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Elijah Granger
grangere@jacks.sfasu.edu

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**ENSURING A HOLISTIC AND QUALITY EDUCATION FOR EVERY CHILD:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY OF PRINCIPALS'
TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

By

Elijah Granger, B.S., M.Ed.

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

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by

Elijah Granger, M.Ed.

APPROVED:

Pauline M. Sampson, Ph.D., Dissertation Chair

Ali Hachem, Ph.D., Committee Member

Janet Tareilo, Ed.D., Committee Member

Stacy Hendricks, Ed.D., Committee Member

Judy Abbott, Ph.D., Acting Chair, Department of
Secondary Education and Educational Leadership

Pauline M. Sampson, Ph.D.,
Dean Research and Graduate Studies

Marc Guidry, Ph.D.,
Associate Provost

ABSTRACT

Researchers have not fully examined how school leaders impact the teaching and learning environment when working toward generating students' academic success. Balyer (2012) called for more work on understanding the transformational leadership behaviors that create conditions conducive to generating student achievement within educational accountability. Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological inquiry is to explore the lived experiences of principals and their perceptions concerning the state accountability system and how it may impact their transformational efforts in ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child. The phenomenological inquiry will yield the opportunity to compare administrators' in-depth perceptions of the accountability systems in Texas that may impact how they apply transformational leadership behaviors to their efforts to educate all children. Five principals of schools that administer the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and its associated end-of-course exams (EOC) and whose schools consistently show high academic performance year-to-year in a Texas urban area were selected to participate in the research. The impact the study has on principals could lead to principal retainment, improvement of student achievement, and trials of better practices and innovative strategies. The data reflected the following overall themes about the phenomenon of transformational leadership by principals in the era of accountability:

- Navigating the political environment
- Clear vision and focus on main priorities
- High expectations
- Collaborative environment
- Teamwork
- Inspiring and motivating teachers and students
- Effective and on-going professional development

Working in a school district that has a focus on student achievement, not student testing, creates a fertile environment for principals to lead their staff and students. The principal must ensure that the vision for school success is clear so that the entire campus focuses on the main priorities for assuring the academic success of every student.

Transformational leaders have high expectations for the staff and students and effective leaders of sustainable and high performing campuses create collaborative environments.

An environment of teamwork is a key element of success on a campus because “working together, you achieve more.” Transformational leaders inspire teachers and students to strive for excellence is an important part of transforming an environment and on-going professional development is a vital part of a successful and productive organization.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction to the Study

School leaders continue to make difficult decisions and overcome significant challenges in their pursuit of serving all children in the public education system. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) established student and teacher accountability guidelines for measuring student achievement through a system of rewards and sanctions. NCLB's nearly 15-year run was termed the *age of accountability*, during which testing and measurable outcomes guided most aspects of the teaching and learning process in K-12 schools, and during this period, the federal government prescribed how measurements would be made and reported (Sherman & Grogan, 2003).

Recently, NCLB became obsolete as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law in 2015. ESSA offered greater control over choosing and implementing accountability processes and measures to the states. However, in Texas, the accountability system has been ever-changing due to the state's legislature meeting every two years and the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2017) adjusting its regulations annually. The TEA made several changes to the accountability system since the inception of NCLB and continues to redefine its regulations for accountability during the new ESSA era. The adjustments to accountability have generated considerable challenges for public school administrators. Therefore, an existing problem is described in the next sections, and the purpose of the study is explicated. The guiding theoretical

framework, study limitations, and conceptual working definitions appear in this chapter.

The chapter concludes with a summary and the organization of the dissertation.

Background of the Problem

Leaders are vital to successful schools and have had to adjust to ensure the success of the students and teachers. School leaders are responsible for conveying and guiding attainment of a mission and shared vision by using both tactical and strategic thinking. They must know how to create a culture and environment that promotes success. As principals work to improve school climate through vision sharing, they generate opportunities for enhancements to teacher effectiveness and student achievement and behavior (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Effective leaders establish empowerment among their followers (Nielsen, Randall, Yarker, & Brenner, 2008).

Bass and Avolio (1993) emphasized that an organization's culture develops, in large part, from its leaders. Steele (2012) and Bandura (1997) emphasized the importance of leaders using differentiated leadership styles to meet the needs of the diverse individuals who comprise school organizations. Furthermore, leaders must believe in their abilities and capabilities to generate transactions between their followers and themselves that ensure successful outcomes, such as students' academic achievement (Bandura, 1997). Effective leaders develop innovative climates in which teachers take risks and institute novel ideas and practices to improve student performance (Moolenaar, 2012). Such leadership capacity involves having the self-efficacy necessary to build trusting relationships with followers.

According to Maxwell (1995), building leadership capacity is part of the foundation to ensure sustainable success. Leaders must empower the individuals around them to build a highly effective organization. The practice of collaboration and dedication to growth increases the potential of leaders and their organizational followers (Maxwell, 1995, 2018). In the age of accountability, transformational leaders need to be knowledgeable and skillful at navigating political waters (Nelson & Squires, 2017). Student learning is the focus of a school's transformational leader (Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010). Educating the whole child is the transformational leader's priority. A transformational leader not only thinks outside of the box of conventionality, but he or she creatively thinks outside the narrow box of accountability measurement to ensure all students learn successfully (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2013).

Creativity in leadership is a challenge when a multitude of legislative mandates affect school leaders in the age of accountability. For instance, NCLB, instituted in January of 2002, produced a legal landslide of mandates as the federal government began to regulate public schools that received federal monies, such as Title I schools in which the numbers of students who were eligible for free lunch were over half of a school's population (Klein, 2015). Even though these mandates and accountability measures were intended to show how students benefited and achieved, (Klein (2015), explained that they lacked funding to support their institution. Without proper funding to support the mandates, school leaders, teachers, and students suffered from decreased motivational levels (Moller, 2009).

Moreover, according to Moller (2009) the accountability measures required school districts to allocate over one billion dollars in educational funding to address NCLB-related requirements, but none of this funding was found among regular annual budgets. Furthermore, during NCLB, testing requirements led to both parents and educators questioning the validity of testing as “a serious limitation of this form of accountability” (Moller, 2009, p. 5). In 2015, NCLB changed to Every Student Succeeds Act.

As the political winds changed in Washington, DC, federal funding was diverted from public schools to charter schools and competitive grant programs. The fiscal year (FY) 2018 federal budget eliminated or reduced funding for more than 30 programs (USDOE, 2017). The budget represented 13% decrease from the FY 2017 budget. For fiscal year (FY) 2018, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE, 2017) concentrated on five major themes for fulfilling the President’s FY 2018 Budget:

- Expanding school choice, ensuring more children have an equal opportunity to receive a great education;
- Maintaining strong support for the Nation’s most vulnerable students;
- Simplifying funding for postsecondary education;
- Continuing to build evidence around educational innovation; and
- Eliminating or reducing Department programs consistent with the limited Federal role in education. (p. 1)

The USDOE’s (2017) FY 2018 budget offered 1.4 billion dollars toward new public and private school choice opportunities, including a \$1-billion increase in Title I

monies allocated to awarding Furthering Options for Children to Unlock Success (FOCUS) grants. FOCUS grants were designed as supplemental awards for school districts adopting weighted, student-centered funding formulas in open enrollment school systems. Also, the budget contained a \$250 million funding increase for the Education Innovation and Research program issuing competitive awards to provide scholarships for students from low-income families seeking to attend private schools under the school choice framework emphasized by the budget. A \$167 million increase to funding for the Charter Schools Grant program was used to strengthen states' efforts to start new charter schools or expand and replicate existing high-performing charter school models while providing up to \$100 million to meet the growing demand for charter school facilities (USDOE, 2017).

According to Elstad (2008) even in the ESSA era and with the school choice emphasis of the FY 2018 budget from the USDOE, school administrators are under extreme pressure to meet all state and federal accountability guidelines, mandates, and deadlines. Given the demands of accountability, educators have continued following standards-based curricula to ensure students achieve equity in meeting expectations of minimum competencies in core subjects such as English, mathematics, science, and social studies (Elstad, 2008).

Historically, Hughes & Jones (2010) believed school leaders have sought to adhere to high standards to inspire trust within students, parents, and the community, in general. Such expectations, in turn, built support for schools and established environments focused on students' academic successes (Hughes & Jones, 2010). In the

era of accountability, Hughes and Jones (2010) believe administrators are expected to understand curriculum, teacher instruction, and delivery of information for all students; therefore, they have lowered academic expectations to ensure even the least capable child can master all the mandated content found on accountability tests. Even though this NCLB mandate continued in the ESSA era, the problems with accountability, ongoing measurement changes, and uncertainties about how schools are measured require flexible educational organizations led by school leaders able to inspire teachers and staff to participate in team efforts and share responsibility for achieving organizational goals, such as turning around a low performing school.

School leaders must complete complex school turnarounds and implement processes for teaching students to be academically adequate (McGhee & Nelson, 2005). Even though movement in Texas has begun to yield more flexibility in school accountability with the implementation of ESSA and the latest iteration of the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) accountability system in Texas, principals have been held to standards that are not necessarily realistic for educating at-risk and low-income student populations (Liggins, 2014). National measurements of students' academic achievement in the U.S. indicated that children living below the poverty threshold are less likely to demonstrate proficiency in both reading and mathematics than children living at or above the poverty threshold (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2011).

According to Payne (2009), students living in poverty start elementary school academically behind their peers from middle-income or upper middle-income

households. Students of poverty live in homes that do not contain books and are less likely to know the alphabet upon entering kindergarten or first grade (Payne, 2009). Sometimes, schools in wealthy neighborhoods enjoy the benefits of serving elementary students exposed to various educational opportunities during their preschool-aged years. However, schools in impoverished neighborhoods receive students who were unlikely to have been read to by an adult or to have experienced other academically enriching opportunities, such as visiting zoos and museums; these schools' students often face challenges with meeting state-mandated standards on standardized exams, such as the STAAR, without receiving intervention from their teachers (Carlisle, Kelcey, & Berebitsky, 2013; Payne 2009). Even when schools are performing according to required Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) mandates, principals of many public schools serve populations comprised of students living in poverty or English as a second language homes (Orr, 2008). Many researchers have demonstrated the importance of disadvantaged and low-socioeconomic students attending federally funded Head Start programs to give them an opportunity to compete equitably with their peers in kindergarten and first grade ((Clyne-Belle, 1998; Graves, 2017; Ramseur-Fischer, 2019; Sargenti, 2012).

Additionally, Mullen and Johnson (2006) argued that standardized testing is not equitable for children from low-income homes. In 2011, Hays found that standardized testing can artificially create wider achievement gaps between students of diverse ethnicities, not reduce them. The effort to close the achievement gap between White middleclass and upperclass children and their counter parts who may be children of

poverty or who are African American or Hispanic may have flaws as “achievement tests have served as a racist and class biased tool for the sorting and socialization process that capitalist and racist schools perform” (Mullen & Johnson, 2006, p. 93). While school leaders aim to address their students’ needs regarding curriculum, their decisions are sometimes driven by the demands of the accountability system. This approach forces leaders to work with “predetermined ends” (Mullen & Johnson, 2006, p. 95) because of the forced requirement to hold all students to the same level of learning, regardless of the context of challenging curriculum (Nieto, 2007). Therefore, ethical issues and concerns plague the use of standardized assessments as a form of equal access to education because the differences between children’s abilities based on their home lives alone suggests standardization is not feasible (Mullen & Johnson, 2006).

Operationally, principals are leaders with major roles in the successes of their educational facilities. Principals fulfill complex roles by being tasked to guide their schools toward attaining some standard of academic progress annually and serve as primary actors charged with creating the visions for their local campuses. Daly (2009) noted principals must help their teachers collectively “develop shared understanding about the organization and its activities and goals that undergird a sense of purpose and vision” (p. 177). Being the visionary leader of a school is not an easy task and is complicated by standardized accountability processes.

Featherstone (2017) examined the concept of the principal as leader as a major construct in the business of educating students and developing teachers. The ability to develop students within schools requires leaders with the leadership capacity to build

school climates that enable understanding of multiple cultures, belief in the success of the school by stakeholders, and collaborations between the community and the school (Hoyle & Slater, 2001). Thus, the effective transformational principal leader serves as the binding agent for ensuring community trust and school success. School leaders who know how to navigate accountability systems while sustaining their students' academic progress in spite of students' diverse cultures and the lack of necessary fiscal resources tend to be transformative (Bloom & Owens, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Federal and state governments have increasingly developed academic accountability systems in public schools that conflict with democratic leadership practices that could ensure the development and implementation of public school improvement innovations (Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010). Transformational principals are an important part of ensuring successful student outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). However, there has been little research on principals' perceptions about and descriptions of their efforts to attain success under ever changing national and state accountability systems (Leithwood & Louis, 2011). There is a minimal examination of how school leaders impact the teaching and learning environment when working toward generating students' academic success. Mitchell and Sackney (2016) called for more work on understanding the transformational leadership behaviors that create conditions conducive to generating student achievement within educational accountability.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of principals and their perceptions concerning the state accountability system and how it may impact their transformational efforts in ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child. The phenomenological inquiry yielded the opportunity to compare administrators' in-depth perceptions of the accountability systems in Texas that may impact how they apply transformational leadership behaviors to their efforts to educate all children. Studies have focused on different aspects of transformational leadership, the practices of the school leaders affected by the accountability system when making decisions and attempting to transform schools despite state and federal demands, the principals continue to improve these systems (Auerbach, 2012; English, 2007; Mulcahy, 2013; NetLibrary & Duke, 2003). The design of the study enabled the exploration of the principals' views about how they lead their schools transformationally to attain the goal of educating all students under the regulations of state and federal accountability systems (Van Manen, 2014).

