the pace was too fast. Together these elements caused some disconnect between those directing the policy and those on the ground attempting to implement. She suggested that a better connection between schools and government may serve to improve implementation processes for standards-based reform in the future, and further that challenges associated with change may have been avoidable with greater attention to detail at the top/from state government. She also seems to imply a necessary caution, from her perspective as a school leader, that teachers' willingness to take necessary risks for the sake of continual improvement of their instructional practices may be compromised by such flawed communication with state government. Candace's position supports the importance of effective communication, as well as that of having the most qualified people in the right places making decisions, in change efforts associated with standards-based reform. While participants have described how effective communication and informed leadership is essential at the local level of the school, Candace highlighted a similar need regarding communication from the state to the district and the schools.

Jack shared Candace's positive view of the standards and belief that current resistance could be attributed to lack of understanding for what the standards mean. However, he went beyond Candace's sentiment regarding the problem of implementation to suggest that lack of understanding not only existed, but also led to debate surrounding the standards. Further, he suggested that some of the backlash may be reaction to hype more than reasonable opposition.

It's not the standards themselves that are of concern, that's my own personal take on it. To me the standards themselves are not the issue at all. It's how we go about implementing them through the curriculums that are put out there.

That's why I feel like our district is already ahead. By having our staff look at the standards, understand the standards, digest the standards, dissect them. We look at what we're doing currently and ask, how we can tweak and modify and do that versus adopting a full program?

The quick summary on that is that there are the pros of those for sure. It's just how you go about doing that. I think people just hear the word [standards] and so they get jazzed up. (Jack, October 2014)

Jack implied that the forming of a real understanding for what the standards mean may have alleviated some of the opposition experienced in school communities during implementation. He also explained, from his perspective as a district leader, how advocating for change and taking active steps to fine-tune what they were already doing and make changes toward what needed to be done led to manageable and effective implementation. In this way, Jack suggested the importance of asserting professionalism with regard to change implementation decision-making.

Emmitt also stated that state government was too quick to implement without a plan for supporting schools and districts in the change. Also like many other participants, Emmitt separated his views on implementation and rollout from the state with his views on the standards. He too stated the standards themselves were not the problem but went on to describe problems with the rollout including documents and materials provided.

There were inconsistencies, there were gaps, there were holes, and there were

spacing issues. There were flat-out errors in some cases and it took months to even get those.

Stuff eventually did get tweaked and got better. The eventual improvements were fortunate, because I do think a lot of districts, especially rural or high poverty didn't have the resources to meet requirements or the teacher leadership to figure out the issues. (Emmitt, October 2014)

Here, Emmitt indicated that not only were there problems with a rushed implementation initiated by the state, but that materials and information to support the change were significantly delayed, causing even greater challenges. He speculated, due to these problems, the potential for implementation to be even more difficult for schools lacking resources. Emmitt seemed to suggest that state actions are in part to blame for some of the challenges faced in schools regarding implementation of the CCSS. It would also seem, to properly address needs of schools and districts continuing to implement the standards, policy and decision makers at the state level need to accept responsibility for these problems.

Beyond simply feeling rushed towards implementation, participants also expressed frustration over the simultaneous changes to requirements for Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) (i.e., the new system of evaluation for teachers). Sheila represented this point of view, suggesting that it was difficult to get teachers to take risks and manage their instruction while being held increasingly accountable for their practice.

Well, certainly I think the standards were a key help for us in identifying the essential learning. Sadly it was a huge tactical error in my own opinion on the states level to tie it into APPR. Had they not done that, and had they not immediately gone to changing the assessment, I think we would be in a different place.

They (government) always do that. You know their philosophy has been if you build it, they will come. Sadly I think they did it (implementation) at the expense of kids that first year.

I think it is quite a balance, because certainly you continue to say we have got to put the testing war aside, the APPR aside, and that's not going to be a sole

determiner as to whether or not a teacher is going to be in [this district] or not be in [this district] as an instructor. (Sheila, October 2014)

Sheila noted that teachers were unfortunately being held accountable for student test scores, in some cases, at the cost of their jobs. While echoing the sentiment of others regarding concerns about the simultaneous rollout of APPR and the CCSS, Sheila went further to suggest the importance of leaders at all levels using sound, reasonable professional judgment to be mindful that teacher evaluation should not be based on one criterion alone like test scores. In this way, Sheila expressed a desire to use professional decision-making to accommodate what works within a given school environment, including adapting policy if necessary. She suggests that such professional decision-making and use of common sense may be a solution for challenges brought about by what participants describe as unfortunate timing of the rollout.

Beyond problems with timing of implementation as initiated by the state, school leaders also indicated that some challenges arose in their own implementation efforts due to increased rigor of the standards. Leaders concurred that the rigor associated with the Common Core was substantially greater than that of previous standards for learning, and most agreed that they needed new curricular strategies and materials to meet the requirements. To illustrate this issue, Candace explained how her school recognized and navigated through their initial efforts to align math curricula with the Common Core. These activities resulted in problems for former students transitioning from second to third grade.

Like for the math, we did it, over a two-year process. We did kindergarten and 1st grade first. There's always unfortunately one cohort that gets stuck being that group that is always the one that's learning something new, or going through that transition, but at least it wasn't everyone all at once.

The trickiest parts were last year going from 2nd to 3rd grade. I think parents felt the rigor was just huge. I think we had made 3rd as rigorous as it was supposed to be, but 2nd grade, perhaps was not enough of a boost up. So, it just felt like a huge leap for parents when their kids understood math in 2nd

grade and felt good about it, then they got to 3rd grade, and they were really overwhelmed. It was just too big a shift. (Candace, November 2014)

Candace explained that in her school, second grade teachers misinterpreted their existing math curriculum to be rigorous enough. When students got to third grade, where appropriate shifts had been made, children were not able to meet or understand the rigorous demands they were experiencing. It may be understood from Candace's case that facilitation of collaboration between grade levels for the specific purpose of ensuring effective alignment of curricula may be essential when implementing curricular change.

Another deterrent to implementation of the standards, as expressed by school leaders, was the tendency for distractions posed by programs promising easy solutions. Brad discussed the tendency for large-scale changes in curriculum, like implementation of the Common Core, to bring about new canned programs, i.e., something from a textbook company including a teacher's manual and pre-made student resources/materials.

Canned programs provide, what I think in ELA (English Language Arts), teachers would like to have, more clarity. I think teachers would like to have the step-by-step guide dictating the order you teach and exactly what you teach.

The thing to me is, especially in ELA, I think different teachers have different strengths and they might be better off playing to their own teaching style rather than trying to have a one approach that fits all. It's very easy to adopt a program and everyone is following that program.

I abhor following a program because we may as well go ahead and just get a trained monkey to do it. I mean you just follow along, and it's a good thing for medium to low teachers. If they are a highly qualified teacher they can do a lot better not following a program. (Brad, November 2014)

Brad asserted that the notion of a one-size-fits-all curriculum is beneath the abilities, skills, and talents of a highly qualified teacher, which further supports the need for collaborative efforts among teachers to unpack and form shared understanding for what the standards mean, as well as

make shared decisions about how the CCSS will be addressed in curricular change and instructional practice. He suggested that such programs underutilize teachers in their professional capacity, which ceases to capitalize on their talents and strengths. He went so far as to state he holds little value in the worth of such programs or their potential for bringing about effective curricular change or student development.

Dale also rejected canned programs and cautioned against purchasing curriculum to implement change.

I think the CCSS are great. I think unfortunately like most change in education it is falling apart with the implementation hiccups and now it's being blurred that the standards and the curriculum are as one. I think it's unfortunate that [this northeastern state] went about rushing to implement and rushing to provide the curriculum for people. I think the district should be more involved in the instructional planning and the design of the units. In this way, rather than adopting a program, you are adapting the standards. (Dale, October 2014)

Here, Dale also asserted the importance of valuing the expertise and skills of teachers as professionals. He made the strong case for collaborative work within the district to develop shared understanding for what the standards mean and align curricula to support shifts in rigor called for by the standards. He called this process “adapting the standards,” which may also be considered “unpacking the standards.” Both Brad and Dale expressed their unwillingness to support the use of canned programs for curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform. Their sentiment echoed that of other participants, in that it indicated that the flexibility and professional decision-making necessary for curricular change is not provided by use of a canned program.

Another challenge associated with implementation of the Common Core Standards as expressed by participants was that the standards were not suitable for meeting special needs of students, especially those with individualized education plans placing their level of instruction

below the rigor of the grade level. Laura discussed the challenge of meeting students at their individual level of need.

I think that it's something that all administrators and teachers feel, and it's that little slice of kids that you don't reach for whatever reasons. The ones that keep you up at night and you're brainstorming, "What approach do I need to take because whatever we're doing isn't working?" Those are challenges that I don't think are ever going away. (Laura, November 2014)

Here, Laura described instances where the typical program fails to meet the needs of the child with special needs and alluded to the notion that these instances were common. She expected it would be a challenge continually faced in education. Laura speculated that other school leaders and teachers who were facing the same challenges may share this concern.

The Common Core State Standards presented challenges to schools across the nation due to the ways state governments rolled out the standards for implementation. As noted by participants, the pace was too great, insufficient input from teacher and leaders in schools informed the development of the standards, the standards do not address the needs of individual students, and for some students, especially those with special needs, the standards may be too rigorous.

Discussion

Central to this research is the notion that instructional leaders are essential to what may be considered, according to existing research, as successful standards-based reform in schools and districts. Through a multi-faceted role, instructional leaders are integrally involved in the effectiveness of the school (Hallinger 1992a; Marzano, 2005; Waters & Marzano, 2006) and thereby influence continual improvement and student achievement. As demonstrated by participants, the duties of a school leader, specific to instructional leadership, include establishing shared vision for curricular and instructional excellence, cultivating leadership skills

in teachers, and monitoring the effectiveness of instructional practices and their impact on student learning (Marzano, 2005; Mitgang, 2013; Portin, 2009). Perspectives of participants in this study and existing literature support that the role of the instructional leader directly affects student achievement, and therefore is vital to implementation of curricular change associated with standards-based reform (Bryk & Driscoll, 1985; Fullan, 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Spillane & Hunt, 2010; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001).

As demonstrated in this study, through research and data analysis, the term instructional leader “has yet to be adequately or commonly defined” (Marzano, 2005, p. 19). Leaders in this study, like Dale and Brad, were quick to distinguish their instructional leadership duties from their managerial responsibilities by separating them into instructional and managerial categories. However, Jack and Trevor seemed to group instructional and managerial duties under the umbrella of instructional leadership. This raises the question as to whether or not unclear distinctions in the duties of the school leader influence how individuals enact those understandings in practice. Literature maintains that while managerial duties traditionally take a majority of the school leader’s time and attention (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2006), it is the balance of political, managerial, and instructional responsibilities in a school that is essential to the instructional leader (Cuban, 1998). Generally, participants in this study agreed that support for teachers was an important facet of the role of the instructional leader.

When it came to characterizing themselves as instructional leaders, participants responded and described their roles as instructional leaders in various ways. Some were comfortable using the term “instructional leader” (i.e., they positioned instructional leadership as autocratic in terms of practice) to describe themselves while others hesitated (i.e., they positioned instructional leadership as democratic in terms of practice). It seemed, of those who hesitated to

characterize themselves as instructional leaders, that some worried the term might distinguish them as an authority on all curricular matters, which they declared was unrealistic. Elmore (2000) stated that knowledge of best practices related to curriculum and instruction is an essential tool for instructional leaders. However, at least three participants seemed to feel that achieving a knowledge base so vast as to guide all educators in the school on all curricular matters may be too much for any one person, and therefore, may be an unrealistic expectation regarding definition of the instructional leader's role. Additionally, the ways participants characterized their leadership roles seemed to align with four aspects of instructional leadership as defined by Smith and Andrews (1989). Those four aspects comprise notions asserting that instructional leaders provide necessary instructional resources, communicate effectively, serve as a resource for instructional practices, and maintain a visible presence (Marzano, 2005; Smith & Andrews, 1989). Regardless of how participants characterized themselves as instructional leaders, or how they positioned instructional leadership within the spectrum of autocratic to democratic in nature, they all recognized their role in the facilitation of change associated with implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

In the context of defining the role of instructional leadership, current literature and data from this study agrees that the role is difficult to define. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) even suggest that to narrow the scope of the role unnecessarily may be unwise, however they noted the importance of a "working definition" to serve as a "frame of reference" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005, p. 2). Data from this research seems to suggest that effective leadership increases for individuals with clarity regarding their role and its responsibilities; therefore, it would seem that neglecting to distinguish between leadership and instructional leadership may put those in the role of instructional leader at a disadvantage with regard to their daily practice. In the context of

standards-based reform, a case can be made that distinctions are necessary for the sake of clarity and conviction pertaining to implementation of curricular change, like that associated with the Common Core State Standards.

School leaders in this study shared their thoughts about the standards and also shared some of the challenges they faced during implementation. Participants agreed that, as guidelines for learning, the standards comprise positive skills development and meaningful learning for students. As noted previously in this research, the standards were, in fact, designed specifically to concentrate on opportunities for students to engage in deep meaningful learning (Porter et al., 2011a; Stage et al., 2013). As noted by Coleman (2011), educators initially received the standards with interest and anticipation. However in time and with challenges that would accompany implementation, the standards became subject to extreme opposition from educators, parents, and students alike. As previously noted in this research, these opponents harshly criticized the standards. School leaders in this study seemed to agree with the need for more careful assessment of the problem and clear distinction between the standards as benchmarks for learning and the problems associated with implementation. Participants agreed that a cause of the problem was the implementation process as initiated by state governments and missteps that followed at the building level due to increased rigor called for by the standards.

Participants asserted the necessity for professional decision-making in the curricular change processes associated with implementation of the CCSS. They seemed to perceive contradictions within the process of implementation as state government rolled it out. Reliance on professional decision-making and even adaptation of policy if necessary appeared to be the way in which many made sense of this perceived problem. This raises the question, what right do professionals have to adapt policy? Such exercise of professional judgment may produce positive

or negative result depending on the how well a given school leader or team within a building/district is able to assess their own professional abilities. In other words, if schools are actually demonstrating the professionalism necessary for such adaptation to be successful, then such professional judgment may be a good practice. However, if decisions made by instructional leaders within a school environment act in contrast to or competition with goals of the standards, or the standards themselves, then such practice may lead to negative results. Today the standards are being implemented at a “crucial” time when criticism from opponents, many of whom are converted supporters, is mounting and some states are calling for a halt and even in some cases pulling out of adoption altogether (Jochim & Lavery, 2015; Rentner & Kober, 2014).

Another challenge participants described during implementation of the standards involved resistance from various individuals or groups in their schools due to increases in level of rigor called for by the standards. Rigor with regard to the standards is an issue of great contention amongst educators (Beane, 2013; Gewertz, 2013; Ravitch, 2013; Ujifusa, 2013a), especially regarding unrealistic expectations for students with special needs. Participants did agree that required shifts in rigor were high in some cases, especially at primary levels of instruction where development of fundamental skills is especially relevant and imperative with respect to how students define themselves as learners. Participants also reflected the findings of Rentner and Kober (2014), who stated that a majority of school leaders in process of implementation agree that new curricular materials and strategies are necessary to meet CCSS requirements.

Implementation of the standards, perceived by many participants as rushed and even flawed, denied teachers the time and processing required for such complex change to be understood and accepted. Alberti (2013) cautioned against implementing too fast without

ensuring teachers truly understand the standards and have properly aligned curricula. Participants seemed to infer that complex curricular change implemented within a short timeframe, or even simultaneously with other similar changes related to standards-based reform, would complicate the process and overwhelm teachers. Literature supports this notion that when too much change happens too fast, teachers feel their efforts become fragmented and become overwhelmed (Fullan, 1993; Noack, Mulholland & Warren, 2012). The slight period of time between rollout of the standards and the introduction of new Annual Professional Performance Review or APPR compounded the situation for schools.

In particular, the timing of the new APPR requirements for teachers presented another challenge for participants regarding implementation of the standards. Participants recognized that the two are intertwined such that most individuals view them as equal parts of the same big picture. Further, participants seemed to indicate that through the confluence of things happening at once, the incentive structures for the two policies were misaligned and even in conflict. The reality of the situation, as explained by participants, was that teachers were held accountable, through student test scores, for rigorous curricular and instructional shifts required by the Common Core before truly adjusting to those shifts. Since 2011, teacher accountability by means of new APPR evaluations has increased (Curtis, 2013). As such, according to many participants, the standards tend to take the blame for problems brought about by implementation errors resulting in grievances associated with APPR. The timing of the new APPR was inconvenient at best, and as noted by school leaders further complicated the implementation process for schools. However, caution should be considered where such grievances may have a tendency to interfere with accountability for taking necessary risks in forming understanding for and implementing the standards. Participants in this study who reported being settled in their implementation efforts

have often made clear distinctions between the standards and their implementation, indicating that such distinctions are helpful in remaining focused on shared goals and their attainment. Despite being difficult to separate APPR from discussions about the standards, participants in this study alluded to challenges associated with implementation as a result of lack of understanding for what the CCSS truly mean and misalignment of incentive structures, which suggests that this separation of ideas is pertinent and influential.

Collaboration among teachers, within and between grade levels, was also helpful with regard to implementation of the CCSS. School leaders affirmed that collaboration fostered for teachers a shared meaning and acceptance of standards-based reform within the school community. Collaboration amongst teachers in activities related to curricular and instructional change/development entails time and support from administrators including materials and resources for strategic implementation. It also necessitates encouragement, assistance, and training from the instructional leader(s) in the form of professional development. Goatley and Hinchman (2013) noted the problem of rushing past quality professional development into implementation of curricular change by use of canned programs, which erroneously claim to sufficiently and accurately meet the standards.

One such form of collaboration for implementing the standards as described by participants is unpacking the standards to develop shared meaning for what the standards require in light of what is already taught within a given curriculum. From a sensemaking perspective, based upon the ideas of Weick (1995), new information is often received within an organization (or in this case, a school) as unfamiliar or even surprising, and to gain understanding of that which is unfamiliar and surprising requires placement of that new information into frameworks. Using Candace's second grade teachers as an example, shifts in mathematics rigor and

expectations involving student performance called for by the CCSS surprised teachers in that it was unfamiliar with regard to previous rigor and expectations for that level of instruction. Candace's teachers needed to go back and rediscover frameworks for aligning existing curricula and instructional practice with the new math standards. This instance, like others within this study, supports that the CCSS presented unfamiliar information for teachers to process and new guidelines to which their instruction must adhere. The process of unpacking the standards provided teachers in these schools with the means of placing that new information into those frameworks necessary for establishing shared meaning and achieving effective implementation. According to participants, unpacking the standards required collaborative efforts from teachers and leaders alike to contemplate each standard in the context of curricular maps at each grade level, establish shared meaning for what the standard requires, and determine when and where in their respective curricula to address each standard. Through these concerted efforts, schools are likely able to avoid the pitfalls of misinterpreting or underestimating the standards to conclude that shifts have already sufficiently and correctly been implemented under the old ways of meeting previous standards. For such collaborative efforts to be effective it is evident, as noted above, that time and support (in the form of both professional development and necessary materials and resources) are necessary. Provision of these essential resources is essential to the role of the instructional leader in the process of implementing curricular change.

It is also important to note, when considering the need for teachers to "unpack" the standards and integrate them with current practice, that initial perception of new standards as something familiar or something already sufficiently covered in the classroom may serve to interfere with what may be considered, according to existing research, as successful implementation. Such a perception presumes that teachers, in fact, already share an

understanding of what those shifts mean as called for by the standards and in the context of their instructional practice and that they are already meeting those shifts in rigor. Further, meaning may be shared, but that does not necessarily qualify what is shared as accurate or sufficient for implementation of a program or concept with fidelity. Therefore, just because shared meaning may be achieved amongst teachers within a given school, it is fundamental to the role of the instructional leader that sufficient shared meaning be developed. Building upon Weick's notion that sensemaking is not merely "interpretation" of new information, but rather that sensemaking comprises active construction of new interpretations (1995, p. 6), it would seem vital to the implementation of standards-based reform that new information be interpreted by instructional leaders and teachers in ways that produce "incremental change" rather than ways that "reinforce preexisting practices" (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012, p. 7). Specific to this study, the role of the instructional leader is vital with regard to providing opportunities for collaboration among teachers from which they may gain understanding of the shifts called for by the CCSS that not only suffices to share meaning, but also expends necessary time, energy, expertise, and resources. In this way, teachers may achieve shared meaning that is accurate and sufficient for reliable implementation of the standards throughout the school.

By cultivating shared vision among staff, facilitating collaboration, and managing curricular and instructional change, effective leaders influence and effect implementation of standards-based reform in their schools (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Marzano, 2005). Participants in this study defined and characterized their role as instructional leaders in varied ways, and in some instances hesitated to call themselves instructional leaders. They described implementation of the CCSS in their schools and/or districts as a challenging process due in part to timing and methods of implementation from state governments. Providing support for

teachers, influence on student achievement, and distinctions between leadership and management duties factored significantly into how instructional leaders made sense of their role and enacted these understandings in their practices. Instructional leaders significantly influence continual development within the school (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001; Waters & Marzano, 2006), and therefore the role of the principal as an instructional leader is especially important regarding implementation of the CCSS as a standards-based reform.