Research Questions

The primary research question (PRQ) guiding this phenomenological inquiry was: What perceptions about the state accountability system impact how school leaders work toward ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child? The two supporting research questions (RQ1 and RQ2) were the following:

- RQ1. What are the principals' perceptions about the Texas state's accountability system?

RQ2. What are the principals lived experiences with ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child through transformational leadership?

Significance of the Study

Understanding how the relationship between transformational leadership qualities and how these qualities have positively impacted school success may affect the way the professional development is designed and implemented. Principals may need to incorporate more direct contributions as a transformational principal in the areas of sharing a vision, building consensus, holding high expectations, modeling behavior, providing individualized support, providing intellectual stimulation, strengthening school culture, and building collaborative structures to increase student achievement (Knapp & Feldman, 2012). The impact the study has on principals could lead to principal retainment, improvement of student achievement, and trials of better practices and innovative strategies. The relationship that exists between principals' practices in campus leadership, leadership skills, high student performance, and their perception of leading with transformational qualities must be analyzed (Krasnoff, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

The study was designed to examine transformational leadership by principals. The study explored perceptions of principal about the accountability system and how principal leadership behaviors affect the success of public school organizations. The framework used guided the rationale for the study which involved transformational leadership and the accountability model used in the state of Texas.

Transformation leaders. Transformational leaders inspire, provide vision and intellectually stimulate their staff members. Transformational leadership is essential to encourage staff members to be innovative, solve problems, and generate solutions to complex problems. Transformational leaders identify and articulate a vision; foster the acceptance of group goals; provide individual support and intellectual stimulation; offer rewards; and build culture and structure (Finnigan, 2010; Leithwood, Chapman, Corson, Hallinger, & Hart, 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Fernandez, 1994).

Leithwood et al. (1996) advocated that teachers are most likely to follow a leader who develops a shared vision, keeps fresh ideas moving in a collaborative way, and is trustworthy. Again, it is also evident that instructional leadership makes a greater impression on teachers and student learning. Keeping teachers inspired during the accountability era is challenging, but it means conveying high expectations to teachers and understanding student learning and sensing how to propel both groups toward their goals. Additionally, Leithwood (1996) expressed, principals learn how to utilize resources to keep teachers motivated. Both using fiscal resources and understanding how to leverage resources to keep teachers motivated are a tight balance of responsibilities. Additionally, Finnigan (2010) noted that effective principals regarded resources as multiple types of provisions and much more than receiving simply supplies or funds. For Kimball (2011), principals viewed their staff as resources and worked to help their faculty perform effectively as resources for students achieving success.

Finnigan (2010) posited that a leader who shows respect, dignity, and concern for subordinates fosters relational trust that gives teachers a feeling of certainty amid the

many compliance demands. Additionally, teacher trust is a direct reflection of the principal's truthfulness, openness, and consistency. Therefore, it is critical to form trusting relationships because transforming a school requires leaders who are trustworthy and transparent (Yang, 2016).

Likewise, great leaders also understand the value of utilizing decentralization methods in the age of accountability. According to Leithwood (2001), decentralization greatly increases the demands on school leaders. Contextually, Leithwood (2001) offered two perspectives on decentralization:

Internally, principals often find themselves setting the agenda, providing information to other council members, assisting council decision making, and developing a close working relationship with the council chair. Externally, principals often act as strong leaders . . . with all stakeholders about council activities and promote the value of the council. (p. 223)

Essentially, Leithwood (2001) considered the implications of utilizing people resources to build principal capacity. Ironically, there has always been some type of standard in existence with education, so the key is to figure out how to manage all of the moving parts within the new accountability system.

As the leader, Leithwood (2001) advocated that transformation occurs when the leader is able to train others on how to make choices and decisions defensively. This is where the work of changing a school starts to take shape. Essentially, this gives credence to the fact that leaders build leaders. The processes that are shared with other leaders begins the transformative work.

Managing accountability became so intrusive to educational practice it gained the label in the accountability era of *new managerialism* (Leithwood, 2001). This new approach to management became intensely goal oriented and was originally labeled as efficient for schools seeking to excel, but according to Leithwood (2001), accountability measures over the past 15 years became increasingly political and required a vast amount of time to manage; therefore, the job of a principal can no longer be done alone. There must be ‘quasi-markets’, in the political climate: students and parents who help serve the school in order to ensure resources are utilized and in order to reach growth measures when there are rigorous accountability policies in place.

Holistic and whole child instruction. There are many implications for pedagogy and educational leadership when discussing whole child instruction. Dinero and Theard-Griggs (2016) advocated for supporting teachers as a critical component in ensuring teaching the whole child. Wiggan and Watson (2016) pontificated that teaching the whole child requires applying cultural responsiveness particularly because the nation’s public schools have become predominantly minority majority with a marked decrease in enrollments of White students.

Innovation for leading during an era of high stakes accountability. When writing about student achievement and leadership in the era of high stakes accountability, *evidence informed practice* (EIP) requires an analysis of what instructional practices have been found to be effective (Brown & Zhang, 2016). Understanding how EIP implementation on campuses occur and to what degree is EIP effective is necessary (Brown & Zhang, 2016).

Teachers traditionally endeavored to use best practices, but they continually need appropriate administrative support to ensure their application of best practices in the classroom have the greatest impact on instruction (Cohen-Azaria & Zamir, 2018). On the same note, Cohen-Azaria and Zamir (2018) sought to show EIP through the lens of teacher capacity and school culture as the two most important variables affecting improved student performance and promoted instructional practices that are research-based. Additionally, Cohen-Azaria and Zamir (2018) unveiled factors that construct the importance of school leadership and its effect on teacher leaders and culture in a high-stakes era.

Teachers need to be able to access the right types of research to support their instructional practices which requires them to be supported by competent administrators who are well-versed in applying research to the classroom. Additionally, administrators need to be skilled at improving their schools with goal setting and the creation of EIP from a systemic standpoint (Brown & Zhang, 2016).

Additionally, Glen et al. (2017) advocated that teacher and staff leadership is equally important because all members on a school's team play crucial roles in improving instructional practices for increasing student achievement. Moreover, the understanding for innovative learning by school leaders has the capacities for influencing their teachers. Perhaps the best leaders both build capacity and determine what are the best practices for developing capacity in their teams (Glen et al., 2017).

Leading innovations for instruction. Similarly, leading innovative instruction and personalizing learning for advancing schools requires an innovative practice known

as personalized learning (Gross & DeArmond, 2018). Essentially, a personalized learning goal is set for every student to allow each student to be innovative and work at a personal pace; it takes a great deal of knowledge and skill for teachers to sustain these practices (Gross & DeArmond, 2018).

DeArmond and Maas (2018) subsequently examined innovative practices for personalized learning. They closely investigated personalized learning by examining open and closed behaviors in schools. Among the findings, leaders held other leaders accountable throughout this process, and the administration monitored teachers' opening and closing behaviors to ensure that the teachers' approaches to personalized learning were being implemented properly and effectively each day. The implications of this research involved the need for a converging of school management models (i.e., innovation, transformation, EIP), ensuring the installation of proper systems to prevent mixed signals, and applying opening and closing behaviors and practices consistently and systematically throughout the campus (DeArmond & Maas, 2018).

Accountability. The word accountability is used in a wide range of contexts and has a number of different meanings. To be accountable can mean to be responsible, to be answerable, to be blameworthy, or even to be liable. However, the literal meaning of the term—that of being “held to account”—suggests there is an expectation that when a person, organization, or entity is accountable, they can be expected or required to render an account of their actions (or inaction). The two immediate questions that follow are “to whom?” and “for what?” (Bardach & Lesser, 1996; Wescott, 1972). Assessment is a key process in education. It is only through assessment that we can find out whether

instruction has had its intended effect, because even the best-designed instruction cannot be guaranteed to be effective (e.g., Denvir & Brown, 1986a, 1986b). Leaders cannot escape the colossal measures of testing and accountability. As Sugrue and Mertkan (2014) explained, “it comes down to a leader transforming a campus from two angles: one within the accountability constraints and utilizing autonomy to manage the rest. Schools cannot be improved without capacity building” (p. 332). Transformational leaders must believe in their abilities to effectively perform a specific task (Bandura, 1982). Leaders have to work collectively to attain certain results within the system (Bandura, 1997).

Shared vision. Effective principals have a vision for the school that is clear and well communicated to its stakeholders. A well-articulated vision sharing promotes a productive environment for teachers, which directly impacts student success. (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). Principals have to work with staff members to achieve goals and objectives of the campus. A team of educators, led by a transformational leader, will transform a school and produce results (Buell, 1992).

Together, a campus team can enact major change initiatives to empower students and remove roadblocks. Effective leaders surround themselves with the right people. People who work diligently to find answers and solve problems. Everyone becomes a transformational leader to impact not only the classrooms, but every part of the school environment. A team of likeminded transformational educators can and will accomplish anything, in spite of state and federal constraints (Rebora, 2017).

Limitations of the Study

Results of this study may not generalize to principals in other states. The results may not transfer to the lived experiences of principals of schools that do not achieve high performance status. Any unacknowledged biases might affect the interpretation of the data and reduce the transferability of the findings.

Delimitations of the Study

The delimitation of this inquiry exists in the nature of this phenomenological inquiry into the lived experiences of transformational principals. There can be no generalization about the phenomenological inquiry because the analysis is specific lived experiences of specific principals. What was found in the analysis cannot be generalized to all principals, nor can it be used to critique or create more effective principal preparation programs. It is simply an analysis and report of lived experiences. This delimitation is one of the strengths of phenomenology; it is hoped that by exploring and uncovering meaning of these specific experiences others will be able to do the same.

My own experiences, as stated in chapter four of this study, could serve as a biased lens through which I view the experiences of other principals. To account for this delimitation, I participated in a bridling process (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008; Pate, 2014) to avoid inserting my own opinions into the analysis.

Conceptual Definitions

The terms discussed in this study are widely used and variously interpreted. The conceptual definitions are provided so the reader may better understand the study.

Accountability. Operating within the State of Texas scheme and federal mandates (USDOE, 2017).

High achieving. Campuses that exceeded the state's (Texas) passing standards and produced academic distinctions within the following areas: (a) Academic Achievement in Reading and English Language Arts; (b) Academic achievement in Mathematics; (c) Academic achievement in Science; (d) Academic achievement in Social Studies; (e) Top 25% in Student Progress; (f) Top 25% in Closing Performance Gaps; and (g) Postsecondary Readiness (TEA 2019).

Exemplary: At least 90 percent of all students and each student group passed TAKS reading, writing, math, social studies and science; less than 0.2 percent dropout rate; at least 94 percent attendance rate (TEA, 2011).

Recognized: At least 70 percent of all students in each student group passed TAKS reading, writing, math, social studies and science; 0.7 percent or less dropout rate; at least 94 percent attendance rate (TEA, 2011).

Academically Acceptable: At least 60 percent of all students in each student group passed TAKS reading, writing and social studies; at least 40 percent passed math; and at least 35 percent passed science; one percent or less dropout rate; at least 94 percent attendance rate (TEA, 2011).

Academically Unacceptable (Low-Performing Campus): Less than 40 percent passing any TAKS test in any subject area; greater than six percent dropout rate; at least 94 percent attendance. An academically unacceptable or low-performing rating will not

apply if attendance falls below 94 percent and is the only substandard indicator (TEA, 2011).

Innovative instruction. Innovative Teaching Strategies that Improve Student Engagement. Inquiry-Based Learning. Inquiry-based learning is one of the most powerful teaching strategies in the classroom because research tells us that students learn best when they construct their own meaning (Davis, 2017).

Standardized testing. A standardized test is any form of test that (1) requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from common bank of questions, in the same way, and that (2) is scored in a “standard” or consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students. While different types of tests and assessments may be “standardized” in this way, the term is primarily associated with large-scale tests administered to large populations of students, such as a multiple-choice test given to all the eighth-grade public-school students in a particular state (Education Reform, 2015)

Holistic and quality education. The term refers to educating the whole child by providing the knowledge and skills students need to ensure success in life (Lovat, Clement, Dally, & Toomey, 2010).

Transformational leadership behaviors. There are four common strategies that leaders use when leading with transformational practices: (a) providing a clear vision of the future state of their organization; (b) serving as the social architects for their organizations; (c) creating trust in their organizations by making their own positions

clearly known and then standing by them; and (d) using creative deployment of self through positive self-regard (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

Principal. The term refers to the highest ranking educational leader on a single public-school campus as the person in a leading position or leading performer (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Summary and Organization of the Study

Chapter I included an introduction of the study, background of problem, statement of problem, purpose statement, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, and overview of the methodology of the study. A review of the literature is included in Chapter II and contains the definitions and aspects of legislation affecting educational accountability, history of the Texas accountability system, critical study of transformational leadership in education, innovation for leading during an era of high stakes accountability, principals and transformational leadership, the holistic and whole child instruction, building relationships, building leadership capacity, leadership ethics and sensitivity to student culture relevant to this inquiry. Chapter III presents an introduction, research design, research questions, participants, instrumentation, setting, credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness, data collection, interviews, artifacts, data analysis, ethical considerations and summary of chapter. Chapter IV provides the epoche of the researcher. Chapter V contains the findings based on the interview data provided by the participants who experienced the phenomenon. Chapter VI concludes the study with a summary of findings, conclusions, implications for practice and recommendations for research.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of principals and their perceptions concerning the Texas accountability system and how it may impact their transformational efforts in ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child while leading innovations for instruction. Although many studies have focused on different aspects of transformational leadership, more attention should be directed to analyzing the practices of transformational leaders and the impact in high stakes accountability system has on their decision making and ability when transforming schools, given the state and federal demands (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). The phenomenological study was used to address the commonalities and views of the transformational leadership behaviors experienced when leading Texas schools in the current educational era.

Despite changes in policy related to aspects of curriculum, accountability, teacher training and certification, there is a persistent lack of equitable educational outcomes (Shields, 2009). Successful leadership implies influencing the attitudes, abilities and behaviors of followers (Bass, Waldman, Avolio, & Bebb, 1987). The lower order of improvement can be seen as the result of leadership that is an exchange process: a transaction in which followers' needs are met and their performance measures up to the explicit or implicit goals with the leader (Bass, 1985). Currently, relationships between supervisors and their employees are quite different in education because of federal and

state student accountability because of the high-stakes consequences. Consequently, higher order improvement requires transformational leadership that may be more effective at creating and sharing knowledge at the individual and group levels (Bryant, 2003).

Leading a school is a complex job. School leadership makes a difference and school site administrators—principals and vice principals—are central to developing and maintaining effective schools (Forbes, 2003). According to McWilliams (2012) in Texas, administrative challenges may be even greater because of the large number of students needing extra support in order to meet the state and federal increasing demands of student achievement.

Leaders are vital to successful schools. The role of the school leader, is complex and relies upon the varied skills, educational experience, and background of the individual who pursues the leadership position. Expectations of school leadership are changing significantly, and administrators are expected to manage organizational processes, facilitate change, and be held accountable for student outcomes (Normore, 2004). Administrators are expected to use leadership skills to inspire, encourage and empower staff and students to perform at a high level of effectiveness and efficiency. Accordingly, there are numerous descriptions of leadership types: laissez-faire, authoritarian, democratic, and transformational. School administrators are feeling the effects of the public's changing expectations in the push to adapt new and expanding administrative roles (Normore, 2004). For example, other factors affecting leadership are the federal and state educational accountability requirements such as the federal Every

Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), formally known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), requiring schools to show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and the state's State of Texas Academic Achievement and Readiness (STAAR) program.

Legislation Affecting Educational Accountability

Tucker (2014) explained prior to NCLB, the federal government had provided aid to the states for a variety of purposes and enforcing civil rights law in the schools. There was a broad agreement that these roles did not infringe on the delegation of the making of education policy to the states in the United States Constitution.

NCLB paid no attention to the unwritten agreements that had restrained the federal role in education prior to its passage (Tucker, 2014). That abrupt departure from more than two centuries of practice had its origins in Congressional frustration and the research by Tucker (2014) continued to explain that over the preceding twenty years or more, Congress had substantially increased its expenditures on behalf of low-income and minority school children, but the results of those increases had been very disappointing. NCLB was established by Congress as a way to expect value to its money; it was going to hold the faculty of the public schools that received federal education funds accountable for doing whatever it took to improve the achievement of disadvantaged children. If their achievement did not improve, Congress would demand that educators pay the price with potential loss of job. Congress would no longer assume, as it had in the past, that if it voted to allocate the money, educators would use it well and wisely (Tucker, 2014).

Additionally, Tucker (2014) believed NCLB was a genuinely bipartisan piece of legislation because legislators on both sides of the aisle were equally frustrated. The

legislation did not represent a bipartisan agreement to change the longstanding agreement about limiting the federal role in education. According to the researcher, that point was never really debated when the legislation was passed. But the central feature of NCLB was a federally designed -- and very new -- accountability system for the states that reached all the way into the heart of the states' right to determine for themselves how to organize and manage public elementary and secondary education in their state. Once Congress required schools and districts to show their disadvantaged students were making Adequate Yearly Progress or face serious consequences—including loss of principals jobs, the die was cast (Dee & Jacob, 2011).

History of the Texas Accountability System

In Texas, the TEA (2017) regularly adjusted statewide regulations and testing programs. At the time NCLB began, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) required students to be evaluated annually with the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) tests. Just two years later, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests became the state's accountability measurement tool. Finally, the TEA transitioned from Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) to the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). STAAR included end-of-course (EOC) exams for measuring successful completion of high school courses beginning in 2011 and various exams from grades 3-8.

In 2017, the TEA provided a historical overview of assessments in Texas. In 1979 the state of Texas instituted a statewide testing program that, through periodic

changes in legislation and policy, has grown in size, scope, and rigor. The timeline illustrates changes made to the assessment program over the years by TEA (TEA, 2017).

1979. The Texas assessment program began when the 66th Texas Legislature enacted a law requiring basic skills competencies in Mathematics, Reading, and Writing for Grades 3, 5, and 9.

1980. As required by statute, Texas assessed minimum skills in Mathematics, Reading, and Writing with the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) tests.

1986. The TEA implemented the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) examinations. TEAMS was the first statewide assessment that students were required to pass to be eligible to receive a high school diploma.

1990. The implementation of another criterion-referenced testing program, the adoption of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) shifted the focus of assessment from minimum skills to academic skills. The TAAS Reading, Writing, and Mathematics tests were administered in the fall to students in Grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. Spanish versions of the Grade 3 tests were administered to eligible English Language Learners (ELL).

1993. The administration of TAAS was shifted to the spring, and the grades and subjects assessed were reconfigured.

1994. TAAS was administered every spring until 2002 to students in Grades 3 through 8 and 10 in Reading and Mathematics; Grades 4, 8, and 10 in Writing; and Grade 8 in Science and Social studies. Passing the exit level tests in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics at Grade 10 was a requirement for graduation. The State Board of

Education (SBOE) adopted a plan to develop Spanish version assessments for Grades 3 to 6. The Biology end-of-course (EOC) assessment was administered to students who had completed Biology at the end of the fall semester.

1995. A number of EOC examinations were offered between 1995 and 2002 as an option for meeting graduation requirements. The Algebra I and Biology EOC assessments were administered to students who had completed these courses at the end of the spring semester.

1996. Spanish-Language TAAS tests for Grades 3 through 6 were incorporated into the testing program in 1996 and 1997.

1998. The English II and U.S. History EOC assessments were first administered in the fall to students who had completed these courses.

1999. The Student Success Initiative (SSI), enacted by the Texas Legislature in 1999, made satisfactory performance on the Grade 3 Reading assessment, the Grade 5 Reading and Mathematics assessments, and the Grade 8 Reading and Mathematics assessments a promotion requirement for Texas students.

2000. The Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE) were implemented to evaluate English Language Acquisition of ELLs in reading in Grades 3 to 12.

2001. The State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA) was introduced and administered to eligible students receiving special education services in Grades 3 through 8.

2002. TAAS was administered for the last time in Grades 3 through 8. Exit level TAAS remained the graduation requirement for students who were in Grade 9 or above

on January 1, 2001. State-mandated EOC assessments were administered for the last time for the courses of English II, Algebra I, Biology I, and U.S. History.

2003. TAKS replaced TAAS as the primary statewide assessment program.

TAKS was designed by a legislative mandate to be more comprehensive than its predecessors and to measure more of the state-mandated curriculum standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and administered in two additional grades. By law, students for whom TAKS is the graduation testing requirement must pass exit level tests in four content areas—English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies—to graduate from a Texas public high school. Spanish versions of TAKS were administered in Grades 3 through 6. The first cohort of students affected by the SSI law was the Grade 3 class of 2002-2003.

2004. Additional assessments of English Language Proficiency were

implemented to fulfill requirements under NCLB. These new assessments were administered in the language domains of listening, speaking, and writing in Grades K through 12 and in reading in Grades K through 2. Together with the RPTE tests for Grades 3 through 12, these assessments formed the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS).

2005. In response to NCLB regulations, the TEA first reported assessment results

using a linguistically accommodated testing (LAT) process to include eligible recent immigrant ELLs in the state's mathematics assessments in Grades 3 through 8 and 10. In order to align SDAA to the statewide TAKS testing program, TEA made changes to SDAA. The first administration of SDAA II occurred in spring 2005. SDAA II, offered

for the courses of Mathematics, English Language Arts, Reading, and Writing, was available to students enrolled in Grades 3 through 10 who received special education services and were instructed in the state-mandated curriculum but for whom TAKS was an inappropriate measure of their academic achievement and progress. Student performance on the Grade 5 Reading and Mathematics assessments was included for the first time in the 2004–2005 school year for the state’s SSI requirements.

2006. TAKS–Inclusive (TAKS–I) was offered for the first time in 2006 for students receiving special education services and for whom TAKS, even with allowable accommodations, was not an appropriate measure of academic progress. TAKS–I met the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) requirements for those subjects and grade levels that were assessed with TAKS but not with SDAA II. TAKS–I was administered in Science at Grades 5, 8, and 10, and at exit level; in Social Studies at Grades 8, 10, and at exit level (Grade 12); and in English Language Arts and Mathematics at exit level.

2007. SDAA II was administered for the final time in spring 2007. The following TAKS tests were available in both paper and online formats in 2007: Grade 7 Reading and Mathematics; Grade 8 Reading, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies; Grade 9 Reading and Mathematics; Grade 10 English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies; and (July) exit level English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. In response to NCLB regulations, Linguistic Accommodated Test (LAT) administrations of the state’s Reading and English language Arts assessments were first implemented for eligible recent immigrant English Language

Learners (ELLs) in Grades 3 through 8 and 10. TAKS–I was administered for the final time. The Texas Legislature enacted Senate Bill (SB) 1031, requiring the replacement of the TAKS assessments in Grades 9 through 12 with a series of EOC assessments, beginning with the entering Grade 9 in 2011-2012. EOC assessments in Geometry and Biology were field-tested in response to the governor’s 2005 executive order calling for the development of EOC assessments to enhance college readiness programs in Texas public schools.

2008. To fulfill federal accountability requirements, the TAKS–Alternate (TAKS–Alt) assessment was implemented, replacing SDAA II and locally developed alternate assessments (LDAA). The TAKS–Alt assessment is an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Student performance on the Grade 8 Reading and Mathematics assessments was included for the first time in the 2007-2008 school year for SSI requirements. The TAKS (Accommodated) assessment replaced TAKS–I for students receiving special education services who meet the eligibility requirements for specific accommodations. TAKS (Accommodated) is a general assessment based on the same grade-level academic achievement standards as TAKS, but its form includes format changes (larger font, fewer items per page).

The TAKS–Modified (TAKS–M) assessment was administered for the first time for grades and subjects within the federal accountability requirements. TAKS–M is an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards designed for

students receiving special education services who meet participation requirements. In response to NCLB regulations, LAT administrations of the state's science assessments were first implemented for eligible recent immigrant ELLs in Grades 5, 8, and 10. Revised TELPAS reading tests were first administered for Grades 2 through 12 to more fully address NCLB goals for assessing English language proficiency. TELPAS is designed to be administered via online testing. EOC assessments in Geometry and Biology were tested operationally; EOC assessments in Chemistry and U.S. History.

2009. The TAKS–M assessment was administered for all grades and subjects. Exit level TAAS was administered for the final time. The Texas Legislature enacted House Bill 3 (HB 3). Among its provisions, HB 3 placed emphasis on postsecondary readiness, requiring that a new series of Reading and Mathematics assessments in Grades 3 through 8 be linked from grade to grade to the college and career-readiness performance standards for the Algebra II and English III EOC assessments. HB 3 removed the SSI requirement for students in Grade 3 to pass the TAKS Reading test to be promoted to Grade 4 and eliminated the Grade 6 Spanish versions of TAKS, effective in the 2009-2010 school year. EOC assessments in Chemistry and U.S. History were tested operationally; EOC assessments in Physics and World Geography were field-tested.

2010. EOC assessments in Physics and World Geography were tested operationally; EOC assessments in English I and Algebra II were field-tested.

2011. EOC assessments in Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, English I, World Geography, and U.S. History were tested operationally; EOC assessments in English II, English III, and world history were field-tested. STAAR

Grades 3 through 8 field test items were embedded in the TAKS live test form with the exception of Grades 4 and 7 Writing that were stand-alone field tests. STAAR EOC English II, English III, and World History assessments were field tested for the first time in 2011. In addition, the other nine STAAR EOC assessments included Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, English I, World Geography, and U.S. History and were administered as operational tests.

2012. The TEA began the implementation of STAAR. STAAR continued as the assessment program being administered during the 2017-2018 school year. However, the TEA made various changes to the exams over the years. The changes created state-level inconsistencies in the expectations school districts and administrators attempted to ensure their students could achieve.

2013. House Bill 5 (HB 5), passed by the Texas Legislature in 2013, made substantial changes to the state's curriculum and graduation requirements, assessment program, and accountability system (TASA, n.d.).

2015. NCLB was dropped upon passage of ESSA in 2015. Although there has been only one major federal legislation change from NCLB (2002) to ESSA (2015), the State of Texas has consistently made changes to its accountability system. From 1980 to 2017, the TEA changed the accountability system multiple times, starting with TABS tests, moving to TEAMS, adopting TAAS, evolving into TAKS, and currently, administering STAAR.

Daly (2009) suggested the accountability system, in the beginning, did yield a great deal of success, but the years to follow only led to the "loss of fiscal and human

resources” (p. 169). Although teachers have improved in the accountability era of NCLB, there are still lingering issues related to the hyper-focus on the accountability affecting the execution of the leadership essential to school transformation. Additionally, district and school leaders continue to be under pressure from failure to attain program improvements.

According to Daly, (2009) the resulting conflicts adversely impact the overall education framework that once relied on trust over compliance. The interactions between individuals within an organizational framework must move fluidly in order to gain greater success rates. When schools have too many institutionalized responsibilities, they generate “rigid response” factors due to juggling the “interrelationships between parts and the whole” (Daly, 2009, p. 173).

Transformational Leadership in Education

Giroux (1992), when writing about leadership and its importance, explained his focus was on “what it means to educate people capable of a vision, people who can rewrite the narrative of educational administration and the story of leadership by developing a public philosophy whose purpose is to animate a democracy” explaining that democracy “is not simply a lifeless tradition or disciplinary subject that is passed on from one generation to the next” (p. 5). Given Giroux’s position, it is the duty of today’s educational leaders to provide such leadership, using inclusive and democratic methods. Leaders are challenged to show their schools are filled with students achieving at grade level, even though the results from one end of the year test does not generate anything of value about student learning (Mullen & Johnson, 2006).