CHAPTER V: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

As noted previously, the study called for a participant sample of reflective leaders to explore how leaders make sense of their practices, especially regarding the implementation of standards-based reform in their schools. In this chapter, I define reflective practice as perceived by participants and discuss how school leaders thought about and enacted their role as instructional leaders in that context, including assets and limitations they identified as relevant to their perceived success. I also describe ways in which participants engaged in reflective practice including the emotional work involved with reflection and how and when reflective practice happens. To delineate how and when reflection happens, based on the ideas of Donald Schön (1983), the way these leaders learned from their experiences is explained in three categories: reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action. Finally the chapter examines the factors existing for school leaders that may enhance or constrain reflective practice.

Reflection as Defined by School Leaders

School leaders participated in these interviews by looking back and examining their perspectives and their experiences. As such, their participation in these interviews was, in and of itself, an act of reflection. Leaders defined and described their reflective practice in varied and interesting ways. Overall, they described the process of reflection as purposeful and personal, and they valued it as a means of improving themselves as individuals and in their roles as instructional leaders. For example, Meg described her reflective practice as a means for determining a course of action for improvement.

I do autopsies of all my events, what worked, and what doesn't work. I look at everything. What worked and what didn't work and how could I change it to make it better. Whether it would be an event, whether it is the school year, whether it would be the firing of staff; whatever it might be. Any event that we have and I'd raise a conversation of how might I have handled the situation differently? What worked, what didn't work? What can I do the next

time, and how can I build on it? That's for any event, any aspect. (Meg, October 2014)

Through her use of “autopsies” as a means of reflective practice, Meg developed an extensive way of dissecting and analyzing her reflections. Finding value in looking at what went well and what did not go well regarding a given day's events, Meg chose to share her process with members of her school community so that they may employ it to improve their own practices. In this way, Meg defined reflective practice as a means for personal and professional improvement, which may serve useful in her role as an instructional leader at times when implementation of curricular change is necessary.

Later in this interview, Meg further defined reflective practice as a means for her to better relate to others.

It shows up the next day or the next time I do that event or whatever. I will just say, “Okay, I handled this person improperly. I maybe should have said it differently. I'll go and apologize.” I have no problem with that. But I will still stand firm. But I might change my approach, depending on what the thing is.

I just spoke to my PTA that mishandled something. I smoothed out the problem and I suggested to the PTA president, “My autopsy thing, you might try that next time.” She's liked that so, she sent an e-mail thanking me for helping them through let me know they'll implement it and they know for the next time.

I use it myself as well as the learning way. Again my teachers use it as a reflection. I used it even as a teacher when I taught my lessons, was the lesson successful, how could I have made it better, what worked, what didn't work? Why did this child get it? Will I try next time or I'm not going to do it next time. I'm going to do it a different way. So, it's throughout my ...everything! (Meg, October 2014)

Here, Meg spoke to reflection as a process to improve relations with others in her school community. She accomplished this two ways. First, she stated she used reflection as a means for finding handling people more properly and that she used reflective practice to deal with conflict. In this way, as Meg stated, she was able to say things better while remaining firm on a given

position. Second, Meg described how her process of reflection aided her in connecting with her PTA president and enhancing that relationship. In this way, reflection for Meg led to influence her school community and served as the means for doing so. Taken together, Meg defined reflection as: 1. a means of self improvement, 2. a way of handling conflict, and 3. a way of influencing her school community. Reflective practice for Meg added up to what she aptly described as her “everything.”

Like Meg, other participants talked about the various ways reflection was integrated throughout their daily practice and influenced their role as instructional leader. For example, Sam described his reflective practice as a constant process. However, he also made clear that reflection could be a difficult process, filled with doubt and questions.

I'm very reflective, but I'm reflective like constantly. So, I'm like second-guessing.

I recently had to reassign a member of my staff because [person] wasn't very effective. That's an example of something that I knew was an issue, but there are so many other layers involved like, you know when I sit down and talk to [person), it is like, do I need to have [person's) union rep there? Like how far do I want to go with this? Do I want to have a casual conversation on the side? Then again it is not really a casual conversation if [person) isn't really doing that well. I dread possibly having to let a person go, but in this case I got lucky because another position opened up for [person) to be re-assigned.
(Sam, October 2014)

Sam stated that those problems that get him stuck and “second-guessing” are the more complex matters that do not have answers. He revealed a tendency to let things work themselves out, and even questions this process. His musings may have been an indication that reflection acts as a strategy for navigating his actions as an instructional leader. As an instructional leader, it may be the case that this strategy would apply in his efforts to implement curricular change. With regard to his leadership role, Emmitt also found deep reflection, hidden in the subtleties of his leadership role, to be a useful strategy.

I think those subtleties for me, when I got here, involved me realizing I'm really trying to show everybody that I really do want to invest in who they are.

For me those subtleties are in realizing there is a lot of good within our school culture and understanding why there is good. Did it just happen? Was it deliberately built? Is it attributed to a collection of professionals that were hired because of their talent?

Yeah. I think it's those subtleties; they set me back for a second. I had never experienced that in my life. That someone would actually question my authenticity. So, I had to do some self-reflection and realize that we won't always be in the same mental place at the same time. When times get tough I have to rely on my resources and stick to my core values. (Emmitt, October 2014)

Taken together, it seems Emmitt reflects upon the deeper meaning of the behaviors of people around him, or what he calls subtleties, to inform his understanding of the needs of others in his district. He explained that he typically utilizes these subtleties to enlighten himself as to the differences between how he sees things and the interpretation of those same things by teachers and other stakeholders within the school community. Further, Emmitt used reflection especially for the purpose of improving communication with teachers and staff. He took away what he considered to be the valuable lesson of understanding he would need to look inward to find the answers to difficult questions or situations. In other words, Emmitt came to believe that he would need to rely upon his reflective practice to guide him in his role as an instructional leader, especially as it related to the implementation of curricular and instructional change associated with the CCSS.

Emmitt defined reflective practice as an awareness of subtleties. For Sam, his reflective practice was defined by uncertainty or second-guessing. Meg characterized her reflections as autopsies. Reflection is a difficult concept to define and explain, and the school leaders participating in this study established, in their descriptions, how varied their reflective practices are from one another. Regardless of how varied their definitions of their own reflection, there are

some similarities in their actions and views. All participants analyzed their feelings, they explored themselves through their experiences, and they utilized their reflections to inform their learning and improve their instructional leadership practices. There are also factors to consider that impact reflective practice both positively and negatively. Later sections of this chapter will explore the above-mentioned commonalities in greater depth beginning with self-awareness achieved by instructional leaders through reflection of their assets and limitations as leaders implementing the CCSS in their schools/district.

Awareness of Assets and Limitations

Reflecting on their perceptions and experiences regarding curricular change associated with standards-based reform, school leaders asserted that their self-awareness was not only relevant, but also critical in their respective roles as instructional leaders. Specifically, participants spoke in varied ways to their role as instructional leaders by drawing upon the assets available to them and/or limitations before them as factors in their practices and decisions. Self-awareness regarding assets and limitations figured prominently in the ways participants defined their role as instructional leaders.

As the building leader, some of the participants, like Meg, saw themselves as being ultimately responsible for implementation with fidelity. Sometimes more than others, it required more of an authoritative means of decision-making and more rigid expectations.

Regarding the Common Core, certain things are non-negotiable. We have to do what we can. You can't just say, "We're not going to do it." I do try to get everybody's input on things. But the buck ultimately stops here. I'm paid enough-such-allegedly-big bucks to make the hard decisions. I try to do it by gathering all the best information from all the stakeholders, which obviously amounts to what's good for the children and seeing how they are all learning. My face is the one, ultimately I am responsible, and so I will rise and fall with it. (Meg, October 2014)

Meg alluded to the need for instructional leaders to know when and how to assert authority, or in another manner, to be able to keep the community moving toward change even if/when the course might be unpopular. She also valued buy in and participation from her teachers and stated she sought input from them, indicating sensitivity to the tendency for teachers to resist top-down decision-making. In this way, Meg described her ability to draw upon strength in awareness and assert authority in decision-making for the good of the school community as an asset to her in her role as instructional leader.

Candace, like many other participants, explained the power of reflective practice as a means of determining her strengths in her role as principal. Candace saw development of a sense of awareness of her personal and professional strengths and weaknesses as a vital asset to her perceived success as an instructional leader.

I think appreciating the areas I need to grow is important. So I can make that my focus, or recognize that I am in need of professional development in that way, or that I need to seek out the support of colleagues in those moments.

But I also feel the flip of it too in terms of being in what I think is a challenging job most days of just having that confidence also of knowing, “Okay, I’ve really struggled with this, but I know I have some strengths with this.”

I think it’s important in both of those ways to kind of keep moving forward to be able to recognize, and celebrate your strengths as well as be able to recognize and be open to learning in those other areas. In addition to that? I’m not sure what else is important in addition to that recognition of strengths and weaknesses for instructional leadership. (Candace, November 2014)

Candace seemed to state that reflection facilitates resiliency, in that, it allows her to see both the good in her behaviors and her expressed self-doubt or strained confidence. In this way Candace’s strengths and weaknesses are described as reciprocal to each other, which may be more realistic than perceiving strengths and weaknesses as dichotomous and therefore separate entities.

Like Candace, Trevor recognized the development of a sense of awareness as a necessary element to his role as an instructional leader. However, while Candace described awareness as necessary for self-improvement, Trevor described a situation where he recognized the need for awareness about his staff and what would increase the likelihood of their responsiveness to curricular change.

I would say for me, and the success we've had implementing change in instruction in our building, that can be attributed to me playing more the role of facilitator rather than leader. Meaning, rather than coming at it from the top down.

One of the hardest challenges in a high performing school is that we never were low performing. There was never that immediate need for a leader to come in, and take that warrior kind of role of, "Okay, you know we have to do this, and this, and this or else, we are not going meet (Annual Yearly Progress) AYP."

For me it was more of a situation where I needed to consider, we are doing wonderfully, but are we implementing the best instructional practices? Our scores are coming back fantastically, while we are still using a basal reader. So, can we pick it up a notch? Enough so that we not only continue to score well, and improve our scores a little bit, but also actually reach our students in a better way? (Trevor, November 2014)

It should be noted that Trevor made a natural distinction between facilitator and leader here. One might argue it is the job of a leader to facilitate. Others might disagree and feel it's the job of the leader to take command. Trevor explained he was making the distinction for the purpose of describing the role of facilitator as one of support more than authority. It was awareness of that distinction that empowered Trevor to gauge the needs and potential responsiveness of his teachers his efforts to facilitate curricular change. He went on to convey the necessity for recognizing and heeding the line between "warrior" and "facilitator." Such awareness proved key to bringing about curricular and instructional change associated with implementation of CCSS.

Like Trevor, Emmitt described how his awareness of ways to encourage reluctant staff served to aid in his efforts to affect curricular change. Emmitt explained his limitations in managing, leading, and even inspiring other school leaders from his role as Assistant Superintendent. He suggested similar circumstances may be the case for many school leaders.

Our job (as school leaders) is not only impacting teachers to impact children, we're impacting administrators to impact teachers to impact children. Sometimes the hardest blows are from those that believe they're the greatest leaders. Some of the greatest issues we have to face in order to foster a school culture where curricular change can be made, is getting the person who impacts the many to buy in. We're in the continuum with that. (Emmitt, October 2014)

Emmitt said he realized that he must reach those who resist change, and also explained his weariness when those resisters are fellow school leaders. Emmitt did not appear to act from the standpoint of hopelessness or discouragement. On the contrary, he reported that he relied on continual reflection of his personal and professional strengths and limitations to continue advocating for change. Emmitt conveyed his value for building authentic trusting relationships with staff for the sake of change and further improvement. He suggested that such relationships may serve to address limitations that, according to Emmitt, are likely to befall many school leaders.

Jack expressed what other school leaders agreed made understanding their assets and limitations valuable, but he did so in a less obvious, though powerful way. As a relatively newly appointed district leader, in a district familiar to him, Jack chose to conclude his interview by sharing a story about his teachers, which he implied was indicative of the expectations and culture within his district.

I'll leave you with this. We had a presenter come in from [State Education Department] to guide teachers in writing (student learning objectives) SLOs for the standards.

Well, the presenter came in and she said to the group afterwards that she could not believe what a great group of high school teachers we have, because they were so just with it. They were asking questions, the session moved along smoothly. There were no complainers. She said there is usually at least one complainer but in your whole group, none of you were complainers.

Yeah, it's a big compliment when that person goes across 30 component school districts and says that about us. (Jack, October 2014)

On the surface the story may seem merely a celebration of professional behavior in his district. However as Jack took the opportunity more than once through the interview to describe the high quality at which his staff operates, this was more likely his effort to say "...this is how we are, this is what we expect," and "...this is what I, the instructional leader, need to preserve." It seemed Jack recognized the importance of seeing and acknowledging this staff's efforts. As already attested to by the other participants, Jack described his awareness as an asset to him in his role as an instructional leader. And the passion with which Jack shared his story suggests that he took the responsibility of utilizing that asset very seriously.

For school leaders, establishing awareness for their assets and limitations appeared to be an important factor in their perceived success as instructional leaders. In their reflections, the dichotomy between strength and weakness equaled out with awareness. When a leader is aware, those strengths and weaknesses lend themselves to becoming an asset for the leader. Alternatively, without awareness, as participants expressed, both strengths and weaknesses may potentially play out as a limitation. Increased self-awareness conjured for leaders what they described as a difficult emotional processes associated with reflective practice.

Investigations of Self and Emotional Work Involved in Reflection

As noted previously in this study, Coldron and Smith (1995) and Schön (1987) have noted that feelings are an integral part of reflective practice. In terms of their feelings, participants explained how excruciatingly personal the work of reflection is at times. They often

described the process of reflection as hard or painful. At least two participants also implied that the experience may be threatening in some way, even if they could not ascertain why or what was threatening about it. Sam provided a vivid description of his reflective practice. He used words that indicate the process for him was painful.

My reflection, I'm probably most reflective driving to work and driving home from work. I have to be reflective during the day. Like I know I am reflective, but I spend the most time usually beating myself up. Driving to work and driving home, more so driving home. Driving home in the traffic it's 45 minutes, and I'm like, thinking about a million things. Probably biting my lips and chewing. (Sam, October 2014)

Sam painted a powerful picture of himself engaged in reflection, captive in his car for 45 minutes, agonizing over events of the day, and putting himself through physical and emotional acts of “biting,” “beating up,” and “chewing” as he rehashes all that weighs on his mind. He described quite an ordeal, all for sake of personal and professional improvement. Sam went on to engage in reflection during the interview, making a number of generalizations about his role as a school leader.

I tend to be hypersensitive and overly sensitive, it is kind of weird, because the position that I am in it is not good, you can't be too sensitive. (Sam, October 2014)

Sam concluded that being too sensitive or thin-skinned in the role of a school leader would be unfavorable if not detrimental. He seems to suggest that to be invulnerable as a school leader would make the leader seem unapproachable, which as other participants agreed, would be an equally, if not more, unfavorable result.

For Candace the process of reflection was similarly hard, because, as she described it, the authority associated with her leadership role, makes her job isolating and lonely.

I think I'm a fairly reflective person. I think the hard part in my position in being an elementary principal I think it's a very isolating job and very lonely. So, it's hard, because a lot of times I do value the feedback of others, and balancing things of others or getting different perspectives. A lot of those

things that we are speaking of as a leader I can't share with the colleagues in the building, because it's just not appropriate. (Candace, November 2014)

As the instructional leader in the building, Candace explained that she does not have peers in her building to whom she can turn or with whom she can bounce ideas about tough stuff. Unlike the teachers in the building, she did not have a grade level or subject colleagues across the hall. As such, Candace seemed to utilize reflection to access feedback she might otherwise lack, from sources outside the building such as fellow building principals in the district and other instructional leaders.

She further elaborated the importance of reflection due to those lonely aspects of her job by sharing what a trying experience her job would be if not for the reflective outlets she has found in external colleagues and mentors.

I rely a lot on my colleagues. I'm reflective not only within myself, I will start there, but then it's branching out to those other colleagues that are leaders to get their opinion. I value that. I'd say 99% of the time; I don't end up where I started.

I reflect and have one decision and then I get feedback from others. I either take what they've said or I land in the middle somewhere. But I definitely value and use that and I think I just need not only to be better at my job but even just for emotional support.

I think I'd go insane if I didn't have someone else to serve as an outlet. So, not only to help me make better decisions, but it gives me just that emotional support that I need or you'd go crazy. (Candace, November 2014)

Contrary to other leaders in the study, who tended to prefer a more personal experience during their reflective practice, Candace explained that reflective practice does not have to be solely an intrapersonal experience. She explained that by sharing her reflections, she was able to gain feedback from others, which informed further introspective reflections. Ultimately this shared process of reflection helped her determine a course of action she deemed better than those she would typically come up with on her own.

Candace went on to describe the hard work of reflection as it pertained to being confronted by the harshness of others and the difficulties associated with exploring uncomfortable occurrences especially as a result of other's words, actions, or even accusations.

I got this very harsh, harsh e-mail that you just want to take at face value, but I think it's important when all that settles and you can have a glass of wine (laughter), and you can talk to somebody and you can step away. And you come back the next day or a week later that you go back to that and ask yourself, "Was there anything in that that was of value, that I can reflect on, that I can do better, or anything I could ask the teachers to do better, or anything as a school community we could be better?"

I think even looking within those things that are very challenging, and where initially you don't see a lot of value, I think it probably takes a great more strength to, in those moments, be able to sit back and say, "Can I learn anything from this?" (Candace, November 2014)

Here, she talked about the "great" amount of strength required from leaders to exist inside of hard-to-feel moments. However, by being prompted to consider what, if anything, she might improve, such difficulties ultimately brought about a shift in mindset for her where learning in fact occurred. Candace explained that she was willing to consider those hard things and often did, for the benefit of learning from the situation. She demonstrated a resilience, which may be inferred as a key factor in executing the role of an instructional leader. As Candace and Sam demonstrated, reflection is emotional work that is hard to feel and process. As demonstrated by Meg, Jack, and Emmitt, reflective practice was also integral to curricular change implementation in their schools. Since reflection, as described by these leaders, was necessary for change and difficult to do; it would seem that resilience, as demonstrated here by Candace, is a necessary quality for participants in their roles as instructional leaders responsible for facilitating curricular and instructional change.

With this in mind, I asked Candace to discuss her perspective on school leaders and their willingness to take on those hard things, specifically as it related to achieving perceived success in the role of instructional leader.

Yes, it's hard to do and you can't process it immediately just because of all of the emotionality that comes with that.

I think willingness to take on the hard stuff is definitely important. I think successful is a hard word, because I don't know what are the indicators of success for a leader? Because certainly you can have a rubric from [this northeastern state] or somewhere for APPR that tells you what successful standards, which I don't mean to mock that. There is some importance in that. But that's only one definition of successful. There are certainly others.

And I don't just think for a leader, I think for any professional, or really any person if you are not willing to be reflective... You can be reflective about the easy stuff, and there is value in that. But if you are not reflective about the really nitty-gritty hard stuff, that's probably where the deepest learning can come from.

But that's not always easy to do. So, yes, I think that reflection is important absolutely. But I don't know if that's specific to being a good leader, or just being a good educator or a good professional or a good person. That I don't know. (Candace, November 2014)

Candace offered insight into the importance of reflection as a means of developing as a person and as a professional. She observed that reflection provides entry into empathy and reiterated that it is often difficult to do. She also implied that, rather than coming from a state education document or a list of standards for professional performance, the true measure of success comes from within. It may be inferred from Candace's statement that although the work of reflection is sometimes hard to bear, successful leadership, especially leadership for instruction, is dependent upon deep and thoughtful reflective practice.

Candace and Sam also described the pain and isolation they feel while engaged in the process of reflection. Emmitt, in turn, described an encounter that he seemed to experience as deflating, which led to his ability to gain credibility in his district.

I had some teachers question my authenticity. I have never experienced that in my life. That someone would actually question, not only the core that is me, but also the core of me that has worked for me now for a decade.

So, I had to do some self-reflection on understanding that their mindset wouldn't be exactly where mine was at that moment. When I was saying, "Well tell me what you think about that?" They were just staring at me. They would only respond to me by asking more questions.

Sometimes it took three more visits. Sometimes it took things that I was able to do for them. Sometimes it took the interpretation of someone, who I had built trust with and said, "I am with you."

Kind of transference of credibility, you know? It's also a portion, because you've got the superintendent's stamp. He hired me obviously, and we've got the board saying that things were going great and that's all nice. But more importantly, when two teachers turn to their principal for reassurance, "he said that he would support us and let us do this on our own," and their principal was able to confirm, "he means what he says." His endorsement means more than anything that could come from my mouth. (Emmitt, October 2014)

The experience described by Emmitt occurred back when he was newly hired to his current position as Assistant Superintendent. As an experienced leader in a new place, he was not used to operating without the credibility that comes with being a familiar face. Emmitt, who prided himself on being sincere and authentic, did not anticipate how much time it would take for staff members to open up to him. It surprised him that he was not taken at his word or that his actions were not readily accepted at face value. Through the process of reflection he experienced new ways to understand the process of gaining trust from others. Like Candace and Sam, Emmitt found this experience hard to bear. However, just as Candace and Sam were able to do, Emmitt pushed past the uncomfortable feelings and found skills for relating to his teachers and staff on the other side of the pain. Each of these participants was willing to experience discomfort for the sake of his or her practice and improvement, and as a result all three reported being better equipped to lead reform efforts as a result of reflection.