There is a body of research about how leadership practices increase student achievement (Ramirez, 2012; Esbrandt, 2012; Ash, 2016; VanHorn, 2017). Ramirez (2012) explained principals have an indirect impact on student achievement by setting and communicating a clear vision and focusing on student learners, rather than focusing on managerial duties. Transformation takes place in the classrooms when principals pay closer attention to building the culture and climate of the schools (Ross & Gray, 2006). Building relationships with the staff and establishing trust have positive effects on student achievement and should be a priority for transformational principals (Ramalho, Garza, & Merchant, 2010).

Principals can lead their teachers toward ensuring students attain academic success by following several key recommendations (Cha, Kim, & Bachrach, 2015; Curral, 2001; Heslep, 1997; Shepherd & Salembier, 2011; Trépanier, Fernet, & Austin, 2012). First, leadership never involves just one person; it always includes the leader as one of two or more persons. Second, those involved in leadership are not just a collection of isolated individuals; rather, they interact with one another. Third, leaders and followers interact voluntarily, freely, and knowingly (Cha et al., 2015). The researchers believed leadership never depends upon force or ignorance. Fourth, leadership has a distinct quality marked by certain activities, for instance, the formulation of goals and the institution of measures for attaining goals. Accordingly, when a situation once characterized by such activities no longer honor these inclusive activities, it ceases to be a leadership situation and becomes a managerial structure. Thus, people in leadership or management roles may become engaged respectively in management or leadership as

their situations change. Fifth, the agents involved in leadership have an end to attain and have a sense of what measures may be employed to attain goals. Finally, leadership takes place within a setting in which time, place, morale, social conditions, cultural practices, political factors, economic resources, and available technology operate as factors inhibiting or promoting goal attainment (Heslep, 1997).

According to Shepherd and Salembier (2011), principals must attend to the needs of the people in the community and create buy-in among the staff. Relationship building is a critical part of creating a transformational environment that will impact accountability and provide students with a holistic and quality education within the system (Trepanier et al., 2012). When those relationships are built and there is collaboration among the staff, a fertile environment grows and enables everyone to engage in professional development for successfully ensuring accountability outcomes (Holland, 2009).

Interestingly, any educational administrator will recognize the *kids come first* mantra that is the obligatory means for pursuing accountability outcomes in all public-school discourse (Ombler, 2016). However, decades of research showed that schools and classrooms tend to be highly bureaucratized and teacher-centered rather than student-centered (Kugelmass, 2001; Mulcahy & Irwin 2008; Spector, 2018). Essentially, schools are not designed to promote democratic learning environments but must be viewed as arenas of cultural politics in which the outcomes of schools are always “contingent on the daily political struggles that take place both within them and without” (Anderson, 1996, pp. 948-949).

The transformational leader must “allow all voices and arguments to be heard regardless of race, class, and gender” (Quantz, Rogers, & Dantley, 1991, p. 97). Until schools are understood to be active sites of cultural politics that house different groups with varying access to power and whose members seek to “interject their cultural understanding into school discourse and practice,” transformative leadership will be impractical for generating change (Quantz et al., 1991, p. 98).

Duigan (2014) stated transformational leaders are known to exemplify authentic leadership practices and ethics of leadership and responds to many of the concerns about the lack of honesty and integrity in leadership. Duignan (2014) explained the following:

Authentic leadership links assumptions, beliefs about, and actions related to authentic self, relationships, learning, governance and organization, through significant human values, to leadership and management practices that are ethically and morally uplifting. (p. 208)

Within education, transformation cannot occur unless school participants engage in critique and critical study, even while also believing that change can occur (Oreg & Berson, 2011). Critical understanding requires a careful examination of the historical mechanisms, which work against the achievement of societal ideals. Dialogue intended to bring critical awareness can, if not carefully considered, remain entrenched in a language of critique without possibility. Transformational leaders understand political environments and creatively work within their system to ensure students are academically successful (Quantz et al., 1991).

According to Berkovich (2016), school leaders and transformational leadership are starting to raise some serious concern suggesting that the transformational leadership theory should be re-examined. Berkovich (2016) advocated for applying the Hsiao and Chang (2011) theory concerning transformational leadership. Hsiao and Chang (2011) examined the practices of 63 secondary school principals in Taiwan and 330 teachers. Their research revealed that the multidimensional structure of transformational leadership was difficult to replicate in its current construct.

Berkovich (2016) argued that although transformational leadership is a primary factor in school leadership development, this specific type of leadership style does not always fit the educational model. Berkovich (2016) postulated that the transformational leadership dimensions of “idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration” are not appropriate for every education environment (p. 620). Furthermore, the 2016 Berkovich study argued that transformational leadership was difficult to conceptualize, and its methods were difficult to replicate between leaders.

Therefore, Berkovich (2016) called for educational entities to accept their responsibility for training principals to engage transformational leadership effectively. Berkovich (2016) determined that transformational leadership and emotional aptitude represent an intertwined connection that can yield sought-after academic results. Moreover, Berkovic (2016), found positive indicators that showed organizational strength when transformational leadership was the right fit within an organizational structure.

The researcher conceptualized transformational leadership as directly impacting educational quality. Thus, examining five characteristics of education shaping the nature of scientific research in the transformational leadership field. Furthermore, Berkovich, suggested that “these areas are anchors in educational research: these features are centrality of values, social ideals, multiple interests, and power conflicts; human volition manifesting in the fluid composition of stakeholders” (p. 614). Berkovich (2016) debated the pros and cons of transformational leadership but advocated for transformational leadership as a beneficial leadership methodology for educators based on empirical findings. Ultimately, Berkovich concluded that the outcomes derived from applying transformational leadership are also directly connected with the leader’s emotional intelligence.

Arguably, Berkovich (2016) sought to continue moving transformational leadership forward as a researchable phenomenon but recognized the challenges of investigating how transformational leaders transfer knowledge and exert influence on followers. Berkovich promoted transformational leadership as a powerful tool for education administrators, such as principals, but argued that more research should be considered in order to create a more “pragmatic” approach to transformational leadership.

Regarding the emotional intelligence aspect of transformational leadership, Wang, Wilhite, and Martino (2016) identified a correlation between school leaders’ emotional competence and transformational leadership in a study consisting of 375 teachers and 200 non-instructional employees in a school district with seven elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school. Wang et al. (2016) implemented a survey of full-

time employees, full-time administrators, and considered gender, student ethnicity, economic status, and reading and math proficiency rates within the participants' schools. Wang et al. (2016) analyzed the data for the relationship between emotional competence and transformational leadership for K-12 school leaders by using self-report surveys completed by the leaders and surveys of others' impressions of the leaders.

The 2016 Wang et al., study found correlations in the results from administrators, teachers, and staff members, giving credence that transformational leadership coupled with emotional competence showed overall effectiveness. The researchers recommended there should be a great emphasis on self-to-other agreement when teaching leadership skills. The authors contextualized the function of self-to-other agreement to find that leaders who equated their ideas with outcomes produced effective transformational leadership.

When leaders overestimated their abilities, their responses did not agree with the staff surveys (Wang et al., 2016). Lack of agreement between leaders' responses (self) and staffs' responses (other) served to indicate a disconnect between self and other that suggested less effectiveness in those leaders' transformational leadership activities. Additionally, Wang et al. (2016) concluded that emotional intelligence often plays a pivotal role with transformational leadership.

Even though Berkovich (2016) addressed transformational leadership as moving out with instructional leadership as the trending style of leadership, Wang et al. (2016) viewed transformational leadership as having great value and encouraged leaders to approach transformational leadership to better understand their own and their followers'

values and emotions. By doing so, transformational leaders meet their followers needs that include ensuring students are fed and safe, as well as teachers are appreciated and safe in their environments. Wang et al. (2016) found some of the key ingredients of transformational leadership that generate the highest possible outcomes and increase buy-in for accountability among all levels of team members include emergent visions, consensus, discussion of plans, and exploring potential roadblocks. More importantly, the researchers (2016) study revealed that schools with higher mathematics and reading proficiency scores were led by campus principals who exuded greater transformational leadership ability and higher emotional intelligence. More consideration should be placed on emotional competence because of Wang et al.'s (2016) finding that the principals who overrated themselves lacked emotional competence.

Dutta and Sahney (2016) furthered the research on transformational leadership by investigating the correlation with teacher job satisfaction and a positive school climate based on principals' leadership behaviors. The researchers' design focused on school leaders' behaviors and affect, the physical environment, and teachers' perceptions of the school climate to determine the impact on student achievement. The researchers examined teachers' perceptions and the importance of teachers working in a satisfying place to positively impact student achievement within several schools in India.

The design indirectly included the instructional leadership style as an influence on student outcomes. Dutta and Sahney (2016) viewed leadership behaviors from a bottom-up approach in their meta-analysis of the effect of school climate on academic performance. The bottom-up approach permeates transformational leadership as an

effective theoretical approach in an era when educational leaders seem to recognize both bottom-down and bottom-up leadership approaches as appropriate for meeting current academic and school reform criteria (2016).

Dutta and Sahney (2016) continued the argument that instructional leadership represents a bigger focus to school success than considering only transformational leadership. They found teacher autonomy and satisfaction along with aligned support and training increased student success rates. Likewise, Dutta and Sahney found that school climate represented a major component for student success and discovered that student achievement is often higher when students relate to and have relationships with their teachers in a positive school climate. While school leaders may use transformational leadership for their instructional leadership behaviors, these findings suggest that teachers' attitudes and instructional practices of innovations play a vital role for attaining the desired results for student achievement. Ultimately, transformational leaders understand that satisfied teachers do their best work in the classroom (Dutta & Sahney, 2016).

Innovation for Leading During an Era of High Stakes Accountability

When writing about student achievement and leadership in the era of high stakes accountability, *evidence informed practice* (EIP) requires an analysis of what instructional practices have been found to be effective (Brown & Zhang, 2016).

Understanding how EIP implementation on campuses occur and to what degree is EIP effective is necessary for the analysis (Brown & Zhang, 2016). According to Brown and Zhang (2016), evidence for transferring research as EIP into the classroom suggests

effective administrators who lead the charge tend to have greater success, and when administrators struggle, teachers struggle.

Additionally, teachers have applied research to their classroom activities for many years and thrived on using several data sources to explore their instructional practices (Brown & Zang, 2016). Teachers traditionally endeavored to use best instructional practices, but they continually need appropriate administrative support to ensure their application of best practices in the classroom have the greatest impact on instruction. On the same note, Cohen-Azaria and Zamir (2018) sought to show EIP through the lens of teacher capacity and school culture as the two most important variables affecting improved student performance and promoted instructional practices that are research-based. Additionally, Cohen-Azaria and Zamir unveiled factors that construct the importance of school leadership and its effect on teacher leaders and culture in a high-stakes era.

The study by Cohen-Azaria and Zamir (2018) generated convincing results about effective campus leadership and teaching staff. Nearly 50% of the sample agreed that they did not implement any instructional practice without using research to support their classroom practices. However, 25% of educators failed to use EIP for instruction to address high-stakes accountability (Cohen-Azaria & Zamir, 2018).

Teachers need to be able to access the right types of research to support their instructional practices which requires them to be supported by competent administrators who are well-versed in applying research to the classroom. Additionally, administrators need to be skilled at improving their schools with goal setting and the creation of EIP

from a systemic standpoint (Brown & Zhang, 2016). However, Brown and Zhang (2016) advocated that more research was needed about what teacher behaviors relate to successfully navigating the high-stakes accountability system. In fact, Cohen-Azaria & Zamir (2018) argued that teachers meet quality assurance guidelines when their evaluators support teacher knowledge by showing an understanding of how research-based knowledge can be transferred into the classroom.

In some instances, high stakes accountability policies are devastating to public education systems. In the case of Atlanta Public Schools, Patrick, Plagens, Rollins, & Evans, (2018) noted that high stakes assessment results were influenced by ethical decision making and quality assurance. According to Patrick et al. (2018), when either is weak, the public school system fails the students because of lack of reliability and validity. Lack of trustworthiness is problematic because all systems fully rely on reliability and validity which are two of the most important pinnacles of high stakes accountability (Patrick et al., 2018)

The data from the Atlanta Schools Scandal investigation suggested that teachers' excessively erased students' wrong answers, and external investigations compared students' scores to local campuses using the Z-score formula to pinpoint wrongdoing (Patrick et al., 2018). The Atlanta Schools Scandal brought negative attention not only to the Atlanta School System but also to the importance of checks and balances in accountability implementation. Atlanta Schools Scandal generated credence for performing statistical checks and balances to ensure that reliable and valid assessment results are obtained when assessing students. In all, 178 teachers from 56 schools

confessed to participating in the Atlanta Schools Scandal (Patrick et al., 2018).

Therefore, according to the researchers, there are fiduciary obligations for all teachers and principals responsible for ethically administering and reporting on high stakes testing.

The real fallacy of accountability, based on the Atlanta Schools Scandal, directly connects with the ethics of reaching rewards versus focusing on the instructional targets (Patrick et al. 2018). “After examining erasure marks and using a Z score, it was obvious that the accountability system, as we know it, appeared vulnerable and weak” (Patrick et al., 2018, p. 555.) Ultimately, effective school reform through high-stakes accountability requires ethical actions, but (2018) noted that corruption and cheating can be problematic. Therefore, it is important to balance the accountability system and student success. The investigation of the Atlanta Schools Scandal shed some light on what happens in high stakes situations when leaders negate ethics to achieve an end goal. The (2018) study concluded that there are no short cuts for attaining high student achievement and becoming successful in meeting high stakes accountability goals: “Rather than demoralize people, find ways to create systems that inevitably help all acquire successful results” (p. 548). Doing so will create an environment for continuous improvement in student achievement in schools.

Glen et al. (2017) examined continuous improvement processes for student learning based on school leadership that is process oriented. Glen et al. (2017) studied Australian school leaders to better understand the increased pressures of improving student performance while attaining accountability goals. The research findings

pinpointed that important professional standards are needed for principals to produce clear evidence-based policies within schools. The study showed that by developing highly skilled and quality teaching practices, school leaders and teachers produce innovations in the school environment. These innovations produced school improvement and leadership development as the two major components of school success. The researchers concluded that the process of leading a professional learning community and creating a culture of continuous improvement impacts student learning in schools positively but is a profound challenge.

Additionally, Glen et al. (2017) advocated that teacher and staff leadership were equally important because all members on a school's team play crucial roles in improving instructional practices for increasing student achievement. Moreover, innovation for learning stemmed from school leaders' capacities for influencing their followers. Perhaps the best leaders build capacity and discern what are the best practices for developing capacity in their teams (Glen et al., 2017). On that same note, professional development represented a prime vehicle for training teachers to improve student learning by connecting teachers with the knowledge to facilitate attaining student achievement outcomes. Essentially, matching the right systems and resources, whether tangible or intangible, can lead to effectiveness among teachers (2017).

The study completed by Glen et al. (2017) advocated for using action research to maximize school improvement opportunities and innovations. They recognized adult learning capacity in its most authentic, meaningful, and personal state as an opportunity for action research to benefit EIP applications and increase student learning. In fact, Glen

et al. (2017) viewed engagement of professional learning as working on practices in a cooperative setting while embracing the learning process. For a school-level practitioner, action research is used to ensure equity in learning as well as pedagogical systems that produce effective EIP for student learning (Glen et al., 2017).

However, as an innovation for leading, action research can be misused when checks and balances are not in place. According to the (2017) study, action research projects that are centralized around improving the efficacy of program pieces rather than understanding the importance of the program's entire context often fail. Additionally, failing to include the voices of all individuals and stakeholders can reduce the success of any innovation effort. Glen et al. (2017) recommend contextualizing the action research, involving all stakeholders, and avoiding engaging any part of the intervention in isolation.

Leadership Ethics. Practitioners of educational leadership are very much engaged in ethical matters. They entertain, determine, ponder, and organize numerous valuations in formulating mission statements. They continuously deliberate in deciding upon all the actions- whether about curriculum, instruction, student conduct, personnel, material resources, or community relations- that need to be undertaken to fulfill their stated missions (Heslep, 1997). Heslep believed practitioners of educational leadership generally do not see any need to be philosophical. "They presumably think it sufficient to arrive at judgments through the use of their professional common sense, which consists of the experience, skills, standards, and research findings common to their field" (1997, pp. 67-68).

Not surprisingly, those who write about the ethical role of school leaders also discuss the crucial need for administrator preparation programs to emphasize the moral and ethical dimensions of educational administration and to explore ways of anticipating and restoring value-laden dilemmas relevant to professional practice (Campbell, 1997). Begley (1999) concluded that, unlike other professions, education, does not have a deliberate and systematic instruction in ethics; however, Bull (1993) argued that professional interest in the ethics of education and schooling had been increasing in the late 20th century.

In the 2000s, the continued need for the majority of principals to receive ethics training led to a new argument for using the school principal code of ethics in the collaborative dialog of educational leaders (Kocabaş & Karaköse, 2009). Kocabaş and Karaköse (2009) identified ethical decision making as critical to student success because “it is undeniable fact that school administrators have to consider all the consequences of actions they planned” (p. 129). With ethics training, Kocabaş and Karaköse postulated, principals can gain necessary skills for responding to the myriad of challenges likely to occur in contemporary school settings.

Key elements of transformation in student accountability. In 2004, Waters and Grubb (2004) conducted a meta-analysis and made the following key observations:

- There was a significant correlation between student achievement and principal leadership. The average effect size, expressed as a correlation, is 0.25, which means that a one standard deviation of improvement in principal leadership is

associated with a 10 percentile difference in student achievement on a norm-referenced standardized test;

- The meta-analysis contained 66 leadership practices that principals use to fulfill 21 responsibilities with statistically significant relationships to student achievement (see Appendix E);
- Campus leaders may have either positive or negative impacts on student achievement; and
- The magnitude or order of change has less to do with the change itself and more to do with how stakeholders perceive the change.

According to Hallinger (2005), campus leaders have influence over the operations and effectiveness of their campuses. Their leadership influences transformational changes in school environments and impacts accountability in a positive or negative way, given their leadership abilities. The leader is a critical factor in student accountability and achievement (Hallinger, 2005).

Leading Innovations for Instruction

Similarly, leading innovative instruction and personalizing learning for advancing schools requires an innovative practice known as personalized learning (Gross & DeArmond, 2018). Essentially, a personalized learning goal is set for every student to allow each student to be innovative and work at a personal pace; it takes a great deal of knowledge and skill for teachers to sustain these practices (Gross & DeArmond, 2018). Most teachers and leaders believe in the personalized learning approach. Enabling

teachers to flip their role in the classroom so that students can work at an individualized learning pace is one approach to personalized learning.

Gross and DeArmond (2018) surveyed 4,508 teachers in 17 cities and 39 schools in addition to conducting 450 interviews about the opportunities and challenges of personalized learning. After a two-year longitudinal study, they noted their sample contained less than two schools with teachers able to fully implement personalized learning. Additionally, the findings revealed that principals struggled to communicate the intervention's complex goals into bite-size, meaningful student outcomes for teachers, and teachers had difficulty when tackling the structures for the classroom. "Central office and other support positions including coordinators were all experiencing difficulty with codifying this innovation for teachers and students in schools" (Gross & DeArmond, 2018, p. 3). In order to recover from the difficulty of codifying this new innovative practice, the researchers advocated that the system should contain more flexibility for personalizing the practices for all stakeholders, and the school districts' leaders must support ongoing professional development to ensure that individuals are able to sustain newly learned pedagogical practices.

DeArmond and Maas (2018) subsequently examined innovative practices for personalized learning. They closely investigated personalized learning by examining open and closed behaviors in schools. Personalized learning was examined in Enterprise Elementary school whereby the principal created two very clear goals for all teachers to access personalization. Enterprise Elementary teachers primarily engaged in problem-

based learning as an innovative tool to enable students to attain academic targets (DeArmond & Maas, 2018).

Among the findings of the DeArmond & Maas (2018) study, leaders held other leaders accountable throughout this process, and the administration monitored teachers' opening and closing behaviors to ensure that the teachers' approaches to personalized learning were being implemented properly and effectively each day. The implications of this research involved the need for a converging of school management models (i.e., innovation, transformation, EIP), ensuring the installation of proper systems to prevent mixed signals, and applying opening and closing behaviors and practices consistently and systematically throughout the campus (DeArmond & Maas, 2018).

Principals and transformational leadership. The type of leadership that is needed to see more success in schools evolves around individuals who aspire to promote learning through the artful act of scaffolding for everyone, including teachers and students (Farr, 2010). The role of the school leader, as an administrator of a school or district, has been complex and relies upon the varied skills, educational experience and background of the individual who pursues the position (Fullan, 2005). According to Black (2008) expectations of school leadership have been changing significantly and administrators have been expected to manage organizational processes, facilitate change, and be held accountable for student outcomes. Administrators are expected to use leadership skills to inspire, encourage and empower individuals to perform at a high level of effectiveness and efficiency (Black, 2008).

Mullen (2003) believed scholar-practitioners held the burden to question the status quo and to solicit multiple perspectives and apply several methods when collecting data, especially where the researchers' inclinations were to protect an investment or project. Jenlink (2006) noted the following about the difficulties of the scholar-practitioner model of school leadership:

Educational leaders in today's school setting are confronted with a myriad of complex problems—problems that reflect the increasing diversity of a changing society, the press of political agendas, and the expectations of a public that is more and more concerned with the quality of education its children receive. Problematically, leadership preparation programs are challenged to prepare educational leaders equipped with a repertoire of skills, dispositions, knowledge, and methods up to the challenges that leaders face in the pragmatic world of schools. Increasingly, leaders and the programs that prepare leaders are faced with the challenge of reconceptualizing leadership preparation practices. (p. 54)

School leadership sustainability is invariably affected by NCLB rhetoric.

Historically, principals managing a school could operate in a successful, purposeful environment, and not fear for their job. Educational leaders understood that transformation takes time and support (Schneidewind & Augenstein, 2016). In the current accountability climate, school leaders work feverishly to surpass the accountability measures because their abilities, much like their students, are judged based on test scores. In the case of the three principals released from their campuses due to low test scores (McGhee & Nelson, 2005), the principals never saw their demise coming, and

they believed they were competent school leaders. This is an example that charting school progress is a difficult task. According to Elmore (2008), schools improve by engaging in practices that lead them to be successful with specific students in a specific context. Moreover, teachers and students need the necessary resources and an adequate amount of support in order to experience success.

Trust is a possible resource that fosters the transparency needed to arrive at sustainable success. According to Daly (2009), trust is the pivotal factor and the central hub for decision making in a well-run organization. Leaders who develop trust gain a collectively supportive network of external and internal parties (Dan, 2016).

The art of collaborating and changing culture in an educational organization is quite different than the work of program improvement. Conversely, leaders play a major role in “mediating difficult situations and creating a more flexible organizational structure by demonstrating participatory leadership and by providing for opportunities for positional redesign” (Daly, 2009, p. 179).

Lee, Walker, and Chui (2012) explored the positive effects of instructional leadership practices and how the construct of a leader who first displays the attitude that learning is priority can propel the campus. According to Lee et al., “effective instructional leaders tend to engage actively in three domains: management for school goals, instructional management and direct supervision of instruction” (2012, p. 589).

Managing goals and supervising instruction are key components in the construct of instructional leadership. Moreover, Lee et al. (2012) also examined several variables: “student perceptions of school attachment, peer academic orientation, parental

involvement, and demographic variables such as gender and number of years the students had attended the school” (p. 593). The researchers also understood the notion that keen instructional leadership skills greatly impact the teachers’ and students’ perceptions in a positive way is true and advocated that the direction of the staff and students is highly connected to the direction of the campus leader.

Great campus leaders are also responsible for continual success in this multifaceted occupation. How do leaders keep staff motivated in the era of accountability? According to Finnigan (2010), principals are in a constant race to motivate teachers by communicating goals and fixing problems. Conversely, transforming schools is a difficult task and the principal is able to encourage and keep everyone motivated along the course of the year to the finish line of establishing goals (Dan, 2016).

Building leadership capacity. Building leadership capacity is an essential aspect of growing and improving an organization. Establishing opportunities for leaders to grow and develop will produce sustainable results (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007). All progress rises and falls on leadership and there is no continued success without a successor (Fleck, 2017). A leader’s success can be defined as the maximum utilization of the abilities of those under him (Maxwell, 1995, 2018).

Maxwell (2018) stated Napoleon Bonaparte was generally considered knowing or understanding the needs of his men. The author detailed Napoleon first determined what his men wanted most. Then, he did everything possible to help them get it. He knew this was a key to successful motivation. Most leaders do the opposite. They first decide what

they want. Then they try to persuade others to want the same thing as much as they do. “It takes a leader with vision to see the future leader within the person” (Maxwell, 1995, p. 22).

Transformation starts with vision. Every school leader has some sort of vision of the school culture he or she wants to create: a mission or vision statement and/or an articulation of core values (Buell, 1992). What is noteworthy from looking at schools across the country, however, is that one realizes that having a vision or a set of school values was not a distinguishing factor of exceptional schools (Dator, 2002). The best leaders “transform their vision into meticulously built systems that operate across every single classroom” (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012, p. 168). The researcher believed that transformational leaders know how to move from vision to system.

The Holistic and Whole Child Instruction

There are many implications for pedagogy and educational leadership when discussing whole child instruction. Dinero and Theard-Griggs (2016) advocated for supporting teachers as a critical component in ensuring teaching the whole child. According to Dinero and Thread-Griggs (2016), teachers need opportunities to help their students. The best support for this change to take place is directly related to administrators allowing for flexibility in the curriculum to allow teachers room to address students’ emotional, physical, cognitive, and cultural needs (Samuels, 2018). Furthermore, Wiggan and Watson (2016) argued that student underachievement is not an isolated situation, suggesting teachers lack empowerment to approach student learning holistically.

Wiggan and Watson (2016) pontificated that teaching the whole child requires applying cultural responsiveness particularly because the nation's public schools have become predominantly minority majority with a marked decrease in enrollments of White students. Additionally, the authors expressed concern about 34% of African American students as performing academically below their peers of other races. Wiggan and Watson (2016) advocated for applying multicultural curricula and diversifying all children's educational experiences to instill motivation to learn and value diversity. They established their argument based on the results of their study of a small school that used a holistic instructional approach with predominately African-American students and outperformed nearby local schools similarly comprised of predominantly African-American students on accountability assessments.

Wiggan and Watson (2016) thought their research validated the multicultural curriculum approach, anti-racism perspective, and valuing of diversity to teach the whole child for boosting academic scores in both reading and math. Teachers in the study used antiracism materials and diversified the curriculum to raise the level of relevance the curricula had and to increase interest in lesson content by students. Therefore, the findings suggested teaching holistically meant knowing how to attend to students' needs, not just cognitively but also physically and emotionally (Wiggan & Watson, 2016). These findings have implications for preservice and in-service teachers who must understand that they are change agents.

Frost and Sutterby (2017) added that outdoor play is essential to whole child development and advocated for using play to accentuate learning and to support

creativity. The researchers in the 2017 study regarded outdoor play as essential to whole language development and argued that research supports that the necessity of natural space is needed to meet children's needs.