As described by many participants from this study, the emotional work associated with reflection involved experiencing painful emotions, sticking hard and fast through confrontation, and finding new ways to see themselves. Reflective practice allowed school leaders to find new ways to align their behaviors with their values. Coming out on the other side of the painful experiences associated with reflection also empowered leaders with skills to more effectively implement curricular change. Through reflection these leaders gained insight about themselves and their leadership practices. Often these insights led to discussions about what leaders learned through their experiences and the different ways in which they learned.

Learning Through Experiences

As leaders engaged in reflection during interviews, they demonstrated how they made sense of experiences or situations, and they explained how such sensemaking improved their practices. When individuals are learning through experiences, reflection happens during, after, and before an action or event (McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Schön, 1987). The sections that immediately follow explain how participants express reflection-in-action in their descriptions of reflections related to actions or events while they happen, reflection-on-action as they describe their reflections related to actions or events after they happen, and reflection-for action in descriptions of reflections that happen in anticipation of actions or events. School leaders reflect as follows in various ways during, after, and sometimes before their experiences.

Reflection-in-action (present). School leaders often find themselves in positions where they have make decisions on their feet (i.e., engage in reflection-in-action). School leaders in this study discussed their actions, thoughts, and decisions in meetings, dealing with discipline and staff matters, as well as in their own self-regulation or control. They demonstrated how reflection-in-action may positively impact their practices regarding implementation of curricular

and instructional change. Illustrating this trend, Kristen explained that she regularly thinks on her feet on a regular basis to model her expectations for how adults should treat one another, and even more importantly, how they should treat children.

I try to keep in mind and emphasize on all of my conversations that we are dealing with children, and we love them. We have such a huge role. With children we have to keep in mind that we can make or break a kid's day, their week, their year by how we treat them and how we interact with them.

Because I'm very passionate about treating everyone with respect especially children, I remind myself I control their whole day before I respond to a question or problem. (Kristen, October 2014)

Kristen described how she moves through each day in constant state of reflection specific to her sensitivity toward others and their self-worth. Understanding that as an educator she has tremendous power to affect children, and that as the principal, she has great power to affect her school community, Kristen engaged reflection-in-action to consistently handle others with care. In this way, Kristen used reflection-in-action to self-regulate and influenced the culture of her school to be caring and responsive to student needs. As I demonstrate in the following chapter, participants utilized such influence to cultivate a culture of care within the school community, aimed at creating fairness and equitable learning for students.

Although reflection-in-action may be considered challenging to do, because it requires quick decisions, most school leaders expressed reflection-in-action as just a part of the everyday routine, both for themselves and for their teachers. Participants seemed to expect as much from themselves and from their staff in their ability to do it and do it well. For participants like Candace and Kristen, such reflection enabled them to control their actions, focus on tasks, and optimize their efforts to affect positive changes for the benefit of student learning. In this way, reflection-in-action served them as a tool for implementing instructional change associated with

standards-based reform. In this way, it often seemed, as demonstrated in the following section, that reflection-in-action was informed by previous reflection-on-action.

Reflection-on-action (past). When prompted, during these interviews, school leaders were able to look back on their experiences and considered them in new ways. Often leaders' responses were prefaced with phrases like "I had not thought of this before but..." or "I am not sure I saw it this way then but..." Several expressed that for them looking back and reflecting on their practices in the context of their role as instructional leaders was the most valuable part of their participation in this study. It provided them the opportunity, not only to pause during their busy day and consider deeper meaning of some big ideas they consider important specific to implementation of curricular and instructional change, but it also gave them the opportunity to discuss those ideas, concerns and even celebrations. Based on their statements, such opportunity seemed to be sorely lacking from their routines, despite it being one they valued and needed to make sense of their experiences. Reflecting on their own reflective practices, for many, created meaning and clarified understanding, which in turn provided them new/revised conceptual perspectives.

As an example of this appreciation for the opportunity to reflect, Emmitt shared his pleasure at being provided an opportunity to pause and reflect as a result of this interview.

It was fun sitting here today. We [leaders] don't have this chance. We don't get to do this as much. We're usually focused on solving problems. (Emmitt, October 2014)

He noted how the opportunity to stop and take time to reflect during the workday differed from the day-to-day problem solving which typically dominates the school leader's routine. It was especially helpful for Emmitt to critically reflect interpersonally because he was able to think aloud and consider deeply to explain his thoughts in ways another might understand.

Kristen also expressed her appreciation for time to be able to reflect on her own practices and discuss how change happens in her school. I thanked her for sharing her passion for respecting students and her regard for cultivating a school community that works as a family. She expressed her thoughts on reflection in the context of her role as principal.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to reflect on that a little bit more too. I'm not the sage on the stage. It's really important to me to always be thinking about what I am learning from my colleagues, the other principals, and teachers I work with, the parents too. (Kristen, October 2014)

Here, Kristen described reflection as truly a reflection-on action experience in that she seems to define reflection as an action primarily defined by looking back and learning through experiences. By making the most of learning from others, Kristen appeared to empower herself with the ability to improve and effect change as an instructional leader.

Kristen went on to describe her own reflective practice as an essential part of her daily routine.

There are goals that we have for the year that we decided on as a faculty. So, I think about those and reflect on those at the end of each day and think, "Okay, did my activities today move that forward? Or am I not getting there yet?"

We set goals. We set individual goals for teachers. At the beginning of the year I ask them, "What is it that you are really wanting to work towards personally this year?" So, I look at those. I keep those on my desk, and try and reflect. I consider, "Did I help that person move in that direction? Is there anything that I provided them that got them there, or did what I do actually stand in their way to that?"

Really I kind of reflect on it on a daily basis. I don't keep a journal or anything like that. I just sort of think, at the end of each day. I try to finish all of my work before I leave work. (Kristen, October 2014)

In this example, Kristen described how teachers reflect on previously set goals during their performance evaluations. Their reflections may then inform their instructional practice. Kristen utilized these same goals to self-assess the level of support she provided to her teachers in their

professional development. It seems as though Kristen's reflection-in-action, or the interactions she had with teachers during classroom visits and/or one-on-one professional discussions, were likely affected by the goals that Kristen accepted.

To further her point, Kristen went on to describe her process for conducting those formal teacher observations and evaluations as composed of the same reflection-on-action practices.

I have to formerly observe teachers and then rethink, "How would I have done this differently?" or "What went really well?" or "How am I going to follow up with this? The same thing occurs every day. (Kristen, October 2014)

During performance evaluations, Kristen set out to write a formal review after the fact. In doing so she reflected on her own experiences regarding best practice for planning and implementing instruction and used this knowledge to inform those performance evaluations. Kristen described reflective practice as a mainstay of instructional development in her school.

Engaging in reflection-on-action also seemed to be the type of practice where leaders most often engaged in the emotional journey experienced via reflection. As demonstrated previously, many leaders described the process of reflection as painful and hard, or explained that they had a tendency to beat themselves up during this process. Others, like Laura, suggested that reflective practice may serve as a comfort for leaders as they struggle to cope with challenges.

As a school leader or as a teacher those transgressions can sometimes make you feel a little beaten down, or discouraged. It's important to just remember that there are positive ways to deal with those kinds of things. I think that is an example of what happened [with an upsetting discipline matter involving a student] today.

I recently heard a national teacher of the year speak and talk about the important role of the teachers in his life and then about the role that he's trying to play for kids. It's just another reminder and those things are good. Those things remind us why we're here and allow us to keep from getting bogged down. (Laura, November 2014)

Laura's sentiments echo those previously shared by Candace as she described the role of the school leader as isolating and lonely, as well as Sam's sentiment that the duties of the school leader can wear a person down. However, while Laura, Candace, and Sam agreed that the leader's job was difficult, Laura offered reflection-on-action as a strategy for coping with such difficulties. Such coping strategies may be necessary for leaders to remain sharp with regard to instructional leadership and facilitating implementation of standards-based reform.

Further discussing reflective practice in her school, Laura stated the importance of providing her teachers with opportunities to critique each other's planning and instructional implementation and with opportunities to present at conferences so they may learn from feedback provided to them by other education professionals.

I think that's really important for teachers. In my role I get to have the bird's eye view. I get to see the good things happening all over. But sometimes teachers don't. To give them experiences, like having a real authentic audience to come in and view their work, or an opportunity to go to a national conference and present provides them those new injections of professionalism and pride in addition to new learning. I think it helps them to stay at a little loftier place in their work and in their own thinking about their work. (Laura, November 2014)

Here Laura highlights that she values reflective practice as a means of self-renewal. She also explains that opportunities to engage in professional practices of education, like presenting at conferences or presenting a lesson for another teacher to critique and discuss, are valuable means of reflective practice that may inform improvements in planning and implementation of instruction, which may be especially important where curricular change associated with the CCSS is relevant. She stated she feels it is an important part of her role as the instructional leader to provide these opportunities for the purpose of reflection and self-renewal.

There were also instances described by participants where reflection-on-action informed reflection-in-action, in that their efforts to look back and make sense of their experiences allowed

participants to respond better in new situations. When asked about the impact of her reflections in the moment (reflection-in-practice) or after the fact (reflection-on-practice), Laura explained how, for her, the process of reflection was needed to inspire change for the future, to be able to improve things and turn a negative to a positive.

I'm not sure that it is just a matter of the reflection, but sometimes the injunction of an inspiration from somewhere else is the thing that for me makes me think about how to approach a situation differently.

I think it's important to be reminded of the significant role that we all play in children's lives and the importance of staying positive and trying to stay on the positive and affirming track as opposed to the negative and punitive track. Especially when things like discipline situations arise.

For example, one discipline situation today was very serious. It's important to remember to give children the message that what they've done is serious and wrong, but then also to give them the message that their behavior just isn't worthy of the person that they are. Sometimes you need little injunctions of inspiration to remember to walk that path. (Laura, November 2014)

Here, Laura expressed her reflection-on-action, or her musings about leadership responsibilities as they pertain to developing children, as it informed the ways she engaged in reflection-in-action. She described how she reacted to students in the moment for the benefit of their emotions and ultimately their learning. In this way, literature previously mentioned in this study supporting the impact of leadership on student learning and academic achievement is called to mind. By tending to the needs of the whole child, as Laura explained, students are then able to be at their best for learning and development of knowledge and skills. This seems especially relevant with regard to leadership impact on student achievement as it relates to how students experience shifts in rigor called for by new standards for learning, like the CCSS.

Trevor also shared that he practices reflection by using what he learned from looking back on his experiences (reflection-on-action) to inform his reflection when he is thinking on his feet (reflection-in-action). Trevor stated that he typically used his evening hours, while doing

paperwork, to consider the day's events and how he might continue to increase his effectiveness as a leader for his school and as a support for his teachers.

The reflection for me comes not to get mystical, but more during quiet time of night. My days are spent on foot; my nights are spent doing paperwork. That's when I can kind of reflect upon me, on what I'm seeing, what's working, what's not working, who seems overwhelmed, who seems resistant today, who seems burdened by the minutia of something.

And I consider, what can I do to take care of that, so they can actually free themselves up to think about something greater than report cards or something like that. A lot of that reflection happens when I am on foot. If you are in your classroom and you are beyond overwhelmed because your technology is not working, or you feel like your class it's just not jiving, you can just use me as a listening ear for a few minutes in the morning. At least, so that you can move on if you will.

So, I feel like my reflection has to do with a lot of what I see. And then at night of course, kind of taking in what I saw. (Trevor, November 2014)

In this way, reflection-on-action allowed Trevor to consider the needs of his teachers based upon what he experienced through interactions with them during the day. That reflection on the day's events and the conclusions he was able to draw provided him with information to inform actions and decisions when he encountered similar situations while thinking on his feet, or to form his reflection-in-action. By observing and taking it all in later, the act of reflective practice for Trevor is like a meditative experience.

Without too much passage of time, reflection-on-action may happen while events are happening. According to Schön (1987) the difference between reflection-on action and reflection-in action is that the former happens when we pause to reflect on an action or event, yet the latter occurs without interrupting the action or event. Trevor conducted his support sessions with teachers while simultaneously considering what might be causing a problem and how he might better meet their needs. This is reflection-in-action. It empowers instructional leaders to make adjustments while the events of their day are taking place, which serves as a strategy for

monitoring and guiding change for the benefit of student learning. Such strategies may be enacted for implementation of standards-based reform like the CCSS. Reflection-in-action is further informed by the quiet time he took in the nights before and after the decisions he made during reflection, or during this time of reflection-on action. In this way, we see how reflection-in action and reflection-on-action differ from one another yet also work together to enhance how one learns from experience while leading change associated with CCSS implementation.

Looking back on their experiences to learn from them, participants expressed that reflection allowed them to evaluate their actions and their feelings in light of best ways for implementing change associated with standards-based reform (e.g., the Common Core) their school community. Reflection-on-action, as described by participants, empowered them to consider ways in which interactions with others in the school environment might be improved. In many cases this in turn led to what participants perceived as a means for improving a given situation and discovering even better ways to interact with others from that point forward. When leaders engaged in reflective practices involving forethought, they were describing instances of reflection-for-action.

Reflection-for-action (future). Reflection, and the ensuing actions, can happen without the need to draw upon previous experiences. Reflection-for-action involves forethought and produces knowledge for planning ahead. Reflection-for-action sets the stage for action. Leaders described the ways reflection-for action influenced their beliefs and increased their motivation. Laura discussed the process of curricular planning with her teachers. For example, Laura described how her teachers planned classroom expeditions at the primary level, which required forethought and strategy, rather than reflection on previous events or experiences.

When teachers plan an expedition, which is the 12 week course of study, they refer to the standards and they plan the curriculum to meet the standards but

they may do it in different ways depending on who the teachers are, who the kids are, there are lots of curriculum planning efforts here that happen that overtime. (Laura, November 2014)

Note the difference related to reflection-for-action as Laura described her role as an instructional leader and her expectations for her teachers regarding their curricular plans. In this case Laura reviewed her past experiences as instructional leader to determine constructive guidelines for advising teachers to plan an appropriate curricular scope.

Laura described her role as a facilitator of curricular change, using her knowledge and experience to identify a course of action for future success.

My role in helping design the curriculum is ...to work with the teachers just on the quality of the plans that they have. Sometimes my role is to be the voice of reason and say, "You're trying to do too much, you have got to narrow and focus." Sometimes my role is to say, "You're not thinking big enough, it can be better, it can be bigger," or "You're accepting stuff from kids that isn't quite what it should be. Let's plan this in a way that you're going to actually get better quality work at the end." (Laura, November 2014)

Laura's strategy in collaborating with teachers to design curricula was to draw upon her experiences with and from those individuals. She then used this information to help them focus their efforts on improvement. In doing so, Laura reflected on experiences to shape her instructional leadership in ways that are specific to her teachers as individuals.

Candace described another example of reflection-for-action by reviewing past experiences to set the stage for a successful faculty meeting.

We are planning our November faculty meeting [to align guided reading with the Common Core]; it's at the end of the month. Some people have been teaching that for 20 years, some it's new for them. But there is always room to grow within it. So, some of the things we want to do is to gather some data on what people were looking for. So, we did a survey at the end of last year specific to those two areas asking people what they were looking for within professional development. (Candace, November 2014)

Planning in this case required a look back on what Candace and her teachers had accomplished in the past and even consideration for what they are currently doing to prepare their upcoming meeting with the professional development needs of teachers in mind. In this way reflection-for-action set the stage for what may be considered, according to existing research, as successful curricular change associated with standards-based reform.

The act of planning for a faculty meeting using questionnaire data is an example of planning with strategy, but as such, that does not qualify it as an example of reflection-for-practice. Rather, the review of past experiences with faculty members took place to identify guidelines for meeting their needs in the upcoming meeting. In deciding to create and disseminate a survey, they empowered themselves with information to influence how they would set the stage for success in their meeting. In this way, reflection-for-action may have served to increase their self-efficacy and confidence in their ability to manage their school environment, including implementation of the common core.

School leaders become skilled practitioners by strategically developing understanding through their experiences about the ways in which they work to implement change associated with implementation of new learning standards, like the CCSS, in their school/district. Through reflection, tacit understandings that have developed as leaders learn through their experiences may be realized and scrutinized. In this way, reflective practice makes new sense of complex situations involved with implementation of reforms associated with new standards and informs leaders' decisions about their practices relative to those same reforms. Some of these decisions relate to factors that enhance and/or constrain reflective practice.

Factors that Enhance or Constrain Reflection

Through discussion of the ways leaders defined reflection, what they see as assets and limitations to their role as instructional leaders, how they work through emotional stress of reflection, and how they process experiences, this chapter demonstrated the importance of reflection as it pertains instructional leadership and implementation of standards-based reform. Factors considered in this chapter may enhance leaders' capacity in their instructional leadership roles or constrain leaders' skills and abilities to bring about change. Next, I discuss time as a constraint regarding leaders' opportunity to engage in reflective practice. Through statements shared by school leaders, I also present ways engagement with others in reflective practice enhanced both the reported process and the results that emerge from reflection.

The process of reflection requires time, which, for educators, is often a resource in demand far exceeding its supply. Our human tendencies toward routines and quick fixes impede opportunities to think reflectively. As confirmed by school leaders in this study, finding time to think and draw conclusions that inform practices can be a challenge.

Kristen spoke to the frequently mentioned concept of limited time as it related to her ability to reflect.

I really kind of reflect on a daily basis. I don't keep a journal or anything like that. There's no time for that. I just sort of think, at the end of each day. I try to finish all of my work before I leave work. (Kristen, October 2014)

Here, Kristen explained that she values reflection and engages in regular reflective practice, but alluded to limits in terms of what she may have the time to accomplish. In her reflective practice, she stated she chooses not to record her reflections, but rather to employ mental deliberations as a response to time constraints. As such, it seems that Kristen's process is a sort of reflection on the fly. Considering lack of time, as participants suggest, it may constrain opportunities for

leaders to reflect and productivity during time they do find to reflect, it's reasonable to conclude that by engaging in reflection superficially, Kristen's ability to effect change associated with implementation of curricular and instructional reforms may also be constrained. It is certainly possible for individuals to make connections quickly while facilitating such reform efforts, and for reflection to happen on the fly. However, perspectives from this study, which view lack of time as a restraint on reflective practice, suggest that more time, or at least more strategic effort in reflection may lead to more productive practices, especially as those practices relate to curricular and instructional reform associated with implementation of the CCSS. As reflective practice is monitored and evaluated unto the self, this conclusion could be true for Kristen if engaging in more reflection or more deliberate strategy in the process of reflection would make a positive difference in her leadership practices. Since previously in this chapter Kristen expressed her gratitude for being provided time in this interview process to reflect on her practice, it's reasonable to wonder if she might find more deliberate time spent on reflection to be beneficial in her role as an instructional leader and potential effectiveness leading change initiatives like the CCSS.

Regardless of whether or not more time and/or strategy could affect her practice, Kristen described a process for reflection and indicated that she feels it works for her, which is substantiated by her perceived success as an instructional leader in a high performing school. This study has already demonstrated that leaders who took time to engage in reflective practice felt that they sharpened their skills as instructional leaders. By managing lack of time as a constraint for reflective practice, one might conclude leaders and their practices come out better for it.

Conversely to Kristen's sentiment, Laura suggested that efficient time management may serve to enhance reflective practice.

First of all, reflective practice makes people better teachers, but all of those practices also keep the teachers moving in the same direction all the time. If you spend time in classrooms you will hear and see huge consistency throughout the building, and how teachers teach and talk to kids. Without the time to be together and really talk about practices, planning curriculum, critiquing each other's teaching, you wouldn't see that consistency. You would see people kind of starting to go off in their own directions. (Laura, November 2014)

Here, Laura discussed the importance of reflective practice with regard to development of instructional practices consistent throughout her school. Time does not constrain the reflective practice of Laura's teachers, because their shared values prompt them to find the time to engage and reflect. However, Laura seemed cognizant of the potential for absence of time for reflection in their schedule to threaten their progress and act as a constraint.

Beyond time constraints, participants discussed monotony and routine, or lack of productivity as time passes, as other barriers to reflection. For example, Sheila described her views on failing to evolve over time and how it may constrain not only reflective practice, but progress toward necessary curricular or instructional change.

Because I think [successful reform] goes beyond just an openness of accepting new opportunities, it involves an openness to thinking of things and looking at it in a different way.

Too often I think sometimes people tend to get stuck in their vision, their idea of the way things should be. Well, I think it is good to have a vision. I think you can become blinded by that, and never open yourself to really kind of looking at things from some different perspectives.

When considering our vision, I think we need to continually redefine ourselves. If we keep to what we have done, I think we become stagnant. So, I think we have to constantly look and ask, what are our outcomes, what do we think education should look like here? (Sheila, October 2014)

Sheila divulged how getting bogged down in an ideal vision may impede the ability to employ critical thought or even common sense. Sheila cautioned that plans or expectations that are too fixed prevent openness to reflection and improvements, which may be especially relevant regarding implementation of change initiatives associated with standards-based reform like the CCSS.