Additionally, Frost and Sutterby (2017) explored the history of play. They found students need to play, and its application in schools stemmed from the conception of the term *kindergarten* representationally refers to children (as the "kinder" in German) living in wonderment with nature (as the garden or "garten" in German) (Frost & Sutterby, 2017). Since the early 1800s, outside play has been a necessity for children to engage in learning and expressing their creativity. More importantly, critics were always concerned with outdoor play and safety because of a belief that unsupervised play could negatively impact children's physical and emotional health. However, the positive emotional and physical implications when leaving children to play alone for hours involve increased creative thinking and problem-solving ability (Frost & Sutterby, 2017).

Therefore, the approach to teaching the whole child really does embody the premise it takes a village to truly care about what children think, believe and live every day in their neighboring communities at large, so it is equally important that their perceptions and realities are taught and instilled through arts, literature, play, and classroom practices (Wiggin & Watson, 2016). In order for leaders to transform learning opportunities and foster change that embraces student diversity skills they must take a unique approach to addressing students' demographics and their cultural needs (Wiggin & Watson, 2016). These same researchers called for incorporating a multicultural approach to teaching practices to support educational reform. Dinero and Thread-Griggs

(2016) noted that teachers must acknowledge their position of agency and their capacity for ensuring change systemically and within children. Teachers' and students' holistic experiences need to be validated so that teachers can ensure whole-child learning (Dinero & Thread-Griggs, 2016). By focusing on the needs of the whole-child with cultural sensitivity, teachers gain agency in building relationships with students and their colleagues.

Sensitivity to student culture. Larson and Murtadha noted that “researchers in educational administration who believe that injustice in our schools and communities is neither natural nor inevitable loosely coalesce under an umbrella of inquiry called leadership for social justice” (2003, p. 135). School leaders who are committed to the education of all children must understand the deeply spiritual nature of African American students. Historically, for many African Americans, their spiritual selves have been what sustained them through persistent institutionalized acts of racism and social injustice. For many urban youths, public schools have been major sources of experiences with institutionalized social injustice. Instead, schools seeking to enhance African American students' academic pursuits must become more than just educative. Schools seeking to achieve academic justice must address social justice in general. For African American students, “such schools must include substantive spiritual dialogue in the context of academic pursuits that also lay bare institutional and societal inequities” (Dantley, 2005, p. 660). Furthermore, administrators and educators have to put aside personal biases and agendas in an effort to meet the needs of every child.

Thurgood Marshall (1987) of the Supreme Court explained:

The goal of a true democracy such as that of the United States, explained simply, is that any baby born in these United States, even if he is born to the blackest, most illiterate, most unprivileged Negro in Mississippi, is, merely by being born and drawing his first breath in this democracy, endowed with the exact same rights as a child born to a Rockefeller. (para. 15)

Larson and Murtadha (2003) challenged followers to argue against the importance of attaining a colorblind society as quickly as possible. Furthermore, Starratt (2007) stated:

Sometimes knowledge is seen as a process of gaining power over the object of knowledge, or as something to be used for self-promoting purposes. That is to miss the point of the knowing process. Coming to know generates an affirming and enabling power of entering more fully into communion with the world, of sharing in the depth, richness, and struggles of the world, of becoming a richer, deeper, stronger human being who is more firmly rooted in the depth and soul of the world. Learning, then, means putting aside one's own sense of superiority or importance, leaving one's own self-centered agenda aside, submitting oneself to the message of the subject, letting the subject re-position the self in a new or clearer set of relationships (natural, social, cultural), allowing the self to be humbled by the complexity of the known. It also means that the knower, when she or he shares their knowledge of the known, represents the known as accurately and as sensitively as circumstances allow. (pp. 12-13)

As Samier explained, “The problem is one of cultivating, moral self-governance that requires a different and higher standard of morality both practiced and demanded by all” (2008, p. 18). Rachels and Rachels (2012) argued that all cultures employ different sets of moral codes and beliefs. With the many varied codes from one culture to the next, it would seem a difficult task to manage and lead a diverse team of people. Truthfully, there is no objective truth in morality. “Right and wrong are only matters of opinion, and opinions vary from culture to culture” (Rachels & Rachels, 2012, p. 3).

It is culture that gives meaning to life. The beliefs, languages, rituals, knowledge, conventions, courtesies, and artifacts, including the cultural baggage of any group, are the resources from which the individual and social identities are constructed (Rachels & Rachels, 2012). These cultural values provide the framework upon which individuals construct an understanding of the world and of themselves. Further, the researchers believed that part of this cultural baggage is factual. It is empirical, descriptive, and objective (Rachels & Rachels, 2012). Another part of this cultural baggage, perhaps the greater part, is mythical. “It is concerned not with facts but with meaning, that is, the interpretative and prescriptive rules which provide the basis for understanding and action” (Bates, 1984, p. 262).

Bates (1984) believed that the greatest moral that is present in the school is ensuring that all students have equal access to education and the leader that stands before each child is dedicated to day-to-day operations of a school. Leaders must work hard and demand equality by setting the bar high. While it is important to consider cultural

aspects, a leader knows how to address the policies in such a way that each person feels respected and valued.

Rachels & Rachels (2012) believed the awareness of cultures creates a better leader. The goal is not to address the individual cultural differences for every decision. The task is to understand the implications of the various cultures and how certain aspects motivate certain cultures, then use this information to help make informed decisions on the campus. All people should be respected and never asked to do something that the building leader is not willing to do; hence creating a collaborative and democratic environment that brings about a level of respect that enhances the work culture (Rachels & Rachels, 2012).

Building relationships. Greenleaf, Frick & Spears (1996) concept of servant leadership has the potential to be important to transformational leadership style to the extent that it requires particular needs and understanding, which an aggregated view of followers cannot accommodate. The exposition of existential thinking and its application to leadership relations provokes further thought on the potential for leadership and leadership communication. An existential approach allows for, indeed demands, the acceptance of potential – of possibility – in communication. Thus, communication as dialogue is seen as a creative process, allowing the development of potential of all those involved in leader relations, and as such it moves beyond the relative fixity of roles. In this way existential thinking may allow us to move beyond relatively recent concepts such as transformational leadership (Avolio & Bass, 1995) where the leader creates transformations in the organizational context and in followers. This line of thinking

develops further to allow for transformation in all, including the leader (Ashman & Lawler, 2008).

Hudson (1997) stated that a leader is responsible for making these connections possible by promoting the participation of the following, or the audience. Citizen involvement in the policy-making process leads to trust and collaboration (Yang, 2006). The level of stakeholders' involvement in policy-making is often decided by the leaders responsible for designing the process. Foster (1989) emphasized the connection between leadership and decision making with this idea important. As a result of this critical process, Foster (1989) believed that citizens will begin to question aspects of their lives and consider alternate ways of ordering their lives.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of principals and their perceptions concerning the state accountability system and how it may impact their transformational efforts in ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child. Leading a school is a complex job. School leadership makes a difference. The role of the school leader, as an administrator of a school or district, is complex and relies upon the varied skills, educational experience, and background of the individual who pursues the leadership position.

Despite changes in policy related to aspects of curriculum, accountability, teacher training and certification, there is a persistent lack of equitable educational outcomes (Shields, 2009). Any educational administrator will recognize the *kids come first* mantra that is obligatory in all public-school discourse (Ombler, 2016). Transformational

leaders are known to exemplify authentic leadership practices and ethics of leadership, as well as respond to many of the concerns about the lack of honesty and integrity in leadership.

The type of leadership that is needed to see more success in schools evolves around individuals who aspire to promote learning through the artful act of scaffolding for everyone, including teachers and students. The important job of an effective leader is to focus on educating the whole child by leading innovations of instruction.

Transformational leaders produce excellence regardless of state and federal constraints and moving academic targets of high stakes accountability. They appreciate different cultures and provide opportunities for all students to thrive and reach their fullest potential.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of principals and their perceptions concerning the high-stakes state accountability system and how those perceptions may impact their transformational efforts in ensuring a holistic and innovative education for every child. Although many studies have focused on different aspects of transformational leadership, more attention must be given to analyzing the practices of educational leaders seeking to transform schools and the impact of their decision-making and leadership when transforming schools, in spite of state and federal demands (Chang, 2016; Fetzer Institute & Pearson, 2012; Jyoti & Bhau, 2016; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Litchka, 2018). The phenomenological inquiry explored the lived experiences of principals, focusing on commonalities and differences of principals as transformational leaders.

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological research design in order to capture lived experiences of the principals who must work within accountability rules to promote a holistic and quality education for every child. The phenomenological inquiry enabled

hearing administrators' lived experiences of accountability systems and the variety of ways they applied transformational leadership behaviors to their efforts to educate all children. Van Manen (2014) explained human experience as the main epistemological basis of qualitative research, but the concept lived experience possesses special methodological significance. Martinelli (2018) recognized Wilhelm Dilthey for the first systematic explication of lived experience and its relevance for human sciences by describing the lived experience as a reflexive or self-given awareness that inheres in the temporality of consciousness of life as we live it. According to Van Manen (2014), the lived experience remains a central methodological notion that aims to provide concrete insights into the qualitative meanings of phenomena in people's lives.

A phenomenological study ascribes the meaning of the lived experiences of several individuals about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). By understanding the experiences of others, researchers can also gain experience in understanding the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009).

Phenomenological meaning can be distinguished from psychological, sociological, ethnographic, biographic, and social science or human science disciplines. Generally, the social sciences, such as sociology, psychology, and ethnography, aim at providing a broader explanation. Van Manen (2014) described the aim of phenomenology as focused on a description that provides an in-depth interpretation.

Research Questions

The primary research question (PRQ) guiding this phenomenological inquiry was: What perceptions about the state accountability system impact how school leaders work

toward ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child? The supporting research questions were the following:

RQ1. What are the principals' perceptions about the state's accountability system?

RQ2. What are the principals lived experiences with ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child through transformational leadership?

Participants

Principals of schools that administer the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and STAAR End of Course (EOC) exams and whose schools consistently show high academic performance year-to-year within a Texas Urban area were selected to participate in the research study and Marion & Gonzales (2014) noted that principals improve with experience; therefore, estimating a time trend is meaningful. This study only considered principals with two or more years of leadership experience, up to and including the 2017-2018 academic year, and whose schools produced TEA academic distinctions within any of the following areas: (a) Academic Achievement in Reading and English Language Arts; (b) Academic achievement in Mathematics; (c) Academic achievement in Science; (d) Academic achievement in Social Studies; (e) Top 25% in Student Progress; (f) Top 25% in Closing Performance Gaps; and (g) Postsecondary Readiness.

The researcher used the TEA's school report cards for identifying schools meeting the criteria. For additional information, the researcher used the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR), school districts' websites to identify principals who may

potentially become participants. The researcher contacted the school district to obtain permission prior to beginning data collection (see Appendix A).

Instrumentation

The researcher used a principal interview instrument protocol as a guide for conducting the interviews with the principals of high performing schools (see Appendix B). The interviews for this study allowed the researcher to gain insight regarding the participants' lived experiences (Rindone, 2015). The researcher followed Van Manen's (2014) recommendation of ensured alignment between the research questions and interview questions to capture the true essence of the phenomenon and the researcher asked the participants open-ended statements during their interviews. A three-tier interview process was followed, with the first level of questions asked and then responses transcribed and analyzed. The second set of questions were derived from the analysis of the first level, with the third level of questions following a similar process (see Appendix B).

Setting

The setting for conducting the interviews was an office or conference room or other location as selected by the participating principals. The researcher followed Creswell's (2009) recommendation to collect data in the natural setting preferred by the participants to capture the full essence of their lived experiences with the phenomenon. By having the interviews in a space that was familiar and comfortable to the participant, the participant had a greater likelihood to be at ease during the interview (Creswell, 2009).

Credibility, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Patton (1999) emphasized the credibility issue for qualitative inquiry depends on the following three distinct but related elements: (a) rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high-quality data with careful attention to issues of validity, reliability, and triangulation; (b) the credibility of the researcher, which is dependent on training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self; and (c) the researcher's philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry which is based on a fundamental appreciation of purposeful sampling, naturalistic inquiry, and holistic thinking during inductive analysis. The researcher established credibility by ensuring the participants' accounts of their lived experiences were thoroughly developed and analyzed by intensive interviews. Furthermore, the researcher ensured any professional or personal biases were recognized and were bracketed for those biases before conducting the interviews and bridled his lived experiences as a former principal by not injecting own opinions or statements during the interviews.

Data Collection

This study employed a phenomenological approach to data collection. According to Seidman (2006), it is imperative that interviewers use care and thoughtfulness when making initial contact with the participants in order to establish a strong interviewer-participant relationship. First, principals were identified through use of publicly available databases and school district websites. Next, an initial recruitment e-mail was sent to principals identified as potential participants including an introduction to the study and the researcher (see Appendix C). Also included in the e-mail was the purpose of the

study and the time commitment it would entail from participants. Third, the researcher set up interviews with any principals who responded as interested in participating in an interview. The researcher presented an Informed Consent form for the participants to read and sign at the opening of the interview session (see Appendix D). The participants were advised that participation was voluntary and a participant may withdraw at any time. As well, the participants were informed that all individual names and school district names would remain confidential.

All data collected for the study were maintained in a locked file at the researcher's home and only the researcher had access to the secured files. Per IRB policy, all data and related files will be destroyed after a period of three years.

Interviews.

A three-tier interview protocol was used to conduct individual interviews. The researcher developed clarifying questions for the second and third follow up meetings (see Appendix B). Approximately one-hour interviews were conducted in-person with five participants. The researcher used the interview guide to ask questions during the individual interviews. Due to the participants' different viewpoints, knowledge, and experiences, each one-on-one interview differed somewhat in length and in the topics discussed by the participant.