As highlighted by participants in their views on reflection, efficient time management may enhance reflective practice, while lack of time may constrain it. Another factor with implications for reflective practice, according to participants, was interpersonal activity relative to reflective practice, i.e., interactions with others involving reflection. Participants discussed engagement with others in their reflection process, as means of enhancing reflective practice. As demonstrated in this chapter, participants connected enhanced reflective practice with an ability to implement change.

Another example of connecting reflection with change from Candace is how she navigated a difficult situation involving a nasty email she received. Having sought out feedback from one of her administrators, she was able to find a better solution.

I had received an extremely challenging e-mail from a parent, and had gotten some advice from an assistant superintendent on how to respond.

As he put, and he met this in all humor he said, “I’m much meaner than you, so this is what I would say.” But I appreciate it because sometimes I think saying, “I am too kind,” isn’t the right thing to say, because I can never be too kind.

But I don’t know that I’m strong enough sometimes in some of those ways of advocating, that I am always trying to please everybody, and so, I appreciated it. I certainly didn’t land where he was because what he wrote would have been...different.

So, I drafted something that was a combination of my gentler approach and his “meaner” approach. I respect that in him and so, I know if I need a little more backbone he is the person I call. (Candace, November 2014)

Due to her kind and gentle nature, Candace described doubting her ability to be assertive as a struggle. By discussing the problem with her administrator, she was able to find a better way to respond. Through interaction with a fellow leader, Candace was able to reflect on her assertiveness, which helped her make sense of her reaction to the situation at hand. In this way, interaction and collaboration enhanced Candace's reflective practice and provided her a satisfactory result, as well as, perhaps, a boost in confidence.

Calling back to attention Emmitt's appreciation for subtleties through his interactions with others, Laura's priority building time into the schedule for reflective interactions among staff, and Candace's tendency to produce a better course of action through interactions, it has been demonstrated throughout this chapter that participants valued interactions with others to inform their own reflection. Participants also indicated that engaging with others in the process of reflection helped them produce better results regarding their own practices and particularly those related to instructional change.

Several factors may enhance or constrain reflective practice. From participants' perspectives, the greatest constraints are lack of time as a resource and the trappings of mundane routines that inhibit new ways of thinking, acting, and planning. Collaboration and interaction with others and support provided to education professionals are among the most valued enhancements to reflective practice. As an important source of personal and professional development, it is beneficial for leaders to consider not only their reflective practices, but also how to address the factors that may constrain these practices. Likewise it is constructive to develop awareness for factors that enhance reflection and how to utilize them for improved reflective practice.

Discussion

To explore how instructional leaders understand their role in implementing standards-based reform and enact those understandings in their practice, this research called for participation from a purposeful sample of reflective leaders. Leaders in this study identified with reflective practice as a means of improving themselves and their leadership practices. They defined reflection as both inherent to how they learned to improve instructional leadership practices and fundamental to how they enacted their role as instructional leaders in that context. While the process of reflection enabled leaders to recognize their strengths and limitations, many still struggled with the emotional work involved in the process. By exploring how leaders identified with and made sense of their practices through reflection, this study demonstrated how leaders learn through their experiences. Finally, participants identified engagement with others in reflection as a factor that enhanced reflective practice and lack of time as a primary constraint.

This study demonstrated how critical reflection is a personal and challenging look at one's identity both as an individual and as an active professional. Reflection, in this way, can be an arduous task. Yet critical reflection regarding what is working and how well, along with what is not working and how it needs to change can be an important tool for school leaders (Day, 2000; Day, et al., 1999). Dewey (1933) defined reflection as "active, persistent, and careful consideration" of our knowledge and beliefs, based upon the "grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends," (p.9). Schön, (1983, 1987) defined reflective practice as the application to practice of knowledge formed by thoughtful consideration of personal experiences. Participants defined reflection as a means of personal and professional improvement, and described their reflective practice as a way of dealing with complex matters without foreseeable answers and a means of understanding the deeper meaning of interactions

with others, among other varied definitions and descriptions. Overall, this study and previous literature support reflective practice as a purposeful and personal means of professional improvement for instructional leaders.

Leaders in this study characterized their reflective practices as critical examinations of their personal thoughts and actions. Dewey (1933) stated reflective practice involves “active, persistent, and careful consideration” of an individual’s knowledge and beliefs (p. 9). Through rational problem solving and purposeful thinking, participants also characterized their emotions and feelings as a natural part of reflection. This also reflects the ideas of Dewey (1933), who described reflection as a way of being. The process of reflection allows us to construct and reconstruct our understanding of ourselves as people (Schön, 1983; 1987). It’s not surprising then that the act of reflection would be an intensely personal experience. While participants utilized various descriptions to characterize their reflections, many considered reflection to be difficult and even painful, especially when confronted by uncomfortable situations or the harsh words or actions of others. Schön (1987) conceptualized feelings and actions as interrelated regarding reflection. In this way this research and previous literature together support that the act of reflection as a professional practice makes for a more effective leader. The ideas of both Dewey and Schön, expanded upon at great length in a variety of research, support the notion that reflection is important with regard to personal and professional growth and self-awareness. As demonstrated within this study, reflective practice allows school leaders to be strategic and intentional in their leadership practices, specifically where facilitation of change initiatives associated with implementation of the CCSS is relevant.

Participants discussed an awareness of their assets and limitations, often personal strengths and weaknesses, as significant to an instructional leader’s ability to be effective in their

roles as leaders of change and facilitators of processes associated with implementation of standards-based reform like the CCSS. Their comments suggest that using strengths to one's advantage and being able to determine resulting efforts to improve leadership skills figure prominently into the perceived success of instructional leaders. Evidence from this study suggests, and current literature supports, that through reflective practice instructional leaders establish a sense of awareness regarding strengths and weaknesses (Schön, 1983; 1987). As discussed within this chapter, leaders armed with awareness may not only improve themselves and their practices, but through their dedication and action, they may serve as a model for reflective practice and life-long learning within their school communities and encourage change.

Participants explained how reflective practice can engage emotional work to potentially produce deliberative strategy. As noted by Day (2000), for school leaders to increase effectiveness through reflective practice, "they need to nurture their critical thinking and emotional intelligence through reflection," (p. 125). To achieve deliberate strategy from reflection required leaders to engage in regular practice and constant analysis of what they know in relation to what they observe or encounter (Vaill, 1989; Day, 2000). In this way, reflective practice provides leaders with strategies to improve their routines and procedures to guide their teachers in the effective processes associated with reflection. Leaders from this study verified both of these instances to be true.

During interviews participants engaged in self-investigation and reflected on their reflective practice. They described ways these previous reflections informed the improvement of their practices. Much of the previous reflections shared by participants here entailed confidential information. Therefore, at the time they occurred, their thoughts and feelings could not be shared with the other members of the school community as a process or product of reflection. As

explained by participants, because it is inappropriate for a principal to discuss personnel matters with a teacher or parent from the building, these leaders often felt isolated and alone in their practice. However it was also stated that colleagues within the district from outside the school, with similar confidentiality obligations, serve as helpful partners in a collaborative exchange of reflections. Whether reflection is accomplished individually or shared with others, the act of reflecting allows an outlet for the complex emotions associated with leadership in schools. This study shows that building and district leaders benefit from strategies and better ways of communicating and interacting with others as a result of reflection. This was true for school leaders in this study, who experienced increased confidence and stated that they felt better as a result of reflection.

None of the participants in this study demonstrated any lack of regard for reflective practice in their interviews or provided evidence that their daily practices were devoid of reflection. However, leaders who expressed that they were more apt to reflect also described increased organization and deliberation, typically afforded by strategy, in their thoughts and actions. These enhancements may serve as especially relevant in implementation of standards-based reform. By failing to recognize and address factors that constrain reflection, like time as a scarce resource, leaders placed limits on their ability to effect curricular and instructional reform. Dewey (1933) claimed, “external monotony and internal routine are the worst enemies of wonder” (p. 52). By getting too comfortable with familiarity of their routines, leaders may be apt to forgo reflection for more pressing matters like discipline or administrative duties. This research also supports that routines and the tedium that may result often preclude reflection and therefore interfere with the productive evolution of curricular and instructional reform (Schön,

1983). By reflecting on and learning from their experiences, participants described ways they avoid these pitfalls.

Learning through experience provided participants with a means of making sense of every-day situations. The process of reflection helped leaders improve their practices (McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Schön, 1983). Through interactions with others about reflective practices and establishing awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, leaders developed powerful tools to utilize in their instructional leadership practices. By reflecting upon and understanding the actions and decisions involved in everyday practices, instructional leaders were empowered by both their awareness of the tools available to them and their potential to develop new strategies for approaching standards-based reform. This chapter demonstrated critical reflection as a meaningful way of learning about leading and as a useful guide for leaders in leading change. In this way, reflective practice was valuable for instructional leaders in the implementation of curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform like the CCSS.

CHAPTER VI: SCHOOL CULTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF LEADERSHIP

Regarding their ability to facilitate the implementation of standards-based reform in their schools, one element that the leaders mentioned was a strong and supportive school culture. In this chapter, I discuss the ways leaders found school culture to be an important change-related factor they worked to cultivate in their schools. One way leaders described their efforts to cultivate a supportive school culture was through the development of shared goals. Additionally, based on participant perceptions, I delineate establishment of culture of excellence, culture of care, and culture of collaboration as an important aspect of school culture, described by participants as essential to the role of the instructional leader in cultivating a strong culture within the school community. Finally, I explain the importance participants placed on authentic relationships and trustworthy leadership in establishing excellence, care, and collaboration within the school culture to build practices of improvement.

School Culture Characterized by Shared Meaning and Goals

The culture of a school is built over time and essentially understood by the group of people working and learning together, making it hard to define and harder to change (Fallon et al., 2012; Gonder & Hymes, 1994; Owens, 2004; Peterson, 2002; Schein, 1990). As noted previously in this research, school culture is defined as the behaviors, beliefs, values, traditions, interactions, and history of members of a school community (Owens, 2004; Schein, 1990). It is also important to reiterate that change is not sustainable unless it is consistent with school culture (Lawrence et al., 2005; Schneider et al., 1996).

School leaders in this study expressed that to effectively acknowledge and respond to the demands associated with standards-based reform, it was important to cultivate a culture within the school where the community, including teachers, staff, students, and parents, understand and

accept the importance of curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform. Participants stated school culture was important, and also imparted the necessity for culture to be embraced as a whole community. In particular, they described an effective school culture, one that could promote change, as being characterized by shared values and meaning associated with standards-based reform. In other words, as a whole school community, they were invested in and capable of the change called for by the CCSS. For example, Laura expressed the importance of this type of investment as part of school culture and its relationship to curricular and instructional change in this way:

We've recently been involved in discussions about the important role of the school's culture. People talk about test scores and instructional practices. All of those things are important but without a solid sustaining school culture, especially amongst staff so that then it can feed into the students' culture, I just don't think that curricular change and instructional change can happen in a way that leads to better outcomes for kids. And, in a way that makes teachers feel as though they're on their own learning journey as opposed to the victim of new mandates. (Laura, November 2014)

Here, Laura describes a “solid sustaining school culture” as a key factor in what she perceives in her school as successful curricular and instructional change, specifically in the context of student achievement. She suggests that such a culture includes teachers invested in student growth and development, who also share an understanding of what is called for by the standards-based reform. She acknowledges the importance placed upon test scores as a measure of school performance and/or best practices for instruction, but states that a school culture built upon a solid foundation of shared meaning and values oriented toward academic improvement is of great importance. Echoing the ideas of Fullan (2006), Laura also states that school culture is critical to the success of the implementation of standards-based reform. Other leaders echoed such sentiments. For example, Emmitt also felt that a positive school culture was necessary for

reform to take place. He expressed how such a culture could be characterized by solid commitment from the whole school community.

I would emphatically agree culture is so important, because if your school community is broken, any academic initiative you have will never fix anything. (Emmitt, October 2014)

Emmitt not only asserted the importance of school culture within the school community, he stated its significance in the context of standards-based reform. By stating that a “broken” school community may achieve no improvements, Emmitt implied, from his perspective, that for curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform to be a success, the school culture must be whole (i.e., the culture is built upon shared goals, shared value for student achievement, and shared vision for change associated with reform). Emmitt’s comment suggests that from his perspective, standards-based reform is dependent upon the community to understand and embrace change as a whole community (i.e., exhibit a positive school culture).

One reason participants felt that there was a need to build community acceptance and understanding was that, traditionally, teachers often felt unsupported or blindsided by district directives issued as a result of mandates imposed by the state. As a result, the participants explained, teachers were often resistant to curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform. School leaders in this study recognized the necessity of managing change for teachers while exhibiting a healthy respect for their tendency toward resistance. Laura expressed that one way to deal with such resistance was to generate a shared meaning of curricular and instructional change.

Having taught in a very traditional city school system, traditional building, lots of mandates and things come from above. Its’ like, “Oh, this is now another thing,” and “I have to change my practice because someone else said that I have to.” But when you have a culture of staff in a building that says, “we want to investigate the best practices, we want to work together to learn new strategies, we want to better understand these new standards that have

come down, we want to figure out what those shifts mean, and we want to identify the very specific things we want to get better at. We're going to do this together, because it will benefit our teaching and our students learning." That's a way different culture than, "Oh yeah, here is another thing I've got to do." Way different culture and I think it just leads to much better quality work on the part of teachers which leads to better work for kids. (Laura, November 2014)

Laura conveys the difference between schools characterized by a culture in support of growth and development (as she describes her school) and those schools with culture characterized by resistance toward curricular and instructional change. In particular, she highlights resistant schools as those in which teachers see the change as just one more they have to do (e.g., like alternative schools in which she worked as a teacher). Laura explained, however, that a strong culture founded upon shared goals for academic achievement within the school makes a difference when attempting to implement change.

Brad shared Laura's perspective on the importance of shared goals within a school culture as key to bringing about curricular change. Brad also attributed what he perceived to be success in standards-based reform to school culture and the community's ability to embrace change as a whole community.

I think it starts from the culture I mean I think it always starts with the culture. Because when we first presented [our plan for curricular change], we [the group who created the plan] went to the faculty with it and presented the importance of embracing change together and addressing it head on.

And in the end, I said, "The question is, someone might come up with a plan and we are going to be required to follow that plan. We can follow or we can do it the way we think is right and we can lead it." They stood up and they said we want to lead it. (Brad, November 2014)

Brad described the response from his staff to be unified in support of not only embracing the inevitable change ahead, associated with implementation of the Common Core, but also committed themselves to adopting it early on and leading the way for others. In this way, Brad's

school community was able to bypass any pitfalls due to resistance on the part of team members and maximize their time and efforts most efficiently.

In reference to his remarks above, I did not probe Brad on what he meant when he said they “stood up,” but whether he meant it literally or figuratively in that they rose to the occasion, that choice of words was powerful. As the instructional leader, Brad offered his teachers a choice about plans for a curricular change. He explained that as a community they could either accept a plan for implementation created elsewhere or they could lead their own way based upon their shared beliefs and goals for student learning and improvement. Brad went on to describe in detail how he led his staff to a shift in their shared goals and ultimately in their culture.

I said, “We talk about all students belong to all of us, but let’s look at what we do.”

I mean every school district somewhere in one of their mission statements will proclaim all students belong to all of us, academic excellence for all of us. And that is our approach. And it’s like; well that doesn’t match what we do. I asked them to consider, in action and in operation, is that really what is going on, do we really believe that all students belong to all of us? Because if we really believe that, then our instructional program doesn’t do that.

So I mean there was, it’s like, oh wait a minute I got to talk to others and I’ve got to share students and how is that going to be; a lot of what ifs.

I challenged what they said was our belief system. And I pointed out the inconsistencies. I took what they said and what I believe they believed to be their culture and their philosophical beliefs in education. I compared them to what was really going on. (Brad, November 2014)

For Brad and his teachers, being intentional about their plans for curricular change and implementing these plans was very important. The mantra “all students belong to all of us” suggests that each student in the building was the responsibility of every educator. Consequently, if their program was failing to meet the individual needs of a sub-population within the school, then it was the responsibility of the whole school, not just the classroom teacher, to provide an

instructional program to meet needs of all students. Therefore, in Brad's case, when it came time to design a system of instruction better suited to meeting individual needs of students, teacher resistance to sharing resources, materials, and even students, was unacceptable. In fact, Brad called his teachers to action on sharing responsibility for all students and held them accountable for this previously established shared vision.

Meg agreed with Brad that students were the shared responsibility of the whole school community. She explained that what she perceived to be successful change in her school is attributed to a culture comprised of educators who care and nurture students so that the students can learn.

A curricular change here will happen, because I think that it's part of who we are. It starts from the philosophy of when we interview and hire teachers and staff, and just the culture of this building is nothing is going to stop us. It just depends on how we implement the change, and how the children flourish under it. I think that schools in general, whether they be a high performing schools or a low performing schools, in a higher wealth area, a middle income area, or a lower income area, if people care the change will happen.

Students here are safe, they are going to be nurtured. There are people here that care. Our shared philosophy is that no matter what happens outside, the outside world stays outside. Hopefully for a couple hours every day students let their learning and their joy of learning take place so that they can learn the curriculum. So curricular change is no different in whatever school you are in. Because bottom line we are here to nurture, feed, and protect the child, socially and emotionally, so that we may provide an education. (Meg, October 2014)

Meg stated that a caring culture would be capable of affecting change in any school regardless of level of achievement or socio-economics. Further, she explained that curricular change happens because of the strength and resolve within the school culture. According to Meg, regardless of how a community might be impacted by matters outside the school including student illnesses, divorce, poverty, etc., their school can make positive change happen. She stated she believes that

for all schools, regardless of socio-economics or performance, that first and foremost a caring school culture is the key to implementing standards-based reform.

This orientation towards creating a space where teachers are collectively responsible for students' wellbeing and learning was repeated throughout the interviews. Almost all of the school leaders used "we" to answer questions about their work rather than "I." Laura spoke to how "we" plan our curricula, Meg spoke to how "we" implement a change, and Brad described how "we" presented our plan for change to the faculty. Brad went so far, later in the interview, as to state that he resists "I" in favor of "we" for the good of his school community.

Taken together, as described by the participants, their school cultures incorporated teachers working and learning together being driven by shared goals and collaborative efforts toward embracing and enacting change. By establishing and sustaining a school culture grounded in shared meaning for standards-based reform and focused on student growth and achievement, leaders believed they would experience school improvement and success in their efforts to implement standards-based reform. Through the cultivation of excellence and care as aspects of the school culture, instructional leaders moved closer to the realization of such success and improvement. In the following section I shift from these descriptions of the culture itself to how participants described their particular role in facilitating a positive culture in their school.

Role of Instructional Leadership Specific to School Culture

Based on the ideas of Kotter (1996), Leithwood and Riehl (2005), and Peterson (2002), we know that cultivation of school culture capable of embracing standards-based reform is an essential role of the instructional leader. Leaders in this study explained their role in cultivating such a culture within a school community. As discussed in the sections that follow, leaders

identified their roles to include demonstrating a strength-based perspective, as well as cultivating cultures characterized by excellence, care, and collaboration.

Strength-based perspective. Participants stressed that instructional leaders need to take a strength-based perspective, understanding and honoring the climate and culture of their district or school to begin building a positive culture oriented towards change. For example, Emmitt was clear that he takes seriously that it is his duty, as a district leader, to learn about the district history as a first step towards change.

I'm very sensitive to the intentional focused and deliberate creation of that culture. I don't have enough longevity yet to understand just how [my district] has built and evolved into this culture we have now where it is quite good. I'm always asking veterans and board members from past and community members, and people who have attended [my district] years ago, "What do you remember about your experience?"

I think there has always been a strong thread, rope if you will in the middle that tows a line that is commitment to good. For me, I think my challenge, and the challenge I think we all have as leaders, is to take that and make a very intentional effort to realize why that exists and exert a focused and deliberate movement to enhance it. (Emmitt, October 2014)

Emmitt stated that one way he goes about respecting the long established culture within his district is by checking in with "veteran" members of the community and members of the school board to understand the district's history and values. He inferred that his longevity as a leader in the district was essential to his ability build on existing strengths within the district. In this way, as an instructional leader, Emmitt may facilitate growth and development in the district toward continual positive development related to curricular and instructional change.

Similarly, from Dale's perspective the ability of the instructional leader to effect change was linked to the leader's longevity in the district. He explained that longevity is necessary to build upon existing strengths within the district.

I think the most defining thing for me is the difference between being an

instructional leader versus management. I look at my responsibilities as an instructional leader in a positive way. I almost wonder sometimes do you become more accustomed to the culture you are in and therefore make more of an impact? From a leadership perspective, you are not really able to impact the culture of the school if you are five years and out, and therefore not in the seat long enough. I don't know how you can impact a culture in that time. Longevity is key to continuous improvement and it happens through subtle changes. (Dale, October 2014)

Having recently moved from the role of building leader of a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence into the role of Superintendent in a new district, Dale was focused on the culture of schools within his district and his role leading them toward continual development and academic achievement. For Dale, strength in his role as a leader would come with longevity and the subtle changes he would be able to influence in his district over time. He implied that to change the district's climate and culture, he would need to engage with the whole community.