During the interviews, the researcher used the secure Rev.com recording application on a smart cell phone to capture the interviewees' exact thoughts and words. The Rev.com application also provided secure and confidential transcription of data within 24 to 48 hours of selecting the transcribe service within the application. The

interview transcripts were forwarded to the participants to obtain their approval of the data and to offer them an opportunity to ensure that the essence of each interview was correctly captured and interpreted by adding any additional information they wanted to share.

Artifacts.

During the data collection process, the researcher asked the participants to share educational artifacts and collected any artifacts the participants chose to share as part of demonstrating their lived experiences, including presentation materials, staff memorandums, weekly bulletins, or other documentation. The researcher took notes about the artifacts as part of the data analysis to ensure the coding of the artifacts were completed with consistency. The participants checked the coding of artifacts for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process that includes constructing one's own theory based on the data collected (Creswell, 2009). The data analysis plan included steps to easily organize the information garnered from data collection. Creswell (2009) further declared data analysis to be an "ongoing process [that] involves continuous reflection about the data, asking analytical questions, and writing memos throughout the study" (p. 184). Data analysis is not necessarily completed after the collection of data and can be conducted concurrently during data collection (2009). Therefore, the data analysis for the individual interviews and reviews of artifacts were completed during and after data collection as part of a constant comparative analysis process. The steps for the data

analysis were established based on recommendations by Creswell (2009). The data were open coded line by line to develop a thorough understanding of the participants' emic experiences. The goal of the study was to gain insight into transformational leadership skills that ensures student and campus success in the age of accountability.

Ethical Considerations

According to Walker (2007), phenomenology is acknowledged as a suitable methodology for gaining insight into the essence or structure of the lived experience. However, the research should be done in an ethical manner. Therefore, ethical consideration and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given to all participants (Lund, Helgeland, & Kovac, 2016). Van Manen (2014) promoted describing the experiences of the participants in the most faithful way possible as the most critical ethical obligation of the qualitative researcher. Therefore, the participants' identities and their schools' identities were masked with pseudonyms, such as generic use of middle school 1 corresponding with principal 1, middle school 2 corresponding with principal 2, through middle school 5 corresponding with principal 5. The participants provided checking of transcripts for accuracy.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter detailed the methods and procedures that were used to carry out the study. Included in this chapter were the introduction, research design, research questions, participants, instrumentation, credibility, reliability and trustworthiness, data collection, interviews, artifacts, data analysis, ethical considerations and summary of the chapter. Although many studies have focused on different aspects of transformational leadership,

more attention must be given to analyzing the practices of educational leaders seeking to transform schools and the impact of their decision-making and leadership when transforming schools, in spite of state and federal demands. The next three chapters describe the transformational leadership through lived experiences, findings of the study, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER IV

Transformational Leadership Through Lived Experiences

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of principals and their perceptions concerning the state accountability system and how it impacted their transformational efforts in ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child. Thus, this chapter contains a description of my 10 years of lived experiences as a successful principal. This chapter provides a conceptual understanding of my lived experiences and unintentional biases as part to ensuring the integrity of the data analysis for the presentation of the findings in Chapter V. The following sections contain several of my lived experiences as well as a conclusion of some overarching concepts.

Lived Experience of Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Leadership Development

From January 2003 to June 2005, I started my educational career as a middle school science teacher in an East Texas public school district. The middle school campus' demographics consisted of a population of approximately 1,800 students. Fifty-one percent of the middle school's students were identified as economically disadvantaged by the TEA. The middle school had earned a Recognized accountability rating with a grade span of sixth through eighth grades, meaning at least 70 percent of all

students in each student group passed TAKS reading, writing, math, social studies and science; 0.7 percent or less dropout rate; at least 94 percent attendance rate (TEA, 2011).

As a novice teacher, I benefited from being a member of a strong team of experienced science teachers. They were effective teachers who understood the science content area. Berliner and Glass (2014) wrote that scholars who study teaching understand that besides dispositions, there is something more than instructional knowledge and content knowledge within effective teachers. They used the term of *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK) to note that this something more occurs as teachers work as a team and provide strong support systems to one another (Berliner & Glass, 2014).

Indeed, we met weekly for departmental content curriculum and team planning. The team planning meetings consisted of teachers of the core disciplines of English, Math, Science, and Social Studies. In these team meetings, we planned lesson activities, reviewed resources, planned parent conferences and student enrichment activities for all content areas.

The systems we had in place were not accidental but strategically put in place based on intentional planning and implementation by the principal. The principal had served the school and community for over 20 years. He had a military background, demonstrated integrity, and provided collaborative leadership while remaining steadfast about his expectations. He provided a form of leadership that enabled teachers to transform the middle school from a low performing middle school into a campus with state accountability status as Recognized.

The principal approached me to inquire about my interest in becoming an administrator. His inquiry led me to enroll into an educational leadership program at Prairie View A&M University. While working on my principal certification, I became a better teacher. I started understanding the importance of providing a holistic education for my students.

Lived Experience of Serving Students with my Heart

Even though I have had a heart for service for as long as I can remember, it took me a while to determine that the best way I could serve others involved teaching, but once I came to that conclusion, I wondered why it took so long for me to accept this truth. As I reflect, I recall that from my very first day as a science teacher, I tried to notice things about my students, such as what made their eyes sparkle, who their friends were, and if they had consistently worn the same team jerseys. I wanted all the children to know they were more than the collection of students in the crowded classroom. Because each one mattered to me, I knew his or her name. He or she was worth the pause in the hallway to give high fives or to hear about what happened with him or her during the weekend. Every individual student was a significant contributor to my class. I have maintained this mindset since my first day of teaching, and I believe this is why I have experienced success as an educator.

All students have the same needs in common. They need to feel loved, valued, and understood. They know that when they entered into my classroom, I genuinely sought to meet their needs. I often think about students like Tony, Susie and Sarah.

Tony was a frequent visitor of the principal's office and only seemed to stay out of trouble when he was in my class. Now, he is a thriving adult and entrepreneur who owns his own business franchise. Susie lost her mother when she was a student in my classroom. Susie found healing in my classroom and through participation in after school science clubs. Sarah loved science but was too afraid to share her thoughts in the classroom. With my encouragement, Sarah participated in a science competition and won the grand prize. There are many other stories like these, and all of these students are part of my teaching legacies as evidence that building intentional relationships can change the trajectory of children's lives.

Lived Experience of Teaching my Passion: Agricultural Science

After teaching at the middle school level for two years, I accepted an agricultural science teacher position in a neighboring district. Agricultural science was my passion. I had attended Prairie View A&M as an undergraduate agricultural science major and now I had the opportunity to teach what I was passionate about. I found myself focusing more on leadership qualities and life with my students, instead of focusing on animals and Biology TAKS exams.

Most would think that because I was an agricultural science teacher, I measured success based on livestock performances (especially since preparation for performances took up a significant amount of time). However, I felt most successful when I knew I had created a classroom culture of respect, vulnerability, and courage. From the first time my students stepped into my room, they realized we would always build one another up and celebrate each others' victories. It took time to build this culture, as it was up to the

students to rise to the expectation. However, the transformation that took place in my classroom was astonishing.

Students who were once fearful and believed they were not capable of doing certain things suddenly realized they were gifted in certain areas of their lives. Every child left my classroom feeling empowered, and this empowerment spilled over in other areas of their lives. My students felt loved and valued, and this confidence would continue to stay with them long after they left my classroom.

At the end of the first year of being an agricultural science teacher, the principal approached me to inquire about my interest in becoming an assistant principal at the high school. She talked me into leaving the classroom to help students on a much larger scale. I became one of the assistant principals at the high school level. While working as an assistant principal, I enrolled into the Educational Leadership Program at Stephen F. Austin State University and obtained my superintendent certification. Also, while working as an assistant principal, with three other experienced assistant principals, the superintendent asked me to become the interim principal of the high school three months before the school year ended. I accepted the high school principal position and closed the school year, with the understanding that I would not be the permanent principal. There were other principals in the districts with more experience who wanted the job. I knew it was time for me to make a career move that was in the best interest of me and my family. I accepted a principal position in a suburban district located in one of Texas' major metropolitan areas.

Lived Experience as a Principal in the Era of Accountability

As a first-year intermediate school principal new to the metropolitan area, I had the full weight of state and federal accountability on my shoulders. As the leader, I had the important responsibility to ensure that I continued to provide a nurturing and thriving educational environment for our students, while responding to high stakes testing and politics. It was important for me to continue to encourage the practices that I lived as a teacher for the teachers and staff. We could not allow the TAKS test to become the focus of the curriculum, because that focus would have limited learning excellence and transformation. Transformation occurs away from standardized testing which has limits. However, a transformational environment has no limits and ensures students receive many opportunities to thrive and grow beyond their foundational beliefs.

Together, as a campus team, we transformed a school that the Texas Education Agency had identified as a low performing school into a high performing school that earned the highest rating of Exemplary. As this school, TAKS was not our priority. Instead, we focused daily on providing authentic educational experiences in every classroom.

Our efforts were on meeting the needs of the whole child and providing an environment that promoted risk taking in teaching and learning among the teachers and students. We worked collaboratively with parents and stakeholders to ensure that our curriculum and reflected our core beliefs as a school community. The focus on state standards was only a part of the learning process. It was important for us to include enrichment activities and embed life lessons throughout the year. The campus team

provided outside extensions to the learning by exposing our students to real world activities experiences, and the students played a major role in creating their own learning environment. After turning the school around and transforming it from a culture of low expectations to a culture of high expectations and resilience, I accepted a principal position as a middle school principal in a district located in a different metropolitan area of Texas.

At the time of my move, the pressures of accountability via the TAKS tests were at an all-time high. The districts and campuses competed for TEA ratings. During this time, more changes were made to the state and federal accountability system.

Producing a new outcome. The middle school I began working at had received an Academically Acceptable rating by the Texas Education Agency, which means at least 60 percent of all students in each student group passed TAKS reading, writing and social studies; at least 40 percent passed math; and at least 35 percent passed science; 1 percent or less dropout rate; at least 94 percent attendance rate (TEA, 2011). The school was performing satisfactorily, and students were learning. However, as the new leader, I approached the principal role by creating a team with most of the campus' educators and exhibiting a collaborative leadership style. We worked jointly to move the middle school from operating under an Academically Acceptable rating to operating with an Exemplary rating from the Texas Education Agency. The campus's focus was on student learning, parental involvement, student focused decision-making, and encouraging risks among the students and staff.

Lived Experience as a High School Principal

During my tenure in this same suburban metropolitan school district, I was reassigned to become the high school principal. It was not a job that I particularly wanted, but the superintendent requested for me to go to the high school to make a positive difference, or so I thought. However, the teachers and administrators at this school operated within a specific culture and mindset by doing their jobs for a certain way over many years. These educators resisted any change and did not take any risks.

I learned several career-defining lessons during that time as a high school principal. If I did not have the support from the superintendent and school board to do what was in the best interest of the students, it would be very difficult, and basically impossible, to provide a holistic and quality education for the students. I learned that politics at the high school level could certainly be a barrier to student achievement. As I am a person with core convictions, I recognized that I could not remain in a job where I could not do what was best for the students. Therefore, I accepted a middle school principal position in a neighboring district.

Lived Experience as a Middle School Principal

For 10 consecutive years, the middle school received an Academically Unacceptable (Low-Performing Campus) rating by the Texas Education Agency, which means less than 40 percent passing any TAKS test in any subject area; greater than 6 percent dropout rate; at least 94 percent attendance. An academically unacceptable or low-performing rating will not apply if attendance falls below 94 percent and is the only substandard indicator (TEA, 2011). . The school year in which I would be a first-year

principal at this school was the last year the school had an opportunity to make improvement. If I did not lead the school to academic excellence in that one school year, the Texas Education Agency would have taken over management of the school.

To move this school toward improvement quickly, I applied a situational leadership style, which consisted of utilizing collaborative and directive leadership practices. As the leader, I knew that an immediate mind shift had to occur in each and every educator for the campus to be successful, and we did not have time to waste. I could not spend a lot of time working with individual teachers who did not work for students. The priority was very clear: Students first! In this role, I had the support of the superintendent. I immediately made personnel changes, curriculum and instruction changes, and systems changes across the campus.

We were able to transform the school in a short period of time. We met state and federal standards. The school was saved from being taken over by the Texas Education Agency. Not only was the school saved, we received all academic distinctions that the Texas Education Agency could assign.

We did not go into STAAR testing mode by participating in test preparation activities during instructional time. We focused on providing high quality instruction for our students from bell to bell. Currently, the school is still performing at a high level. The systems that we put in place have sustained the school during the tenures of three other principals following my promotion within the district to the position of Executive Director of Secondary Education and School Accountability.

Lived Experience as Executive Director of Secondary Education and School

Accountability

As the Executive Director of Secondary Education and School Accountability, I provided professional development for principals, assistant principals and aspiring leaders in the district. I had an opportunity to show these educational administrators how to become transformational leaders in this era of state and federal accountability.

Although they needed to fully understand the accountability system, they needed, more importantly, to understand the fact that transformational leadership operates on a level beyond seeking merely acceptable test results from students. Therefore, professional development was focused on student learning, effective leadership, creating sustainable systems, and bringing people together for the one cause of educating children.

We continued down a path of success as a district. All of the campuses began to see increasing levels of student growth. The campuses' good accountability ratings were due to transformational leadership education and practices. Transformational leadership enabled changes in each campus' culture to occur, administrators to establish and promote student-driven environments, positive system changes, and high expectations among the staff. By taking the risk to ensure these changes occurred with success throughout the district, I was promoted to the position of assistant superintendent of human resources and superintendent of schools.

Lived Experience as the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources

As the assistant superintendent of Human Resources, I worked diligently to attract and retain highly qualified staff. I worked closely with principal and department leaders

to screen applicants and to place the right people in the organization. I had the privilege to provide professional development for principals and department leaders to ensure their success and the success of our students. I served as the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources for only a few months before becoming the Superintendent of Schools.