Alternatively, while longevity was noted by Dale as a source of strength as a leader influencing school culture, Sam drew strength as a leader from flexibility. Sam stated that through a culture that thrives on flexibility he was best able to support his staff in favor of student development and achievement.

We have a very flexible culture here that that makes for a productive system of operation. Things are fluid, like yes we have a schedule, and if I need to adjust the student schedule to get more support for that student, then we're going to do so. We don't have anything set in a way that has to be black and white. Whatever it takes to help students learn, then we're going to do it. It's my job to remain up-to-date on best practices for instruction and do whatever it takes to support [my teachers] so that students have what they need in order to learn. I make the effort every day to support them and ensure they have what they need. (Sam, October 2014)

Through the flexibility Sam describes, he also referenced his practices during a typical school day in his school. Sam described himself as visible in the school and present in the classrooms. His goal was to enable himself to make adjustments to the schedule or reassign support staff as

needed to support his teachers and meet students' needs. In this way Sam influenced the school's ability to embrace change together and collectively strive toward academic success.

Participants continually referenced culture and community in their positions on leadership practice and implementation. They believed that a school culture composed of a supportive school community was best equipped to embrace change together and move forward toward enhanced academic achievement. This demonstrates a strength-based perspective in that the school community is represented as sharing a resolve to work together to excel on behalf of students and their learning needs. To further specify the emphasis leaders placed on school culture respective to curricular and instructional change, I discuss two aspects of school culture participants stated should be recognized and nurtured within a school community: culture of excellence and culture of care. The sections that follow discuss those aspects in greater detail.

Culture of excellence. Throughout their interviews, participants described deliberate actions they took or valued that strategically led to development of high expectations and/or excellence within their school culture. Participants discussed that one way of establishing a culture of excellence within the school community was through the establishment of a shared vision focused on continual improvement, student achievement, and ensuring students' individual levels of need were met. Additionally, participants explained excellence could be characterized by shared understanding of high expectations for knowledge, decision-making and performance throughout the school community. Examples of these strategic actions are provided here. One action was deploying a rigorous process to the hiring of new staff. Stella explained, with great passion, how the strategy behind cultivating a strong school culture started with hiring new high quality teachers and staff for her building.

I will say that we have been very good at interviewing, and we do get very bright teachers who are able to support us with curricular change. We see to it

that we do have phenomenal teachers. It starts with teachers to help us carry out our vision.

In our interview process we are very selective, and we do demo lessons, multiple interviews in, which we try to select the best. We look for interpersonal skills; we look for intelligence, ambition, [etc.]. The bar is set very high here. You are in a good place, a happy place, but you're required to work at a quite a high level. (Stella, October 2014)

Stella explained, in the context of contagion, that she recognizes the importance of forming a strong team, as the strength from individuals will elevate the collective strength of the team.

Emmitt too noted that his district shares the value of establishing a strong professional team.

We think it's important to build a strong culture by maintaining high quality level of new hires.

While Stella and Emmitt spoke to the importance of cultivating a culture of excellence through new staff hires, Emmitt also spoke, along with other leaders, to the cultivation of strong sustained school culture pertaining to existing staff.

For example, Emmitt presented this focus by explaining the high expectations he holds for his staff. In particular, high expectations for performance and professionalism were central to building the culture of excellence that was the norm within his district. As part of his role as an instructional leader, Emmitt said he continually encouraged his teachers to press forward to achieve excellence in meeting students' needs.

There is a universal expectation for all staff. I think when you're shooting for excellence, and everyone is truly a part of what's happening, you don't have to define by the minutia what that expectation is. That rudimentary stuff is almost unspoken, because we're living in a place way above it.

Teachers sometimes ask, "Why would we look at that? We're good at that." Having that conversation of "Good to Great," Why be good? Why not reanalyze it in eight different ways from Sunday and let's think, "Could it be great?" I always go back to that cultural and academic excellence. (Emmitt, October 2014)

Emmitt described his high expectations for excellence within the school and among the teachers. Emmitt inferred that a shared understanding existed within his district as a result of his efforts to impress upon teachers and staff that good is not good enough. He echoed James Collins (2001) when he redirected his teachers from settling for good enough to striving for greatness. From Emmitt's explanation it seems that a culture of excellence was a driving force for continual improvement in his district. Just as Emmitt expected greatness from his teachers, so too did Brad.

Brad and Emmitt both explained their perspective on the importance of cultivating supportive culture for new and veteran teachers alike. Emmitt expressed the need for veteran teachers to share the value placed by the district on excellence with those teachers who were newly hired. For Brad, this greatness was to come from new and veteran teachers working together. Brad stated that he expected teachers to break from traditional norms and collaborate, rather than to work alone behind the closed doors of their classrooms.

What does it mean to be a high performing team? It's not just we pat each other on the backs telling someone they are great and then you go out on your own and shut your door and come out at the end of the day. We have higher expectations for academic excellence for all of us. (Brad, November 2014)

Here Brad implies that academic excellence is achieved through collaboration among teachers regarding instructional design and practice. For Brad, high expectations were not measured in praise; rather they were evidenced in academic results. As such, Brad expected teachers to work together toward academic excellence for the good of the whole school.

Like many of the participants, Candace also expressed the importance of collaboration among teaching professionals and described the team of educators composing her collaborative culture of excellence.

A community of leaders that work together towards a shared vision for high expectations, that's certainly the goal. We have a lot of hardworking,

dedicated, kind of over achieving teachers that are just putting in tons of hours to get it done. (Candace, November 2014)

From Candace's description of her staff, she believed a sense of internal accountability was a characteristic of the professional culture within her school. She described how teachers in this community work long and hard to achieve their goals, suggesting that they hold themselves and each other accountable for a similar level of dedication and excellence.

Collaboration was also a priority for Dale; however, he went further than some of the other participants to describe the level of initiative, or internal accountability, for which each member of his staff was expected to strive and attain.

We provide modeling and support as a means of teacher professional development. The expectation is high that the classroom teacher will independently sustain the differentiated instruction and best educational practices moving forward. (Dale, October 2014)

Here, Dale described how excellence may also be achieved through internal accountability as a guiding principle fostered by the district. As Dale explained, one way his district does this is by maintaining a high level of professional development paired with a high level of expectation that teachers will take the initiative to implement curricular and/or instructional changes with fidelity and merit.

According to Dale, without initiative to capitalize on the professional growth and development provided by the district and implement change with coherence and fidelity, teachers fail to achieve excellence expected of them by their superintendent. This type of culture may be cultivated by instructional leaders through the establishment of shared vision for student achievement, shared meaning of what a particular change means as it becomes relevant to the district vision, and shared goals for implementing change.

Like Dale, Jack described the level of initiative from his teacher as significant in their collective efforts toward change as a school community. Participants throughout the study made direct connections between teachers striving for and attaining excellence and student development. Specifically, as told by the participants, the more that excellence became present among teachers, or the more that teachers demonstrated the vision, values, and goals shared throughout the school community, the more students demonstrated similar character indicative of that school community. Jack explained how the culture of excellence does not stop with the adults in his district, but trickles down to include the students.

There is that set expectation of cultural excellence, which is seen in our students, in that we had zero fights at the high school last year. Not one physical altercation, think about that. That is 700 students at a high school, not a single [altercation]. Yeah. There is a piece of data for you. That's real life. (Jack, October 2014)

Here Jack seems to suggest that “real life” student behavior demonstrating expectations for high level of good character is true evidence of the strong culture within his district. He was especially proud of the organic nature in which such results occur and stated that such a culture of excellence could only be cultivated over time within the district. With time and strategic efforts of instructional leaders, Jack explained high expectations became a shared value within the school community, and therefore a culture of excellence in which shared vision, values, and goals were established.

Participants described vision and excellence as important priorities for them respective to their role as instructional leaders specifically as these priorities contribute to the foundation of a school culture. According to participants, vision for the school/district should be focused on continual improvement, academic achievement, and meeting students at their own levels of need; most importantly, the vision should be shared within and among the school community.

Additionally, participants stated excellence was also a shared understanding of high expectations for professional decision-making, skilled knowledge, and high performance.

Culture of care. Consistently, participants described the positive impact of mutual trust and respect with and among staff in their respective school communities, describing the collective experience of these characteristics as a culture of care. Specifically, leaders stated that when the school or district values of care as a whole community, it made learning more equitable for students. Meg described a culture of care as one in which the focus was both on student achievement and on people and their overall need to feel safe.

It's care, its people. It's not just about numbers and data. It's all about people. We say we are a microcosm of what society should be. We strive to remove the dysfunctional from the day-to-day. If society could just be caring like us, we would all be in a lot better place. (Meg, October 2014)

For Meg, culture of care supported students' ability to escape any potential dysfunctional attributes of their daily life to focus on the task at hand. In this way, a caring and nurturing culture is a driving force for academic achievement.

Like Meg, Jack described a culture of care with a focus on tending to individual people's needs. In particular, he explained that his district acknowledged their teachers as whole human beings with real lives in and outside of work. Jack described how leaders in his district reached out to individuals when they struggled or were in need. He also noted that type of care and regard for individuals started with the superintendent.

If a staff member is sick, or is in need, or even gets well, [our superintendent] is great about sending cards. When somebody has a death in the family, he will send a sympathy card or a make phone call. When someone has something going on he will just send a quick email checking in, "How are you doing?"

We as school leaders emulate that behavior. Just recently one of our physical therapists had a tendonitis in the foot. She was committed to running a marathon and trained a long time for it. Unfortunately she couldn't run it

because she developed tendonitis. I was sure to check in with her and ask about it.

I have to assert my organizational methods to keep track of it, because the day gets away from me. So, I just put in my calendar, “check on so and so.” Then I write a quick message. They appreciate the fact that you’re actually caring about what is going on. (Jack, October 2014)

In Jack’s district the superintendent led the way for maintaining a culture of care by reaching out to his school community members personally on matters of significance. Jack described a situation where he emulated that behavior, because he shared in his district’s vision to demonstrate care and concern for members of the school community. In this case, as the leader, he also followed the lead of his instructional leader (i.e., the superintendent) who served to model for his staff the way to adopt shared values and act accordingly. Jack stated that connecting with his staff to show that he cared was so important to him that he scheduled it in his calendar, so as to ensure he did not forget or overlook someone at a time of need or enjoying a celebration.

Like Jack, Emmitt was also part of a school community with expectations for demonstrating care led by his superintendent. While Jack described how his superintendent modeled showing care for members of the school community, Emmitt focused more specifically on how his superintendent cultivated care through school administrators. Emmitt explained how his superintendent expected leaders across the district to be transparent about themselves and their families.

Coming from our superintendent, there is a strong expectation that our leaders are transparent about family. He expects principals to share themselves, their families, matters that are shareable, so that we’re all aware. I think probably one of the biggest things that would frustrate the superintendent is if he is blindsided by a death or someone is sick. There is a strong expectation that it’s not about just looking like you’re in the know. It’s actually sending a card or an email. It’s often reported to the board, so that they can be aware. Almost every [meeting of administrators] begins with sharing out about people that

are related to our circle, because that's really important. (Emmitt, October 2014)

In Emmitt's district, the culture of care was such that individuals understand, without needing direction, that leaders shared themselves and their personal lives when it was appropriate and welcomed. Emmitt explained that, in his district, the community understood that it was not just an individual's professional skills that mattered, but the whole person. In this context, the culture of care was one in which leaders made themselves open and vulnerable within the school community for the purpose of cultivating a strong and supportive culture. The significant matters or events in the lives of the school community go straight to the Board of Education, because in Emmitt's district, the culture of care was systemic.

Across the sample, participants evoked the concept of family to highlight the degree of care within their school community. For example, Meg explained how culture of care in her school was characterized by a sense of family, and described that culture as central to student achievement as well as her perceived success as an instructional leader.

I'm over 60, so, I can go whenever I want, but I'm here, because we make a difference. It's a wonderful supportive school community. It's truly is, and we say we are a family here. We treat each other like family, squabble like family as well. But we also, bottom line is, we pull together for each other, and we are here for the children and for the parents. It's a loving, nurturing family. It's wonderful. (Meg, October 2014)

Meg described her school as a wonderful place to be, and she attributed that to a supportive and caring environment, characterized by family-like relationships. She implied that through support and family-like behaviors the school was a second-home where students felt safe to learn. Meg also described the versatility required from role of the instructional leader within a culture of care; in particular, the need to fulfill various roles at once.

We are a family. You wouldn't see that on our website. We are an elementary school with one of the largest Special Ed populations. All the data can show

you our statistics, how well do, with what we do. All of that is there. What you couldn't see from a website or in our data is the people side. That bottom line is we are people, we treat people the way we want to be treated, and we care and nurture each other. That's really it. I'm not just the principal, I am the mommy. I am the psychologist. I'm the hugger. We have a strong belief that we really need to hug, especially, just to know that you are there. That it's not just a job. This is our home away from home. This is another home. (Meg, October 2014)

By expressing the importance of hugs and serving students from various caring capacities, Meg indicated the necessity for school leaders to ensure the basic needs of students are met if learning and development are to take place. Trevor too attributed student growth and development in his school to a culture of care characterized by sense of family within the school community. The caring culture and sense of family in his school was demonstrated through collaboration among staff members.

We have a collaborative dynamic in our school. That system has allowed us to embrace new initiatives, embrace change, embrace budget cuts and just work as family. It actually works. Working as a family is key to our success. 100%. (Trevor, November 2014)

Trevor described the system of collaborative care in his school to be productive and essential. Similar to the collaboration discussed in the context of excellence, collaboration in this sense was striving together toward a shared goal. However, in the sense of care, collaboration is employed for teachers to support one another through change, thus building on the other goals of continuous improvement via creating a culture of excellence.

As the school leader, Trevor had to actively work to establish this culture of care as an aspect of the larger culture within his school. He emphasized the importance of working as a family and attributed their perceived success as a school community to that culture of care. This required that Trevor, as the instructional leader, facilitate such a dynamic within his school culture. Trevor went on to describe the ways he fostered a sense of family within his school.

Coming into my role of principal as an outsider, nothing would be more offensive than coming with a family mentality. It would come off as kind of creepy, “I want to be a member of your family, let me intrude myself into your community.”

It took me a long time before I would have said this was a family. But I think that’s because I established myself as “I’m here, and I am listening. I want to be a part of your community. I’m going to make mistakes.” It takes time, but when it works, it works. It’s worth the wait though. (Trevor, November 2014)

Trevor described his concerted efforts to earn trust and establish a sense of family over time as the school principal. While Trevor’s actions differed from (as described previously) Emmitt’s efforts to understand history of his community or Meg’s and Jack’s efforts to meet teachers’ needs, all attempted to demonstrate care. Participants across the sample indicated the need for an instructional leader to listen and be open to making and admitting mistakes. They stressed that this is not something that can be forced; it must happen with time.

Finally, regarding the role of the instructional leader in cultivating a strong, compassionate, and extraordinary school culture; participants described the efforts to establish a culture of collaboration within the school as essential to curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform. As noted by leaders in this study, ways for leaders to cultivate collaboration within the school environment include facilitating opportunities for teachers to share in decision-making and endeavor leadership for school activities.

Collaborative culture. Participants described the importance of collaboration in the context of establishing excellence and care within their school communities. They explained how collaboration toward shared vision contributes to excellence within the culture and how collaboration toward shared values contributes to caring cultures. As an important aspect of cultivating strong and supportive school culture, leaders explained their strategic efforts to establish collaboration within their school environments. Participants defined shared decision-

making and distribution of leadership as ways in which members of a school community collaborate to learn and grow in the interest of curricular or instructional change. The remainder of this section explains how school cultures that foster teachers sharing decisions and leadership responsibilities, according to participants, can serve to further strengthen the culture of continual improvement throughout the school environment.

Jack described how instructional leadership is contractually distributed to teachers in his district. The unique system of leadership distribution in his district includes monetary incentive for teachers in their leadership roles.

Our leadership structure includes teacher leaders at each grade level. That's a model that's not in every place where you have a grade level leader. That's a paid position too, just keep that in mind. So, it's actually a contractual position. Literally they get paid extra to go to after school meetings with us, and organize staff development day agendas based on the needs at the grade level or the goal that we're focusing on at that time. Oftentimes we're talking about updates and State Ed. pieces or curriculum pieces. It's a two-year paid contract position.

Usually they stay in the role, but there is no release time during the day. They're paid because they're working outside of their time, out of their hours, to create the agendas, to create the follow-ups so that our superintendent knows what was said at that meeting, even if he was only in that meeting for 15 minutes to stop by and say hello.

Teachers create and submit meeting minutes, including a meeting agenda, so he can feel confident knowing he can set the target and they will organize their day accordingly. And they will not be sitting there doing nothing. (Jack, October 2014)

Jack explained that recruitment and compensation for leadership services from teachers, along with time provided for collaboration with administrators, creates a team of teacher leaders.

Working to align district practices with state education department requirements empowered teachers giving them a voice in decisions related to policy and practice within the district. Other ways to similarly organize the structure of the school with teacher leadership planning staff

development days and setting goals for meeting students' needs, among other duties. In this way, teachers not only contributed to shared values within the district, they shaped those values and contributed to leading the change.

While teachers in Candace's district were not paid for their leadership, they were given time to collaborate together and with instructional leaders to shape curricular and instructional change across the district. This collaboration inside of the regular workday and typical professional responsibilities (including anything outside of direct work with students) existed in many other schools and districts as well. Candace described a typical district-wide professional development event, focused on literacy, in which she and her teammates partook as part of their aptly named literacy leadership team.

Some of our professional development is accomplished on our own, some of it we've formed literacy leadership teams in each of the elementary buildings with teachers and staff and ourselves. We've gone for some professional development and training as a member of that team with those teachers.

Then we are helping with those teacher leader teams to form some of the professional development that comes up on staff development days or faculty meetings or things like that.

I think that's a prime example of it, because we are all knee deep in literacy and I'm learning right alongside them some ways. I'm in a leadership role, in other ways I'm just sitting right alongside, and we are doing it together. I think that's an example of the way leadership works collaboratively with our teachers and administrators. (Candace, November 2014)

Candace explained that her role, as part of this team, was not to lead it, but rather to participate as an active member. Together, this team brought back new skills and knowledge to implement change in their school. They did so in concert with their principal, rather than being directed by her. Unlike the system of teacher leadership in Jack's district, in Candace's district, administrators and teachers often made decisions together.

As described by both Jack and Candace, such distribution of leadership encouraged collaboration and provided teachers with a voice and ownership in their school and/or district. It fostered a culture within the school where teachers not only supported, but also created and guided curricular and instructional change. As described by participants in this study, such a culture may be approached through the establishment of PLCs (Professional Learning Communities). Sheila, newly appointed district as an Assistant Superintendent for Instruction in the same district where she previously served as a principal, described the process of implementing PLCs from her capacity of principal when she lead at the building level.

So we built our PLCs on the four essential questions, you know, “What is it we expect students to learn, and how are we going to know when they learn?” and then “How will we respond if they don’t learn, and how will we respond if they already know it?” Those first two questions were critical because we really didn’t believe that we all...although we had programs in place. And at that same time Common Core was just rolling out. So we knew we needed to look at the curriculum.

So, that really became the yeoman’s work in math and in ELA, we really worked hard at finding and really got to know the essential learning. Then we developed common assessments so that we would be able to answer, “Do they know it or not?” (Sheila, October 2014)

Sheila stated that effective implementation of PLCs was dependent upon the essential questions established by the DuFours (2004). As Sheila described it, doing the work of implementing PLCs effectively required collaboration characterized by a significant level of investment and intense shared decision-making. Previously participants described collaboration as the aim by which change might be achieved. Here collaboration was not the aim; rather it was a precise system by which the aim of implementation was achieved.

In agreement with other participants, she also explained that a proper shift in school culture toward shared decision-making was necessary before implementation of the specifics associated with PLCs could be approached.

Really we knew we needed to have a common knowledge of everyone. So, we needed to then figure out ways to present information and not have it be a directive. At the time there were some conflicts or struggles within the district of people feeling a lot of things were top-down.

So, when the district moved toward PLCs, we really wanted it not to be, you know, roll the eyes and “Sheila says we have to do this.” So, instead we did a lot of shared leadership. There were times where the team would present on the topic and I would sit as a member of the audience. So, it was great, and really we developed that common knowledge. We established building-wide norms about consensus. We felt like we all needed to be on the same page. (Sheila, October 2014)

Sheila described efforts taken collectively by her building to become more open and willing to share their work to establish PLCs in their school. As she explained, before teachers could engage in the type of collaboration necessary to implement PLCs effectively, they first needed to become comfortable with sharing through practiced shared decision-making activities. Engaging in shared-decision making as a bottom-up approach to change was a common belief across the sample of participants.

As a tenet of the PLC model in Emmitt’s district, also based upon the work of the DuFours (2004), he described shared-decision making as necessary for teachers to collaborate for the purpose of conducting audits and other curricular management tasks.

We filed a PLC model, which is based on the model the DuFours have set forth, where teachers must agree to what must be the explicit curriculum that is taught, and teachers must agree on the explicit methods that those curriculum standards are assessed. So, we used time, provided them time to do the curricular audit and to do the resources audit. (Emmitt, October 2014)

Emmitt described the distribution of leadership within his schools as teams of teachers across all grade levels collaborating to make decisions about curricular change and resources to align practices and materials for improved instruction and academic achievement. In this way, Emmitt presented a system by which teachers collaborate and make decisions about how change happens

at the building level to better inform decisions about curriculum which seem to be made at the district level.

Brad also described PLCs in his district as a system for making decisions about change as it happens at the building level.

Curricula are driven by district level. We have representatives from our school who participate as part of that district level group making curricular decisions.

For us, it's more, how do we operationalize what we have received from the district office? It's like, here is what you need, here is your assessment schedule, or here are your materials. Now how do we operationalize this at the building level?

The flow of information is set up to disseminate out. As part of the PLC focus in our district, we have spent a lot of time determining what skills are most essential. What are the can't-live-without skills at ever grade level?

Clearly at our level, literacy is a dominant area where we devote a significant amount of instructional time. We are very deliberate when we teach science and social studies to integrate literacy skills with those.

In their future how are students going to gather knowledge and then express what they know? They are going to do that through literacy. So the literacy skills required to gather and express knowledge, that's the kingpin to the whole thing. (Brad, November 2014)

Like Emmitt and Sheila, Brad described PLCs in his district as a process by which the aim of curricular and instructional change happens. Also like Emmitt and Sheila, Brad described shared decision-making as an integral part of shifting toward the collaborative culture necessary for effective PLCs to flourish. Like Brad, Emmitt also said that in his district, decisions made at the district level about curricula were informed by collaborative efforts from teachers at the building level to make decisions about curricular implementation and instructional delivery.

Candace too explained the importance of establishing a collaborative culture within the school. She offered a bit of wisdom in reference to the concept of "good to great" (Collins, 2001) described previously.

That it's something that I do appreciate if you don't set that climate, and that culture in the building. It is going to impact teaching and learning. There is only so far you can go to be great by yourself. You'll be even greater with others. I think most of the people are getting there. (Candace, November 2014)

Candace stated that educators need each other to continually develop and improve their skills and abilities and declared that teachers must work together to improve the school. As reinforced by the majority of participants within the study, collaboration was considered a key to success, especially regarding curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform.

Taken as a whole, participants discussed the type of collaboration involved with implementation of PLCs as a systematic and ongoing process that defines the school culture. Collaboration, as it relates to PLCs, requires an interdependence among teachers, such that they are responsible to and reliant upon each other for continual improvement (i.e., the curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform).

The distribution of leadership was one way in which school leaders built collaborative structures into their respective school communities. Distribution of leadership and shared decision-making also provided means of making the job of the principal as instructional leader more manageable. Such collaboration brought ownership for instruction to the entire school community. Participants in the study valued processes within their schools by which they were able to share instructional leadership and decision-making. They agreed that collaboration and leadership amongst professional peers leads to a stronger sense of school community and greater success implementing and managing curricular change associated with standards-based reform.

School leaders in this study recognized a strong collaborative school culture, based upon expressions of care and expectations for excellence, as a foundation for continual improvement. They also expressed that the authentic relationships built upon trust with and among teachers and

other members of the school community are a core of that culture. Participants determined the cultivation of authentic relationships within the school to be an essential role of the instructional leader in the context of change associated with standards-based reform.

Authentic Relationships and Trustworthy Leadership within School Culture

School leaders expressed the importance of building authentic relationships, characterized by trust and founded upon high expectations for mutual respect and professional decision-making, to achieve successful standards-based reform efforts of their schools. Participants credited development of trusting relationships with and among staff as the most essential factor in the continual development of the school. In this section, actions and decisions of school leaders regarding the development of relationships with and among staff are discussed.

Regarding trust, participants expressed that it is essential for building authentic relationships within the school community. Jack qualified building relationships within the school culture as a top priority for the instructional leader.

Establishing trusting relationships is number one! I would say it's the number one thing. We're a people business. Think about what we really are in the end; it's about students. (Jack, October 2014)

Here, Jack implies that student achievement is significantly impacted by the adult relationships existing within a school culture. As stated previously in this research, literature supports this implication, and through their sentiments regarding the importance of relationships within their student achievement focused school environments, participants concurred. In this way, participants asserted that positive relationships lead to a beneficial influence on student development related to academic achievement.

Participants highlighted that one element that helped to ensure the productivity of their relationships and hence their ability to support change was cultivating trust, first with teachers

and then with other members of the school community. In talking about trust, participants identified two key mechanisms, transparency and empowerment of teachers, as together producing positive, trusting relationships with teachers. Additionally, participants stated that these mechanisms served to build a willingness among teachers to participate in the change (i.e., to encourage buy in) and, in turn, to encourage others to buy in as well. And yet, participants were also quick to point out that this process was both difficult and lengthy.

For example, in talking about establishing trusting relationships with his teachers, Emmitt highlighted both the effort such actions require as well as how these requirements create a lack of willingness among leaders to engage in these ways.

I represent the abnormal. I think teachers like the abnormal ultimately. But with a new leader who leads this way, they watch it skeptically like, “Okay he took 20 minutes from his day just to call and talk to me, but why? What’s the tradeoff here?” It’s not about the tradeoff; it’s just about investment. It’s just feeling part of it. It’s just about openness. (Emmitt, October 2014)

Here Emmitt implies that the skepticism with which teachers react to the transparency in his efforts to connect with them happens because, from his perspective, it is uncommon for leaders to demonstrate effort or willingness to be open with teachers. As teachers wondered about a tradeoff for Emmitt’s extra attentiveness, they also sent signals that they questioned Emmitt’s authenticity. Teachers’ uncertainty regarding whether or not Emmitt (or perhaps any administrator) is to be trusted is an indication that building trust requires patience on the part of the school leader. As Emmitt saw it, patience was necessary, because building trust can be messy.

At the same time building trust can be a fraught experience. Leaders also highlighted the need to make these difficulties and, indeed, their overarching goals transparent and clear to the community. To be expressed in comments from Trevor, Sheila, and Jack as this chapter

continues, school leaders largely noted transparency as essential to building trusting relationships. To Emmitt being transparent and trustworthy was key to being perceived as authentic, which he previously emphasized as necessary to building trusting relationships.

But probably the biggest thing that I've been focusing on is building authentic relationships and being transparent about doing it. [Another district leader] has said about me, he knows I'm different than what they (in the district) are used to seeing everyday with building principals, or maybe with the previous district leader, but that I really mean it from my heart. I'm really trying to show everybody that I really do want to invest in who they are. (Emmitt, October 2014)

Emmitt's commitment to demonstrating authenticity for the sake of relationships with his staff also suggests that a certain kind of individual, capable of transparency and trustworthiness, is required to lead. In this way, Emmitt contributes to the cultivation of a culture of care through his efforts to connect with his staff and build relationships in an authentic, caring way. Emmitt explained how patience on his part was worth it, because, as he implied, with time, others will not only recognize that he means what he says and really is who he presents himself to be, but will also trust him as a result of his authenticity and reliability.

While Emmitt described ways to build relationships by demonstrating transparency with the whole community, other participants, like Trevor, reinforced such views by discussing how trust can be compromised when efforts to connect with staff lack transparency. He told a story of his own experience to illustrate this point.

As a principal I wanted to reach all of my teachers, even the ones with the reputations for being in cliques and unlikely to be accepting of a new person. I knew that would take time, but I came on strong and wanted even my most arrogant teacher to like me right away. I think I went out of my way sometimes, so hard, to get the approval of those curmudgeonly teachers. In the sense that I was getting the impression that I should stay away from them, because they're the mean people. But I decided, "Oh no they are going to like me no matter what cost. But in the process of getting them to "like me" I had others around me saying, "What's this guy deal? He is more concerned about these naysayers." That was my mistake.

It got me thinking. I was busy proving to myself that I could get along with anyone, whereas maybe, had I sat back and listened, it would have been more authentic. The naysayer teachers might have liked me as a result of my efforts, but also at the expense of other teachers who were saying, “There is another one getting sucked into this person’s whirlwind.” (Trevor, November 2014)

Trevor wanted trust from all of his staff, so he concentrated his efforts on those he understood to be the toughest individuals to reach. However, in doing so he neglected the time he said he knew it would take to really build trusting relationships. The implication of Trevor’s comments should not indicate that it is better to focus on those who are willing to adapt than those naysayers of the group. Rather, the lesson it seemed Trevor was attempting to impart here was to focus on the needs of the group as a whole and seek out authentic opportunities to connect with members of the community on an individual basis over time. This is in contrast to targeting a particular group with common characteristics in a perhaps misguided effort to rush the trust-building process.

Rather than describing an approach to building trust, as Emmitt and Trevor did, Sheila, who had recently moved to be an Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, simply described the significance of relationships within the school culture. In particular, she spoke about how all professionals have needs regardless of their level of leadership.

We have had a very close relationship for a long time. I once told her, I really have a great appreciation for our relationship, me as the principal and her as the assistant superintendent, because we had like philosophies and backgrounds, and I know she had trust in me. I ran everything by her. I probably had some flexibility because I think she trusted me as the building leader. We had formed a relationship over time that consisted of mutual respect for one another. (Sheila, October 2014)

Sheila stated that her relationship with her former boss, also the person who recruited her into the district and then later into her current district role, was built over time. She recognized the relationship was founded on similar backgrounds and defined by a rapport that allowed for open communication. It the time it takes to establish such a rapport, Sheila also formed her identity as

an instructional leader. In addition to the successful development of that trusting relationship she was able to find perceived success professionally in her role as instructional leader.

Participants spoke overall to ways in which relationships were built in their schools/districts and described the effect those relationships had on members of the school community, including themselves. Sheila went on to describe the openness that came with trust in professional relationships within the culture of a school or district.

I would tell you that it was never a blind trust and I never felt that it took away any pressure. I mean I knew she had high expectations for me as a leader. I like to think I lived up to them. But she was never afraid, if she thought I was veering off the path, I knew she was right there to say, "Hey, come on." And that was okay. (Sheila, October 2014)

Sheila described the relationship between her leader and herself with much the same appreciation as Emmitt disclosed earlier in this chapter for open communication and authenticity. And like Emmitt, the implications of Sheila's comments were that this relationship, for Sheila, provided a model by which she was able to emulate cultivating trusting relationships with her own staff. This trust then formed the foundation for a school culture capable of embracing curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform. In this way, Sheila experienced value in being empowered by her leader to make decisions.

In Sheila's example, through building trust with principals, district level leaders play a role in facilitating capacities within principals to trust their teachers. This shows how, through trust-building, instructional leaders at any level have the power to influence others in their school environment.

Trevor also described how his staff was empowered by his trust in their professional decision-making.

I very rarely see students sent up on discipline matters, because they want to handle it. They want to handle their team meetings and their structures so, that

it doesn't require me micro managing something to get it done. They want to get it done on their own. Our Phys Ed department is constantly coming up with ideas, like setting up haunted house, you know, great things. I don't feel like I'm doing a lot to inspire them, they are kind of inspiring themselves. (Trevor, November 2014)

In this example Trevor described how trusting teachers to make decisions regarding student discipline established a school where teachers felt safe to offer up innovative ideas, and led them to decisions that appeared to increase intrinsic motivation. Based on Trevor's example, the ripples of entrusting teachers to make professional decisions extended out to impacting and enhancing teachers' participation and initiative in curricular change for the school.

The inverse, as highlighted by Sheila, that is, failing to empower teachers in their decision-making, can cause teachers to withdraw.

I think sometimes as building leaders we tend to think that we have to have all the answers, and so therefore, we don't open ourselves up to allowing others to have answers too. I think by doing that you tend to come across as off-putting to people because they see you as "it." I think the moment you establish yourself as I am "it," whoo, get ready because no one will make any decision or take any role, because clearly you are the person. (Sheila, October 2014)

The "whoo" expressed by Sheila was a release of shudder in anticipation for the negative consequences she described would follow such an approach to leadership. The "it" Sheila described is the school leader who presents him/herself as authoritarian, one who knows all the answers and makes all the decisions. This type of leadership lacks the transparency previously described as important by Trevor, Jack, Emmitt, and Sheila, and therefore, from the perspectives of participants, was unlikely to produce the trusting relationships within a school community. In this way a case was made that without transparency or authenticity leadership would fail to produce trusting relationships.

Undergirding the theme of building trust through empowering teachers' decision-making was the sense that doing so allowed teachers to act as professionals in ways that a strict adherence to administrative decision-making would not. For example, Emmitt expected teachers to use common sense in guiding their professional decision-making.

Nonstandard rules, and I call them nonstandard, because I think that's where below average schools fall short of mediocre schools, when they can't even get the standard rules. I think where mediocre schools fall short of good schools, is where those standard rules are the norm and they rely on them. Whereas good schools say, "Hey, together we can bend them slightly" and lines get broad slightly.

I think great schools, great leadership calls to task where you can say, "I'm going to trust you. We're going to focus on trust, not the number of hours. You're going to decide what's right based upon what is best for the situation rather than because it's written on a piece of paper. You're going to do what's right, because it's in you, not because someone is watching." (Emmitt, October 2014)

For Emmitt, rules are norms that serve as more of a hindrance than help if they get in the way of what is best for students. Regarding professional decision-making, Emmitt expected teachers to put common sense regarding students needs above a job description or hours in a workday. In his example, Emmitt referenced "number of hours" meaning with permission, from time to time, a teacher might need to leave a few minutes early, which the district would likely approve trusting that teachers would address student matters brought before them outside of the regular workday from time to time as well. In other words, time on the clock mattered less than quality of effort and professional judgment. This sense that decision-making was linked to professionalism and that treating teachers as professionals was a precondition for building trust ran through the interviews. Additionally, Jack stated the importance of empowering teachers with flexibility and latitude to make good professional decisions and accompanying that with accountability for

those decisions. To illustrate this point, Jack highlighted such an instance involving the current district business leader.

One of the expectations with our business leader, he will support you every step of the way. Don't come into his office with a wishy-washy request, or without having the information there to make your request. For example, "We had 3 move-ins, that increased our need for services by this much, this is why there is a 0.5 increase over here. This will equal this, if we pay this part." Then he'll say, "Yeah, ok." I can't just say I want this. I have to provide the data to support this is why I'm asking for increase in this staffing position and he'll support it. That's the culture that we have. (Jack, October 2014)

The business leader allocated resources for teachers upon request, provided those teachers could back up their request with evidence of real need; this impressed upon Jack the fact that part of establishing trust is being trustworthy. Jack elaborated on the notion of trust as important as a matter of personal security.

Simple good faith goes a long way.

When you trust your teachers, it's not just that the transparency and care we provide drives how we all feel. But it also takes care of that thinking survival piece of...I do have to make a living. (Jack, October 2014)

Taken together, school leaders believed that these authentic relationships produced a sense among the teachers that the school leader was to be trusted. According to school leaders this trust was important because it built buy in. Jack explained the role of the school leader as one who looks ahead and strategically plans for the needs of others in light of the work that needs to be done.

We believe in a philosophy of shared leadership. We're working together towards a common goal, because I see we have buy in. We really do, from the ground up. You really have to guide and shape and that's the puzzle. That's the game. That's the chess match. That's the piece there. But at the end of the day they are the ones that are making the changes to impact the kids and our job is to support that.

That's how I see a leader, as somebody who is with the team and making decisions with them, getting their hands dirty. When the chairs need to be

moved after you had a family night, you're the one doing that with your head custodians and helping them pick up. It's not just you going home, because you hit the 8:30pm mark or whatever it may be.

That's the key because that's how you get buy in from everybody. They see you chipping in, and they see you as a real person. We don't know the answers, but we'll try to help you figure them out and work through it. (Jack, October 2014)

Although not directly stated here, the context of Jack's discussion uses transparency and authenticity as those mechanisms to proceed with strategy and achieve buy-in or cultivate a culture for change. He expresses here the need for leaders to be deliberate in their work supporting teachers and others in their school community. He describes an example of what a leader does in a true, shared leadership alliance, being present and engaged on the frontlines, doing the work in support of community.

Beyond the enhanced interpersonal experiences of teachers, the instructional leaders also pointed out that cultivating trusting relationships with and among teachers, helped them to overcome challenges posed by mandated change like the Common Core State Standards. Emmitt discussed how contagion and coherence typically occur in the school community. His awareness of the complexities involved with trusting relationships and achieving buy in from staff was essential to his ability to establish a sustained school culture of collaboration for the benefit of student achievement.

People either understand [change] and agree with it, or they don't understand it and mock it. The groups of people who understand it and disagree with it are those who just want to stick in the standard. Then there is a small pocket of people who understand it, disagree with it, and choose to thwart it. So, we have our challenges.

I would say comparatively in my experience, [our district] has far less personnel issues, than I've experienced in my career. By and large part, [faculty and staff demonstrate] a tremendous amount of professionalism. Yet the sores that we do have, and I call them sores, because it's not just the point of impact that gets affected. It's like a radius of pain that shoots out from [the

center] and affect all those people who are your bell curve.

You've got the half who understand it and agree, the "I'm in," folks. Those are your change agents. You've got a large pocket maybe on that side of the bell curve that say, "I don't quite get all of it. But I know they're in so I'm in too." Then the other half of that bell curve says, "I don't know. I guess I'll dip my foot in."

That sore that radiates pain, sometimes it draws back [those who may be influenced] away from truly buying in to the other side of that curve and making it lop-sided. (Emmitt, October 2014)

Note Emmitt's description of "sores" as catalysts of negativity, and how he describes their impact on the school community. They "radiate pain," indicating that they can cause resistance to change in those with whom they have proximity and social influence. As instructional leaders it seems important to understand contagion and coherence caused by trust and strategies for steering the ripple effect in directions beneficial for student achievement.

One way to reduce negative effect on positive change, as described by Laura, was by implementing strategies for building relationships and enhancing collaboration among teachers. Many other participants also described their efforts to facilitate collaboration among staff with the same strategy in mind. Laura described her efforts to cultivate relationships in her school community to increase productivity, effectiveness, and collaboration for the benefit of student achievement.

We have professional marriage counseling for teacher partner teams. I think that does contribute to the ability to affect curricular change. Because if you don't have two people that can head-take on new changes together and change their practice together, change their approach together and take risks together. It makes the implementation of any kind of change almost impossible. Maintaining those strong relationships between those two co-teachers is really important, in order to make curricular change happen. (Laura, November 2014)

As described here, collaborative partners in her school were required to work on their partnerships for the benefit of their improved instructional skills and the academic achievement

of their students. As Laura described it, work on relationships can go a long way toward reinforcing the collaborative culture within the school.

According to participants, relationships between leaders and staff were important factors with significant impact on continual improvement in a school community. Trust was key to establishing and maintaining relationships. As explained by participants, transparency allows teachers to trust the school leaders who provide it, and teachers understand to be trusted one must be trustworthy. Participants also described how contagion by coherence allows trusting relationships to do the work of advancing curricular and instructional change in positive productive ways. Within the chapter it is demonstrated that with trusting relationships secure within the school culture, instructional leaders may begin to cultivate shared leadership opportunities for teachers and staff.

Discussion

As described by participants in this study, the school culture, as it embraces change and works collaboratively to sustain it, was integral to implementation of the Common Core. Participants showed that strong supportive school culture was facilitated through the establishment of shared understanding of the change and shared goals for achieving it. They also defined important aspects of culture within their school to be high expectations for excellence, caring and supportive relationships, and collaborative efforts to share meaning, values, and vision related to continual improvement. This research shows, and literature supports, that school culture is vital to the success of standards-based reform, such as the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (Fullan, 2006; Hallinger, 2010). Data from this study shows that implementing successful standards-based reform is dependent upon a collaborative school

culture where leaders, as part of their job responsibility, see to it that teachers are part of the change process.

School communities are dependent upon school culture to dictate the ways and means of planning for and implementing curricular change associated with standards-based reform. According to participants, being intentional about planning for curricular change and demonstrating consistency between the plan and actions within the community contributes to positive results regarding implementation and ultimately academic achievement. Fullan (1982) and Schein (1990), maintained that school culture serves as the foundation for sustained change and improvement in schools. As noted previously through an examination of literature, a solid sustaining school culture is vital to producing change that is understood and embraced by teachers, staff, students, and parents in the school community (Kotter, 1996; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Peterson, 2002). This research demonstrates the importance of establishing shared meaning respective to change within the school community as an initial step in planning and implementation.

In this study, leaders explained that positive outcomes related to standards-based reform begin with the facilitation of shared understanding for new goals, or in this case, what the standards meant. As explained in previous chapters, leaders found lack of understanding for what the standards mean to be the root cause of debate about the standards and the challenges implementing them as a result. In turn, they recognized their efforts to establish that understanding along with clear goals for curricular and instructional change within their school communities as necessary for the culture to embrace and accept the change.

With shared meaning and goals in place for the community as a whole, change could be promoted within the school culture through their collective acceptance and understanding of the

change. A school culture accepting of change and focused on shared goals for student achievement begets successful changes that lead to better instructional practices and positive outcomes for students (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Fullan, 2011; Sahin, 2011). Leaders like Laura and Emmitt described how investment and commitment from their school communities made the difference in what he perceived to be their successful efforts to implement the standards. For an instructional leader to influence successful standards-based reform, the development of shared meaning within a school culture, regarding what the curricular change is and how the school community plans to achieve it, is vitally important (Fullan, 1993; Marzano, 2005). Leaders in this study described that as true through their descriptions of investment from their teachers and staff and the ways in which shared meaning and goals helped to quell resistance to change within the school culture.

As participants stated, cultivation of a strong and supportive school culture was critical to the role of the instructional leader. Sahin (2011) also stated that because school culture powerfully influences learning and instruction, it is essential to the role of the instructional leader that school culture be established and maintained. Participants in this study recognized their role in the cultivation of a strong and supportive school culture was to establish the aspects of excellence, care, and collaboration within it. As they explained, this effort starts with the establishment of shared vision. Instructional leaders in this study explained that the instructional leader may cultivate sustained school culture by establishing a vision for learning that emphasizes student achievement. Visions best take hold when they are shared and instructional leaders create shared vision by openly communicating the plan with members of the school community, listening to their views, appreciating their opinions, and attending to their needs

(Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Marzano, 2005; Vandenberghe & Staessens, 1991). Through the establishment of shared vision, tenets of a culture based on excellence begin to take hold.

As stated within the chapter, leaders like Emmitt and Stella asserted that their efforts to cultivate a strong school culture characterized by excellence included recruitment of high quality new hires to work in their schools. Murphy et al. (2010) specified that effective instructional leaders invest time and strategic planning to see their school is “populated with excellent teachers, and with colleagues whose values and instructional frameworks are consistent with the mission and the culture of the school” (p. 3). Other leaders, like Jack and Brad, went beyond the hiring of new teachers and staff to explain their efforts to retain their high quality staff members within the school community. These participants asserted the importance of establishing effective leadership practices through strategies including hiring and retaining high quality teachers within the school, maintaining a level of high expectations for professional behaviors and decision-making, and facilitating opportunities for collaboration.

Implementing standards-based reform, as stated by participants, requires that leaders and teachers stretch their comfort zones and strive for excellence in pursuit of academic achievement. Within such a school culture, high expectations necessary for success may be established and achieved. Fundamental to their school culture, as participants stated, was the ability to count on their teacher to meet and exceed high expectations for continual improvement. The culture of excellence established in some districts resulted in teachers who went beyond the conditions of a job description and exceeded the hours in the workday, not because they were required to, but because the school culture fostered a belief in and value for going above and beyond the norm. This reflects the position expressed by Hess (2013) that policy can be unnecessary when culture is sufficiently strong” (p. 25). However, Hess (2013) also noted that this level of strong school

culture is likely the exception rather than the rule. As Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, it stands to reason that these leaders represent the exception, and therefore the achievement of high expectations may be considered a means of being exceptional. Another aspect of a strong and supportive school culture included expressions of care as characteristic within the school environment.

Participants stated that allowing teachers to feel safe is central to establishing a culture of care within the larger school culture. They explained that through transparency and concerted efforts to share appropriate details of themselves as individuals, leaders made themselves as trustworthy in the eyes of their school community. Trustworthy leadership is at the foundation of successful schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Participants described ways of openly sharing themselves and their lives in appropriate ways with teachers and also communicating with teachers about the events in their lives outside of school. Sosik and Dionne (1997) explained that such openness is essential to instructional leaders in establishing themselves as trustworthy. By proving their trustworthiness, leaders allowed their teachers and staff to feel safe to care about their leader, themselves, and others in their school community. As an instructional leader cultivates psychological safety, individuals feel secure sharing their ideas, asking for help, and even making mistakes (Edmonson, 2003; Morrow et al., 2010). Edmondson et al. (2001) and Morrow et al. (2010) suggest that psychological safety and trustworthy leadership foster a sense of collective learning and support for changing behaviors in ways that can positively impact behaviors and improve performance. For leaders in this study, this type of mutual trust and personal validation motivated their teachers and helped to create a culture of care where individuals are able to strive for and achieve great effectiveness.

As described by participants, the school culture, including aspects of excellence and care within it, is dependent upon activities for sharing meaning, vision, and values and the collaborative culture that results from such activities. Participants discussed cultivating a collaborative culture by organizing school structure in ways to ensure teachers are part of the change process. A leadership model including distribution of leadership within and among the school community, especially instructional leadership duties for skilled teachers, is known as a distributed or shared leadership model. As a leadership model, distribution of leadership may serve the school community better than a more traditional top-down style of leadership, because it encourages collaboration within the school culture through shared leadership and decision-making activities (Elmore, 1995; Spillane et al., 2001). Elmore (2005) noted that leadership becomes more likely to be distributed by expertise within a school or district when schools succeed in establishing a school culture characterized by continuous improvement. As discussed by participants, teacher leaders may take various leadership roles as team leaders, professional development coordinators, curricular council members/leaders, etc. Also expressed by participants, the list of possibilities may be endless and opportunities adapt to the needs and culture of the school/district.

Whether or not leadership duties are included, one way of encouraging collaboration with and among teachers to build and sustain culture within the school or district is through facilitation of professional learning communities or PLCs. Commitment and persistence is essential in the development and maintenance of PLCs (DuFour, 2004). It is much more of a shared philosophy for the school culture than a program for managing meetings. A PLC is characterized by a collective team, which calls to mind the statements of leaders who reflect upon and enact their instructional leadership with “all students belong to all of us” as their

central guiding principle. Professional learning communities collectively accept responsibility of every learner and respond through thoughtful daily practice to ensure their perceived success and continual improvement (Elmore, 2000; Moon, 2012). As such, PLCs serve to increase collaboration, promote change, and influence student achievement within the school culture. PLCs, as noted by school leaders, influence and improve student achievement. Moon (2012) supported that notion by stating that PLCs improve teacher instruction through strategic use of collaborative planning and assessment, meaningful analysis of student performance data, and scholarly investigation of teaching practices and other education related topics. Additionally, DuFour (2004) referenced a culture in which job-embedded professional development assists teachers in meeting the needs of struggling students. DuFour (2004) also confirmed that establishment and fidelity in implementation of PLCs promotes collaborative culture within the school.

School leaders in this study overall felt collaborative school culture and the relationships that compose it were integral parts of what they perceived to be their schools' successes regarding curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform and student achievement. Studies reviewed previously in this research support that school improvement is impacted by authentic relationships within the school community, which result from actions of school leaders (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Tarter et al., 1989; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). School leaders in this study agreed that the field of education is a people business, and that relationships are key to establishing and maintaining relationships built upon mutual trust. As noted by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, cultivating sustained school culture is dependent upon establishing authentic relationships built on trust, which form the foundation of a sustained school culture.

Leaders in this study asserted that trust is key to establishing the relationships that are central to cultivating a school culture responsive to change and committed to continual and sustained improvement. This reflects the ideas of Tschannen-Moran (2014) who explained that cohesive and cooperative relationships allow schools to be productive and accomplish goals, and further, that trust is the key to establishing those relationships. School leaders in this study recognized that they play an important role in facilitating trust with and among teachers, which reflected what Bryk & Schneider (2003) have previously asserted in literature, and they acknowledged that relationships built on trust are key to cultivating a school culture responsive to change and committed to continual and sustained improvement.

Once trust is established, then individuals have the capacity to perform at high levels of expectation. As noted by participants, the first aspect of building trust with and among teachers is for school leaders to demonstrate transparency in their words, actions, and in the plans for which they expect buy in from the school community. As noted by Klein (2012), transparency begets mutual trust and cooperation with and among staff. Participants repeatedly underscored the importance of open communication, transparency in their words and actions, and authenticity in their interactions with teachers and other members of the school community. Through communication, transparency, and authenticity, instructional leaders earned the trust of the people in their school community. A second aspect of building trust with teachers is the act of granting trust to teachers. By trusting in teachers' skills, talents, and sensibilities, leaders are essentially empowering them to give their best and make themselves a part of interactions with others, as well as what they do for students. As noted by Wahlstrom and Seashore (2008), Tarter et al. (1989) found a significant relationship between supportive leadership behaviors and trust from teachers in their school leader.

Part of receiving trust is being trustworthy. The school leaders in this study drew attention to the value of entrusting teachers to behave in trustworthy ways by going so far as to suggest that common sense should be a teacher's priority over job descriptions or hours in a work day. One could conceive of such a lack of focus on work rules as autocratic in that there is a contract potentially being violated by someone blurring the lines in favor of common sense. However, in this way, common sense is valued as a means of treating teachers as professionals, and in doing so, elevates the teaching profession. Teachers rise to the occasion professionally and buy in more to the school/district vision when they are able to choose, which perhaps signifies relevance in moving away from compliance and towards professionalism.

With trustworthy leadership and teacher buy in regarding plans for curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform, coherence and contagion become relevant effects on realization of shared goals and vision within a school community. Friendships develop from physical proximity and shared attitudes develop from social interaction (Burt, 1987, p. 1289). "Contagion by cohesion focuses behavioral communication," (Galaskiewicz & Burt, 1991, p. 88), with contagion happening through proximity and cohesion evolving through shared social understanding (Burt, 1987). By cultivating trusting relationships with and among teachers, the school community guided by instructional leaders may overcome challenges posed by mandated change like implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Overall, throughout this chapter, participants stated that success of the school was dependent upon a collaborative school culture founded in shared meaning and goals regarding change, shared vision for excellence, and shared value for caring and trusting relationships within the school community. School culture is the "glue that binds the community of teachers and learners" (Hess, 2013, p. 25). For standards-based reform to be successful in a school or

district, the school leader must cultivate a school culture that is open to and collaboratively working toward the change. Change is hard, because it requires us to restructure what we know, and how people experience change often differs from how it may have been intended (Fullan, 1982; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Strike & Posner, 1985). Large-scale changes, like implementation of the Common Core Standards, are even more difficult. Standards-based reform requires shared meaning of curricular and instructional change, which is relevant on both individual and social levels (Fullan, 1982). Participants felt that through strong, supportive school culture, shared meaning was established via facilitation of opportunities for sharing ideas and decisions in a collaborative effort toward continual change. This outlook aligned with Fullan (1982) who stated that to develop new meaning along with new skills and behaviors, it is important for teachers to be “exchanging ideas, support, and positive feelings about their work” (p. 97). Instructional leaders provide such opportunities for establishing shared meaning and orientations toward positive continual change within a strong sustained school culture.

The instructional leader establishes a shared vision, focused on continual improvement and sets the tone for the facets of excellence and care within a school culture. School leaders from high performing schools in this study credited teacher collaboration and unpacking the standards as necessary elements to implementing curricular change. Establishing shared meaning was vital to the development of a school culture able to open to and accepting of change. Through strategic and informed action, sensitivity to the needs the school community, encouragement of collaboration through professional development, and cultivation of a strong sustained school culture, school leaders influence their schools and districts such that the community may experience success in their efforts to implement curricular and instructional change associated with standards-based reform.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

This study was designed to explore the perceptions of school leaders from high performing schools regarding their role as instructional leaders implementing the standards-based reform, the Common Core. My goals were to determine how school leaders conceptualized and understood the CCSS and what implementation looked like in that context. I was also interested in how school leaders thought about their role in the context of their perceptions of the CCSS, and how they saw themselves creating conditions to facilitate change and helping others to learn and grow. To establish such understanding, I focused my inquiry on school leaders having served, or currently still serving high performing schools from a state in the Northeast. I chose to investigate high performing schools for two reasons: (1) schools having experienced perceived and/or recognized success implementing instruction may be more likely to have information to potentially inform a blueprint for curricular change implementation in schools struggling for academic success, and (2) we understand (through their school's successful outcomes) this particular population of principals as having evidence of their capacity as reflective practitioners, which was a desired characteristic for achieving meaningful data regarding instructional leadership role and practice.

The study revealed that leaders, from their perspectives, saw their role as leaders in both autocratic and democratic ways, however all leaders discussed the importance of supporting teachers. This confirms Glickman's (1992) notion, as noted by Blasé and Blasé (1999) that the role of the instructional leader is ideally enacted in a supportive environment. In concordance with Beane's (2013) view on the CCSS, participants looked upon the standards with positive regard as a set of guidelines for student achievement, however they recognized flaws in the way

standards were rolled out by State government education agencies especially the almost simultaneous changes in APPR requirements for teachers. Additionally, school leaders in this study considered collaboration between teachers and a school culture characterized by excellence and care as fundamental to the process of implementing curricular change associated with standards-based reform. Corresponding with Blasé and Blasé (1999), who noted that effective leadership is characterized by “authentic interest” and “true caring” (p. 367), participants generally reported transparency in their actions and plans, authenticity in their continual efforts to build relationships and cultivate school culture, and clear and meaningful communication as essential to their role as instructional leaders.

School leaders in this study looked at the standards in light of their potential for elevating higher order thinking and problem solving skills in developing students and the juxtaposing challenges these standards presented to their schools due to the ways in which State governments rolled out the standards for implementation. They contended that the pace of implementation expectations, as set by State governments, was too great considering lack of materials and resources provided at the time of the rollout. Current studies support that the capacities and skills delineated by the standards are superior to previous standards in the majority of states across the nation (Bean, 2013; Blackburn, 2011; Carmichael et al., 2010), but that the need for more time and enhanced materials/support for implementation presented challenges for teachers (Beane, 2013; Fetterolf-Klein, 2015). School leaders also recognized the high level of rigor associated with the standards for students with special needs. Gewertz (2013) noted that teachers’ lack of readiness to address the special needs of individual students (e.g., learning disabilities or limited English proficiencies) under CCSS requirements left these students particularly underserved by the standards. Taking these challenges into account, instructional leaders prepared their schools

for implementation by opting out of canned curricular programs promising to be standards-ready. Rather, these leaders chose to facilitate collaborative school-wide efforts to unpack standards and align individual standards with local curricular maps.

Leaders from this study, who reported engaging in critical reflection on a regular basis, benefitted from self-awareness that served to enhance organizational skills and strategy. This echoes the sentiments of Schön (1983) and McAlpine and Weston (2000) noted previously in this research that reflective practice provides for continual learning and improvement amongst leaders regarding their practices. Reflective practice presented challenges to participants as it elicited feelings of self-doubt, regret, and even emotional pain. However, these school leaders, from high performing schools, said that they engaged in critical reflection despite the discomfort, because it led to new ways to align their practices with their beliefs and new strategies for approaching standards-based reform. Participants revealed that they strategically developed understanding through their experiences by reflecting for action, on action, and in action. School leaders also felt that reflective practice led them to enhanced skills at interacting with members of the school community. Sergiovanni (1986) noted effective schools are characterized by positive climate, and that through reflection the school leader may improve skills and interactions to influence climate and culture of the school. These various ways to reflect upon their work allowed for continual reflection to occur such that it was tailored to the individual instructional leader, making the experience more personal and therefore more relevant. Critical reflection relating to processes utilized by participants in the implementation of curricular change appeared to provide meaningful learning for instructional leaders concerning their practices.

As previously noted, research shows that principal leadership significantly affects student achievement and is vital to the effectiveness of the school (Marzano, 2005; Supovitz & Poglinco,

2001; Waters & Marzano; 2006). However, strong leadership alone is not enough (Waters & Marzano, 2006). It is also imperative, as noted by participants, for instructional leaders to cultivate shared goals, communication, and collaborative efforts of people who work and learn together within the school environment. To improve the effectiveness of instruction, the culture of the school should be immersed in shared meaning for implementing standards-based reform and focused on academic achievement. As discussed within this research, an essential factor in cultivating a school culture in high performing schools included the establishment of shared vision focused on continual school improvement and high expectations for excellence. According to leaders in this study, high expectations for excellence in professional decision-making, knowledge, and skills characterized a culture within the school community that significantly impacted the school's ability to implement curricular change. Participants noted that appropriate personal connections with teachers and staff, including the investment of time and care to acknowledge concerns or share celebrations, also contributed to cultivating a school culture based capable of producing what may be considered, according to existing research, successful curricular change.

The study shows that relationships cultivated by the school leader and built upon mutual trust may have significant impact on continual improvement in a school community. This confirms research previously noted in this study that authentic relationships built on trust enable sustained school culture and successful school improvement to be cultivated within the school environment (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tarter, Bliss, & Hoy, 1989; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Instructional leaders reported that they cultivated relationships built on trust by being transparent in their words and actions and authentic in the ways they represented themselves to members of the school community. As noted by Oplatka (2007), these

efforts in favor of trusting relationships allow the instructional leader to appear more credible in the eyes of teachers, parents, and other stakeholders within the school community. A school culture built upon trusting relationships also appeared to provide leaders with opportunities to facilitate shared leadership with teachers and staff. This shared decision-making and distribution of leadership may then, as reported by participants, produce levels of collaboration that contributed to what they perceived as success regarding implementation of standards-based reform.

Important insights that came from this study particularly involved the emotional work for school leaders associated with reflective practice and the importance of relationships in the context of strong instructional leadership. The extensive responsibilities of these instructional leaders, as previously noted within this research as described by Cuban (1988), required them to be many things to many others. Leaders in this study reported it was their willingness to open themselves up to feeling real emotions, experiencing difficult situations or interactions, and connecting with others in meaningful ways that truly made the most difference in their practices. As one participant (Jack, October, 2014) pointed out, succinctly and emphatically, “We are in the people business, 100%. That’s what we are all about.” Evidence from this study indicates that the critical reflection and relationships built upon mutual trust may indeed be vital proficiencies in the instructional leadership role.

Participants viewed the emotional work associated with reflection as painful, hard, and even threatening in some cases. Many participants seemed to indicate the work was worth the effort as it led to new ways to see themselves and more effectively interact with others in the school environment. Some participants characterized reflection as an agonizing process, after which they feel beaten and/or exhausted. Others, who seemed less daunted over the process of

critical reflection, recognized the emotional work involved, but viewed the work as necessary despite any emotions conjured by reflection. Overall, they described how reflection allowed them to consider what really mattered to them, and often those priorities included the needs of staff and students and continuous improvement regarding instructional practices and administrative activities relating to academic achievement. Schön (1983) noted that reflective practice provides professionals with ways to cope in unusual, vague, and contradictory (i.e., difficult) situations often presented during daily practices. Leaders described the process of critical reflection as a practice in need of time, effort, and exceptional skill for the purpose of gaining insight about themselves as instructional leaders.

Participants identified authenticity as an essential factor in the cultivating relationships and healthy, positive interactions within the school environment. According to participants, relationships must be built upon mutual trust and authentic interactions including honesty, transparency, and consistency. These types of interactions within the school environment were perceived to provide validation for others as individuals and enable teachers to see the leader as trustworthy and credible. Research both supports this notion that authentic interactions lead to positive relationships that define the culture of the school, and also goes further to describe these efforts as characteristic of effective leadership (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). As discussed within this study, instructional leaders said they cultivated relationships built on trust by demonstrating transparency in their words and actions and by affording trust to teachers. Some participants described methods for building trust among staff, and conveyed that finesse, rather than force, was necessary. Others simply emphasized the importance of establishing trust as opposed to being perceived in a more authoritarian manner, an approach that, according to participants, would produce negative results or even resistance among staff. Overall, leaders in this study

agreed that trusting relationships with and among staff were the most important factor in the establishment of a school culture capable of achieving excellence and thereby producing successful standards-based reform.

Taken together, these findings illuminate the critical importance of transparency, authenticity, and communication in the role of the instructional leader. Echoing the sentiment of leaders in this study, it is not enough to offer an open door policy from the principal's office or possess good intentions to be honest and kind. Essential to the role of instructional leader, as discussed by leaders in this study, are efforts to be transparent in how they present themselves and their plans with members of the school community. Participants in this study seemed to indicate that demonstrating transparency in one's actions allows the leader to establish credibility with teachers and others in the school environment. Also essential to the role of the instructional leader, as described by participants, are efforts to listen to and understand others more than to be heard and understood themselves. It seemed that through valuing others and sharing decisions as well as leadership tasks, instructional leaders provided teachers and staff with a real voice in communicating their needs and ideas. Additionally, as the study shows, networking within the school community and being visible are important responsibilities of the school leader. Trustworthy leadership and reliable professionals working together for the benefit of student development and academic achievement seemed a powerful force, which participants stated would likely lead to continual improvement. Transparency in how leaders present themselves, communication that is candid and collaborative, and authenticity within relationships were noted in this study as the essence of strong instructional leadership.

The study illuminated the importance of closing information and communication gaps, which may exist between policy makers and the educators on the front lines, in the field, doing

the work of implementing new standards and facilitating the curricular reforms associated with these standards. As stated by participants, improvements in state-led systems and processes for rolling out related materials and disseminating critical information would have aided in the implementation of the Common Core within schools and districts. These efforts would have established (1) better, clearer shared understanding between policy makers and instructional leaders could positively impact decisions about how policy changes are rolled out, (2) who sits on committees to design and develop new standards, and (3) what expectations are called for from existing and future standards-based reform. Communication and shared understanding were both central topics to themes that emerged within this study indicating that both are essential elements of planned change in education, and it is my position that these communication and shared understanding are the responsibility of all involved in the changes associated with standards-based reform, including those who make decisions and determine policies at the state-level.

On the whole this research provides a timely investigation of how instructional leaders, argued to be a strong influence on teachers and student achievement (Gallagher, 2012), perceived their role in implementation of standards-based reform, like the CCSS, and how they enacted those perceptions in practice. As discussed within this study, instructional leadership practices comprise building authentic relationships within the school environment, establishing shared meaning and vision within the school culture, and engaging in skillful reflective practice to enable continual improvement of the self and model reflective practice for the school community. The emotional work of critical reflection and the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships built upon mutual trust resonate as most useful findings from this research, as they inform how leaders go about and make sense of their daily practices and

interactions with others within the school environment. Through this exploration of leaders' perceptions, including how they made sense of and enacted their leadership practices while leading curricular change associated with the CCSS, the process of how instructional leaders implement standards-based reform is further clarified and better understood.

Implications for Research

The highly dynamic school environments in which school leaders function, as demonstrated within this study, require them to act and make decisions on the fly. We know from what they shared that competing values, like the many facets of change associated with reform, often demand quick and/or tough decisions from the instructional leader. As discussed in this study, reflective practice allows leaders to maximize these values based upon shifting costs/benefits patterns as they unfold (Sergiovanni, 1986). As such, it is my position that further research, central to reflective practice as it informs how leaders use these patterns to inform their judgment, is needed. Sergiovanni (1986) noted that such practice informs rather than prescribes leaders' actions; therefore, I suggest that future research explaining how leaders use this knowledge as they are informed by it would provide a logical next step.

An extensive amount of research exists on teaching and reflective practice, but literature that is specific to leadership and reflective practice is less abundant. Therefore, it seems that much is still to be understood regarding how school leaders engage in reflective practice (Singleton, 2012). I propose that research exploring implications for teacher instruction and student learning related to leadership and reflective practice would make an important contribution to forming practical understanding of how change happens in schools. Additionally, literature is lacking in the more specific area of leadership preparation and reflective practice (e.g., how reflective practice is addressed in leadership preparation programs and how that

preparation translates to practice). Questions that may be generated as a result of these findings, specifically those relating to matters of isolation in leadership and the emotional work associated with reflective practice, include matters associated with the importance of addressing reflective practice in leadership preparation programs. Therefore future research addressing reflective practice and leadership preparation may contribute to a more precise understanding of instructional leadership practice and thereby inform a more universally accepted definition of the role as well as better ways of preparing future leaders for the field.

Beyond reflective practice, the matter of assessment as it relates to instructional leadership specific to implementation of standards-based reform can provide further insight into how leaders facilitate change. Participants in this study spoke to the conflict they experienced planning and implementing accurate and efficient change without knowing what would be measured as a result of that change. One participant (Brad, November 2014) pointed out, “it cannot reasonably be understood what the change is or how to implement it until it is understood what is being measured.” This inconsistency resulted when state governments rolled out the standards before the plan for formal assessment, which would be addressed in the years that followed. Recognizing that assessment is such an integral part of standards-based reform and the change processes involved, I decided that addressing such a topic would necessitate another study separate from the work involved in this research. For the purpose of focusing this research to sufficiently demonstrate understanding of the topic, I did not address matters of assessment in any detail. Future research with a central focus on assessment and implementation of the CCSS would be relevant and informative for audiences of this study.

Finally, it is my suggestion, that similar studies supporting this research should be conducted investigating how leaders facilitate curricular change from the perspective of teachers

and others within school environment. This study demonstrated how school leaders understood and reported enacting their practices, as well as how those same leaders reported facilitating change. It would also be useful to observe these leaders in action to see the degree of overlap between their statements and what they actually do in their practices. It would further inform how leaders facilitate change to conduct similar studies with teachers from the same school environments as leaders from this study. Such information would serve as a comparison of how leaders view their practices and processes for change in their schools with how others view those same practices and processes in that same place. Additionally, I suggest that similar studies exploring different school leaders in similar or different types of schools, with or without participation from their teachers, would provide necessary perspectives for how change happens in schools from other geographic areas, different state policies, as well as different levels of performance and/or levels of resources available to support their instructional programs.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Initially received by educators without much opposition, the standards were considered by many teachers as something they were already doing (Coleman, 2011). For instance, as noted in Hinchman and Moore (2013), based upon Coleman (2011), the literacy standards call for students to develop a “sophisticated academic vocabulary used in scholarly reading and writing across disciplines” (p. 442). I suggest that it is reasonable to presume that teachers might look at the standards, in all their comprehensiveness, and think, “...oh, yeah, we already cover vocabulary.” However, the shift in rigor required by the standards, fitting a scholarly level of reading and writing, is something very different from just covering vocabulary. It is my suggestion, one that was supported by participants of this study, that if teachers and schools were already doing what the standards called for relative to curricular change, there would not be

much need for new standards. This calls to mind a central theme from this research, that shared meaning for what the change is and shared goals clearly defining what change needs to take place are essential to successful standards-based reform as described within existing research. As the instructional leaders plays a vital role in the implementation of standards-based reform (Bryk & Driscoll, 1985; Fullan, 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Spillane & Hunt, 2010; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001), like the Common Core State Standards. It would be helpful to present collaborative opportunities for teachers to develop shared meaning and goals. As discussed within this study, such opportunities may be provided through facilitation of professional learning communities along with other options for shared-decision making and shared leadership activities.

As noted by participants, the work of reflection can be painful and the role of the instructional leader is sometimes isolating. Participants from this study stated that reflective practice provided a means of working out the worries of the day. They stated that their reflections were especially helpful when shared with others. Reflective practice may offer future leaders an approach to their professional practice, which may be cultivated in leadership preparation programs to prepare future instructional leaders for their professional roles. Acceptance of reflective practice requires an appreciation of the nature of professional knowledge and that individuals doing the reflection value opportunities to examine and learn from experiences and change their practices to increase effectiveness. Additionally, I suggest that such preparation may address the emotional challenges associated with reflective practice, provide skills and knowledge for how to engage in reflection, and include opportunities for authentic experience with reflection in the role of the instructional leader.

Also essential to the role of the instructional leader was the cultivation of a sustained school culture and the authentic relationships that unite it. The importance of trust relative to authentic relationships and school culture, was demonstrated both in this research and by previous studies; however, it is widely accepted that trust is a risk. The concept of trust, as explained by Weiner (2015), based on Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), may be understood based upon how willing individuals are to take risk. That willingness is dependent upon the degree to which that risk is interpreted with kindness, openness, honesty, and reliability. Trust building requires honesty, openness, and integrity on the part of the school leader so that a sense of faith may be instilled and mutual respect established (Sosik & Dionne, 1997). To me, it makes a great deal of sense that in the context of education, professionals are more likely to trust in others and in situations that are reliable (e.g., teachers are more willing to trust school leaders who are transparent and caring). Tschannen-Moran (2014) stated that trust reflects one's willingness to be vulnerable. Through consistency in words and deeds, entrusting and empowering teachers assures them of the leader's integrity, which in turn allows teachers to be vulnerable and trust in the leader (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Calling to mind Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of need, which puts self-actualization behind physiological needs in order of importance; teachers need to have the fundamentals covered before they can go above and beyond. Teachers also need to feel secure in their jobs and the relationships that steer their career paths. As expressed by leaders in this study, it is essential regarding the cultivation of strong supportive school culture that instructional leaders build trust and establish authentic relationships with and among teachers in their schools and districts.

As shown in findings from this research, it is necessary for leaders to provide teachers and staff with high quality professional development, because effective change associated with

standards-based reform is dependent upon it. According to Elmore (2000), facilitating the development of new behaviors and values from others is one of the most challenging aspects of school leadership. It is not enough to provide information as a means of professional development for teachers and staff. High quality professional development comprises “opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the setting in which they work” (Elmore, 2002, p. 29). As such, it seems that professional development should be sustained as leaders provide follow-up support and information and facilitate opportunities for collaboration, as teachers work to develop ideas and implement them in their classrooms.

As discussed within this study, one successful means of providing ongoing professional development, as perceived by participants, is through the establishment of professional learning communities (PLCs), which operate effectively to provide regular and scheduled opportunity for teachers to engage in professional discussions and do the work of implementing change (DuFour, 2004). DuFour (2004), noted that teachers may utilize PLCs to seek pedagogical strategies, collaboratively plan instruction to attend to student achievement, and even to set goals for future professional development in the PLC or another format (e.g., staff development days, scholarly research, etc.). As demonstrated within this study, collaboration is a valuable tool for instructional leaders as a means of implementing what they perceive to be successful change.

Finally, this study points to the principal as the key to a strong school culture. As previously discussed in this research, having a strong instructional leader serving as principal in the school positively affects student achievement and teacher effectiveness. This study has shown how school culture and the leader’s influence within that culture are integral to such a positive effect. As supported by evidence from this study, practitioners seeking to influence

individual and group behaviors, may choose to consider their strategies for establishing shared goals for student achievement within their school(s). Further, efforts to establish shared vision for excellence and care within the school culture may positively impact curricular and instructional change for student achievement. Leaders in this study described how cultivation of a strong school culture results in community members who are motivated, dedicated, collaborative, accepting of and prepared for achieving successful change associated with standards-based reform like the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Summary

Standards-based reform resonates today as matter of importance in the field of education. Reform efforts are known to swing back and forth, like a pendulum when old practices or philosophies resurface as new improved ideas (Slavin, 1989). The most recent iteration of reform in America, the Common Core State Standards, introduced in 2010, provide benchmarks for what students should know and be able to do in preparation for college and career (Beane, 2013; Carmichael et al., 2010; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). Instructional leaders are essential in the implementation of this mandated change at the school level (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). This study contributes to a limited research base on how principals understand their role relative to implementation of standards-based reform and how they enact these understandings in practice.

The goals of this research were to determine the following: (1) how school leaders conceptualize and understand the CCSS and what implementation looks like in that context, (2) how school leaders think about their role in the context of their perceptions of the CCSS, and (3) how they create conditions to facilitate change for the school so that others can learn and grow. Semi-structured interviews with principals from highly effective schools and document analysis of demographic data provided by principals were utilized to establish understanding for how

leaders bring about standards-based reform. The study found that the role of the instructional leader, the leader's reflective practices, and a strong sustained school culture figured prominently into results.

To understand how leaders bring about successful standards-based reform, it was necessary to explore the participants' perceptions regarding their respective roles as instructional leaders and how they thought about standards-based reform in their schools. Instructional leaders saw their role as characterized by support more than authority. They recognized value in mandated change like the Common Core State Standards where it benefitted student development, and they worked hard to collaborate with teachers, sharing decisions and leadership tasks, to implement the change. Critical to successful implementation of standards-based reform, as found within this study, is the school culture. Through instructional leadership efforts, the school culture is characterized by shared understanding for what a given change requires and shared vision for excellence in their school community. In general, this study finds specific factors as essential to the role of the instructional leader, including genuine and reliable capacities for transparency in how they present themselves and their plans, authenticity in their persistent efforts to build relationships and develop school culture, and clear and meaningful communication in their interactions within the school environment.

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT

Gaining Access



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT, AND EVALUATION

Name, Title
 Organization/District
 Department/School
 Address
 City, NY Zip

Dear *Name*,

As a doctoral student at Syracuse University in the School of Education, I am conducting a dissertation study involving instructional leaders and the various ways in which managing and leading curriculum and instruction manifest in the typical workday of the principal.

I am especially interested in learning from principals in high performing schools about how curricular change like implementation of the Common Core State Standards happens. As the principal of a National Blue Ribbon School, the results of your commitment to instructional leadership and reflective practice are documented and recognized. I congratulate you and your school on your recent recognition as a Blue Ribbon School for 2013, and I hope to learn more from you and other principals like you, about how you promote powerful teaching and learning.

I would like to invite you to participate with me in an interview about your typical practices and procedures as an instructional leader. My study is designed to describe how instructional leaders cultivate and maintain systems and processes necessary for change to occur. Of course, as an impartial researcher, I would approach any information you share with the greatest of sensitivity and the strictest of confidentiality.

As a former principal myself, I greatly respect your time, and I hope to be as unobtrusive as possible. An interview may be scheduled electronically or in person in the way and at a time most convenient for you. Questions will explore your reflective practice, including your perceptions and experiences implementing curricular change, especially as it relates to the Common Core State Standards. Most importantly, my questions and your answers will be handled professionally with courtesy.

All interviews for this study will be recorded using a digital audio/video recorder and transcribed. All files containing personally identifying information, including the original audio recordings, will be kept *confidential*. Only the researcher will have access to the information. In any publications or presentations, names will be made up, and any details that may identify

participants will be changed. Audio recordings will be destroyed after the completion of the study.

Studies show effective instructional leadership strongly influences quality of instruction, however research demonstrating “how” instructional leaders make change happen is sorely lacking in education. Your participation will contribute to a body of literature that is lacking in our field. Risks of participation in this study exist only where embarrassment may occur as a result of reflection, however information provided is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to answer specific questions and you may withdraw at any time. Please be assured, I will do what it takes to ensure you are comfortable and informed throughout the study.

Thank you for considering my invitation to participate in this study. It is my intention to conduct research that will make for a worthy contribution to our field of education. Thanks again for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing back from you

Sincerely,

Tiffany M. Squires
tmsquire@syr.edu

Consent Form



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT, AND EVALUATION

Dear [Subject Name],

My name is Tiffany Squires. As a doctoral student in Instructional Design, Development, & Evaluation at Syracuse University I am inviting you to participate in an interview that will focus on instructional leadership. This sheet will explain the interview to you and please feel free to ask any questions you might have about the research. I will be happy to explain anything in detail if you wish. Involvement in the study is voluntary; you may choose to participate or not. I am interested in learning about the ways in which instructional leaders accomplish curricular change. Questions will involve the Common Core State Standards, what you are doing to determine and communicate expectations about implementation, and your experiences with curricular change. The discussion will take approximately an hour of your time. The interview will be recorded using an audio recorder and then transcribed.

All files containing personally identifying information, including the original audio and video recordings, will be kept confidential. Information you provide will be stored in password protected secure server, and only the research team will have access to the information. In any articles written or any presentations made, a name will be made up for you, and any details that may identify you will be changed. The audio and video recordings will be destroyed after the completion of the study.

The benefit of this research is that you will be contributing to a body of literature that is lacking in our field of education, literature that addresses various ways in which managing and leading curriculum and instruction manifest in the workdays of instructional leaders. You may benefit from this study by reflecting on your own actions and decisions, and becoming more aware of how the course you've taken so far has impacted the success of your school and/or district. The risks to you of participating in this study exist only where embarrassment may occur as a result of reflection, however information provided is entirely voluntary. You can choose to not answer specific questions and you can withdraw from the study at any time.

If you do not want to take part, you have the right to refuse to take part, without penalty. If you decide to take part and later no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty.

If you have any questions, concerns, complaints about the research, contact Tiffany Squires at SU Project Advance, 400 Ostrom Avenue, tmsquire@syr.edu, 315-443-2404.

All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this interview. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree to be audio recorded.

I do not agree to be audio recorded.

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of participant

Signature of researcher

Date

Printed name of researcher

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Instructional Leaders-Subject (Individual Perspectives)

1. Please describe the role of an effective instructional school leader.
 - a. ...with regard to implementation of curricular change/development?
2. How is the organization of leadership structured within your school community?
 - a. Who is involved?
 - b. What is the culture?
 - c. Describe the relationships that exist within the culture of your school.
3. What is your role as an instructional leader in your school?
 - a. Please describe a time when you have demonstrated instructional leadership in your school.
4. What do you consider to be/value as the most important aspects of your instructional vision?
5. How do you think about your work?
6. Please describe the regular demands of a typical day in your schedule.
 - a. How do you typically solve problems?
 - b. What are the processes by which you solve problems?
 - c. How do you go about regulating your problem-solving processes?
7. With regard to implementation of the CCSS, what do you talk with your teachers about? How do you encourage teacher reflection? In what ways do you promote professional growth? "...making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling, using inquiry, soliciting advice and opinions, and giving praise" (Blasé & Blasé, 1999: 359).
8. Throughout your tenure, how have your beliefs about teaching and learning changed? How have these changes in views manifested in your leadership style/communication/actions?
9. Please describe what collaboration looks like in your school.
 - a. What ways do you collaborate with others for the purpose of improving/developing instruction? With whom?
 - b. What ways do teachers in your school community collaborate with others to improve/develop/implement instruction? With whom?
 - c. What ways do you and your teachers collaborate within your school community to bring about curricular/instructional change?

Instructional Leaders-Object (Procedures/Goals)

1. Describe your instructional vision for your school.
 - a. How do you communicate that vision with the school community (teachers, students, parents, etc.)?
 - b. What efforts/actions do you dedicate toward selling that vision to the school community?
2. Describe the culture of your school. In what ways have you acted to establish/develop the culture of your school?
3. How do you conduct discipline within your school community?
 - a. Describe the process(es) you follow/invoke for formal reprimand of teachers and staff.
 - b. What actions/efforts do you take to establish a school climate in which discipline is separated from instruction?
4. How do you/your instructional team bring about curricular change in your school?
 - a. In what ways do members of your school community respond to your efforts to implement change?
 - b. Describe a change that was implemented with success in your school?
 - i. How do you know it was successful?
 - ii. What ways did other members of the school community respond to the change?
5. What steps/actions/processes has your school taken to implement the Common Core State Standards?
 - a. Describe how you go about distributing materials and resources within your school. How do you go about acquiring materials and resources to distribute?
 - b. Describe how you schedule and distribute time and support in your school.
 - c. How do you go about supporting teacher growth and development, both individually and collectively?
 - d. How do you go about providing both summative and formative monitoring of instruction? ...innovation?
 - e. What languages/vocabularies/symbols exist within your school community unique to it/special within it? What is the meaning behind such language/symbols?

Document Analysis-Artifacts

Tools

1. Forms-reflective accounts of leadership activities, protocols/elements of observation to implement evaluation in a given or assumed manner
2. Memos-school communication, informal congratulations/updates or formal reprimands
3. Agendas-outline results and organize discussions
4. Daily schedules
5. Yearly calendars
6. District and school policies
7. Learning technologies
8. School plant

Symbols

1. Language based systems
2. Rhetorical strategies
3. Vocabularies

APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY Institutional Review Board MEMORANDUM

TO: Gerald Edmonds
DATE: May 30, 2014
SUBJECT: **Determination of Exemption from Regulations**
IRB #: 14-149
TITLE: *Leading Curricular Change: The Role of the School Principal in Implementation of the Common Core State Standards*

The above referenced application, submitted for consideration as exempt from federal regulations as defined in 45 C.F.R. 46, has been evaluated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the following:

1. determination that it falls within the one or more of the five exempt categories allowed by the organization;
2. determination that the research meets the organization's ethical standards.

It has been determined by the IRB this protocol qualifies for exemption and has been assigned to categories **2 & 4**. This authorization will remain active for a period of five years from **May 30, 2014** until **May 29, 2019**.

CHANGES TO PROTOCOL: Proposed changes to this protocol during the period for which IRB authorization has already been given, cannot be initiated without additional IRB review. If there is a change in your research, you should notify the IRB immediately to determine whether your research protocol continues to qualify for exemption or if submission of an expedited or full board IRB protocol is required. Information about the University's human participants protection program can be found at: <http://orip.syr.edu/human-research/human-research-irb.html> Protocol changes are requested on an amendment application available on the IRB web site; please reference your IRB number and attach any documents that are being amended.

STUDY COMPLETION: Study completion is when all research activities are complete or when a study is closed to enrollment and only data analysis remains on data that have been de-identified. A Study Closure Form should be completed and submitted to the IRB for review ([Study Closure Form](#)).

Thank you for your cooperation in our shared efforts to assure that the rights and welfare of people participating in research are protected.

Tracy Cromp, M.S.W.
Director

Note to Faculty Advisor: This notice is only mailed to faculty. If a student is conducting this study, please forward this information to the student researcher.

DEPT: Project Advance, 400 Ostrom Ave.

STUDENT: Tiffany Squires

Office of Research Integrity and Protections
 121 Bowne Hall Syracuse, New York 13244-1200
 (Phone) 315.443.3013 ♦ (Fax) 315.443.9889
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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Tiffany M. Squires was born and raised in Auburn, NY. She completed her Bachelor of Science In Elementary Education with concentrations in Early Childhood, Behavioral/Social Science, and Dance at the State University of New York at Fredonia. Tiffany completed a Master of Science in Education at Canisius College in Buffalo, NY in 2001, and went on to complete a Master of Science in Instructional Design, Development & Evaluation at Syracuse University in 2005. She also completed her Certificate of Advanced Studies in Education Leadership at LeMoyne College in 2007. She was permanently certified as a NYS Teacher at the PreK-6 levels, with an annotation in Early Childhood Education, in 2001. Additionally, Tiffany was provisionally certified as a School Administrator/Supervisor in 2006 and earned permanent certification as a School District Administrator in 2007.

Tiffany is an experienced teacher, principal, and professional development facilitator. She worked as a classroom teacher at various levels across grades PK-5. Tiffany served as principal for schools at both elementary and primary levels of instruction. In 2011, she began her doctoral research at Syracuse University's School of Education in the Instructional Design, Development & Evaluation Department. Currently, Tiffany assists the Instructional Services Team at Syracuse University Project Advance in Research and Evaluation, and she also assists the Syracuse University Assessment Working Team with review and development of Annual Assessment Plans university-wide. With Gerald S. Edmonds, Tiffany has a forthcoming edited book - Bridging The High School College Gap: The Role of Concurrent Enrollment Programs in May of 2016.