Lived Experience as the Superintendent of a Suburban School District

As a superintendent of schools in a suburban city, I have the responsibility to ensure that every campus is guided by transformational leaders within every department. Everyone is working together as a team to create a district culture and climate of high expectations for student learning. I guide all administrators and teachers to maintain their focus on student learning and to provide transformative learning experiences for all students.

Conclusion

Upon reflection of this chapter, it is important for me to continue to incorporate the bridling process throughout this study. Vagle (2014) explained bridling requires an ongoing process; as one reveals new experiences of phenomena, one must revisit the bridling process frequently. I will not attempt to bracket out or remove my knowledge and experiences. Rather than attempting to remove or bracket out this knowledge, bridling allows one to become aware of the existence and influence of these experiences (Vagle, 2014).

Furthermore, this chapter revealed some overarching concepts that were present in successful lived experiences: teamwork, situational leadership and stable systems in place. It appears that teamwork, situational leadership and putting systems in place may

be essential ingredients of success for transforming schools and providing transformational leadership.

CHAPTER V

Data Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of principals and their perceptions concerning the state high-stakes accountability system and how it may impact their transformational efforts in ensuring a holistic and quality innovative education for every child. The phenomenological inquiry yielded the opportunity to compare administrators' in-depth perceptions of the accountability systems in Texas that may impact how they apply transformational leadership behaviors to their efforts to educate all children. Although studies focused on different aspects of transformational leadership, the practices of the school leaders affected by the accountability system when making decisions and attempting to transform schools despite state and federal demands needed to be understood in order to improve these systems (Chang, 2016; Fetzer Institute & Pearson, 2012; Jyoti & Bhau, 2016; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Litchka, 2018). The design of the study enabled the exploration of the principals' views about how they lead their schools in a transformational manner to attain the goal of educating all students under the regulations of state and federal accountability systems (Van Manen, 2014).

Review of Research Questions

The primary research question guiding this phenomenological inquiry was: What perceptions about the state accountability system impact how school leaders work toward ensuring a holistic and quality innovative education for every child? The two supporting research questions were the following:

RQ1. What are the principals' perceptions about the state's accountability system?

RQ2. What are the principals' lived experiences with ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child through transformational leadership?

Data Collection

This chapter presents the findings of the data analysis for this phenomenological inquiry of the lived experiences of principals and their perceptions concerning the state accountability system and how it may impact their transformational efforts in ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child. The study was conducted in adherence to the process and protocols outlined in Chapter III of this study.

The researcher conducted multi-tiered interviews to obtain phenomenological data from five participants for the purpose of answering the research questions. The researcher transcribed the interviews using the encrypted software REV.com. All study participants were contacted for brief follow up meetings to confirm the analysis and interpretation of the interviews. The participants provided the researcher with their feedback about the interpretations and comprehensive insight into certain information seen throughout the transcripts.

Data gathering. The data gathering process took a total of two months. The researcher examined the TEA website to review the Texas Assessment and Performance Report (TAPR), School Report Cards, Texas Performance Reporting System, Texas Consolidated School Rating Report, and Academic Accountability Ratings. Furthermore, the researcher reviewed the various schools' websites and used Google to find and review newspaper articles and information about the schools led by the participants. The researcher called the campuses to validate the information found online and to validate the tenures of the participants. The researcher reviewed the artifact data to determine what principals qualified as participants for this study and the selected principals were recruited to be participants for the interviews. Middle School Principals with TEA academic distinctions and at least two years at that school.

Participants

A purposeful group of principals was selected for this phenomenological study. The sampling, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), should involve participants with in-depth knowledge about the specific topic. Creswell (2013) suggested sampling should be from three to 15 participants for a phenomenological study. Five middle school principals of schools that administer the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness and State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness End of Course exams and whose schools consistently showed high academic performance year-to-year according to TEA within a Texas urban area were selected to participate in the research.

The researcher contacted the superintendents of each district by phone and email to gain permission to interview the participants and contacted each participant by phone and email to gain his or her participation in the study. The researcher scheduled in-person interviews with the participants and traveled to the recommended locations of choice by the participants.

Marion and Gonzales (2014) noted that principals improve with experience; therefore, estimating a time trend was meaningful. This study only considered principals with two or more years of experience up to and including the 2017-2018 academic year and serving schools producing academic distinctions within any of the following areas: (a) academic achievement in reading and English language arts; (b) academic achievement in mathematics; (c) academic achievement in science; (d) academic achievement in social studies; (e) top 25% in student progress; (f) top 25% in closing performance gaps; and (g) postsecondary readiness.

The researcher used the TEA's Texas Assessment and Performance Report (TAPR) for identifying schools meeting the above listed criteria. Next, the researcher used the school districts' websites about their schools and school leaders to identify principals who could be recruited as participants in the study. The five participants consisted of two male principals and three female principals. Their experience levels as principals varied from three to six years.

Principal 1. Principal 1 (P1) was male and the principal of middle school 1, a high performing middle school in a Texas urban area. P1 taught school for five years, served as a high school assistant principal for three years, and reported having four years

of experience as a middle school principal. For the past three (2016, 2017 & 2018) years, his school has received 100% of seven academic distinctions awarded by the TEA. P1's campus population consisted of over 500 students in Grades 7 and 8, with an at-risk population around 40%.

Principal 2. Principal 2 (P2) was female and the principal of a middle school 2, a high performing middle school in a Texas urban area. P2 taught school for seven years, was an elementary assistant principal for two years, and had six years of experience as a middle school principal. For the past three years (2016, 2017, and 2018), her school received 100% of the TEA's seven academic distinction awards. P2's campus population consisted of over 900 students in Grades 6, 7, and 8. The school's at-risk population was approximately 60%.

Principal 3. Principal 3 (P3) was female and the principal of middle school 3, a high performing middle school in a Texas urban area. P3 taught school for four years and had been a middle school instructional coach for four years, in addition to accruing three years of experience as a middle school principal. For the past three years (2016, 2017, and 2018), P3's middle school received 100% of the TEA's seven academic distinctions. The campus population consisted of 1,000 students in Grades 6, 7, and 8. The at-risk population was less than 4%.

Principal 4. Principal 4 (P4) was male and the principal of middle school 4, a high performing middle school in a Texas urban area. P4 was a classroom teacher for two and a half years before working as a reading interventionist for one year. He was a middle school assistant principal for two years and accrued four years of experience as

the principal of Middle School 4. For the past three years (2016, 2017, and 2018), P4's school has received 100% of the TEA's seven academic distinctions. P4's school consisted of 1,000 students in Grades 7, 8, and 9. The at-risk students were above 49% of the campus population.

Principal 5. Principal 5 (P5) was female and principal of Middle School 5, a high performing middle school in a Texas urban area. P5 was a classroom teacher for four years before working as a counselor for three years. P5 had three years of experience as a middle school principal. For the past three years (2016, 2017, and 2018), Middle School 5 received 100% of the TEA's seven academic distinctions. The Middle School 5 campus population consist of 900 students in Grades 6, 7, and 8. The at-risk population was above 66%.

Findings

The research question that guided this study was: What perceptions about the state accountability system impact how school leaders work toward ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child? The narratives that formed the response to this research question contained the participants responses about how they perceived the accountability system. The findings are presented with principal narratives relating to their lived experiences.

Principal 1. Principal 1 (P1) perceived the current accountability system as conflicting with providing a holistic and quality education for every child. The accountability system poses limits and stifles transformation. P1 shared:

It's kind of difficult to be transformational in a system that has boundaries, right? So, it's like, you can't transform past. If you're using that as your benchmark, right, you really can't transform past where those boundaries are set up for you in that system.

P1 acknowledged the role of politics within the school system as it relates to accountability. However, P1 operated in an environment that was supportive of student learning and explained:

Politics doesn't play a huge role because I have a lot of support from the school board, from my supervisors, the assistant superintendent, superintendent. And if things come up that we need to address, I've got a whole team of people that are ready to help me with that. So, I don't ever lead out of fear at all. I lead out of confidence, and that's really valuable, you know. Because when you can lead out of confidence and not fear, you've got a lot going for you. Because if you've been in the other situation, you know how hard it can be.

And at the same time, they're quick to identify you when your staff is doing something great and your kids are doing something great, you know. They're right there, too. So, day to day, I would just say that they're in a support role. That's the way I perceive it; that's the way they approach it.

P1 was mindful of how campuses and leaders are measured by the public and within the state. Although leaders are measured in the current accountability system, P1 maintained a focus on the main priorities of the campus as follows:

This can, kind of, go back to the political side a little bit, but ... you have to know the leader, how you're going to be measured. Because you've got lots of measuring sticks. You've got one big one, and then you got lots of little ones. So, if you don't know what all your measuring sticks are, it's going to be hard to make sure you're always performing at your best.

P1 was keenly aware of the importance of the benchmarks and performance markers set by the district for school improvement. He stated:

Certainly, there's times where we get some benchmark or simulation scores that come back really out of whack that are not characteristic of our performance. I'll probably visit with my supervisor about that because she's going to want to know what the plan is, what happened, what are we doing? You know. I think that's pretty normal. I don't think that's out of normal for any school.

P1 continued by explaining, "It is important to have your own measurements that are understood throughout the campus by the teachers and stakeholder." P1 elucidated how these measurements work at his campus:

We make sure our staff is educated on how we're measured: What does student growth mean? How did they track student growth over time in their own classroom? How do they know what impact they're having on student learning? I mean, these are all big questions that you have to continually keep in front of your team. They can't just be like once or twice a year; these have to be regular things. And when something becomes regular as a norm, then it becomes

important, and so being transformational is discerning as a leader what those things should be.

P1 discussed having autonomy as a principal in order to lead without micromanagement as follows:

I don't think it has a ton to do with my day to day work. My supervisors are very supportive, they're very involved. And what I mean by that is they're not overly involved trying to tell me what to do, it's just that I know that they have my back, and they are there when I call them and I need them.

P1 addressed being focused on a set of core values. The core values drive all decisions about student learning. P1 discussed the four core values as:

Students are always becoming resilient, resourceful, creative, and global. Those are our virtues ... so I talk a lot about that. I have a monthly breakfast with parents, kind of what I talk about I try to bring back to those four things. When I have Meet the Teacher Night early in the year, we talk about those four things. And I'm talking about what that looks like in a middle school.

P1 discussed the importance of messaging, being open to feedback and ensuring clear and open communication among the staff is critical. He stated:

I don't want to say controlling the message, but making sure that as a leader you're communicating what's important to you to your staff, community, your PTA. But then you also have to be a leader that says, I want to know if things are not right. I want to know if there's a perception of something out there that, maybe, is something I want to be different. So, you have to have the open door policy and

you have to have key parents that you're like, it's okay to email and call me even if you don't think it's a big deal. You kind of have to have that open communication with them. And that's for any parent, you want to have your door open to them.

Principal 2. P2 discussed talked about how she does her job without constraints because of the support she receives from central office. She stated:

Central Office and non-campus personnel are very supportive [and] help me consider different perspectives. They shield me from state and federal politics because their focus is on student learning. They offer the wisdom and assistance. I know that their support is only a phone call, email, or quick visit away.

P2 discussed the importance of not letting average become their standards. She has set high expectations and goals for her students and staff. She stated:

I recently started reading *Culturize* by Jimmy Casas. He states, "We cannot allow average to become our standard." So, even after a goal is accomplished, I start to look for additional areas for improvement. The goal is to chase perfection, while knowing we will not obtain it.

P2 talked about how the state accountability system could possibly have a negative impact on the school environment, create obstacles and hurt staff morale. Her focus was on motivating students and staff. She stated:

As a leader of a high performing school, over time I have encountered many obstacles that my team and I have overcome. Some of the ongoing obstacles as a leader of a high performing campus are maintaining high levels of student achievement and keeping teachers and students motivated in order to continue to

be successful. High levels of success motivate others around you to be successful and it's up to you as a leader to be consistent and continue to evolve.

Principal 3. P3 sees herself as a transformational leader within the accountability system. She focused on positively impacting the lives of her students and staff. She stated:

I am a transformational leader because I believe in making necessary changes to improve student achievement and creating a vision that will guide the change. I also believe it is important to inspire others to believe and work towards the change. When people are happy, respect and trust their leader, anything is possible. I am a results-oriented person so I love to explore new and more efficient ways to do things. As a leader, I believe in providing support for my staff and keeping the lines of communication open so that employees feel free to discuss issues with me. I know leaders cannot achieve success alone. It takes a team of individuals who are inspired and believe in the same vision to be successful.

P3 avoided politics as much as possible when making decisions that are in the best interest of her students. She stated:

I try to steer away from politics when making decisions because often times politics involve personal feelings. When making decisions, I always try to consider what is fair for all parties involved. Since I am in education, I try to focus on what is best for children and the teachers responsible for educating those children.

P3 focused her attention on leading organizational change creating an open environment for exchanging ideas geared toward student success. She stated:

Leading organizational change through systems and processes that inspire, motivate and allow for collaborative design and decision making with an end goal will benefit the whole campus rather than individual good.

Principal 4. P4 perceived the state and federal accountability systems, when passed by legislators, were meant to ensure that every child received a holistic and quality education. However, it would have a negative impact on providing a holistic and quality education if leaders give in to the pressures of the system. He stated:

I perceive the state and federal accountability systems as initiatives which had, at their inception, the intent of ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child. The heart of the system was meant to ensure that no child was left behind and that all students were counted in accountability. It has somehow shifted to be a political tool used to measure the effectiveness of elected officials. The increased pressure has caused many teachers to feel the need to teach to the test and forgo teaching critical concepts not assessed in the written curriculum.

Unfortunately, we are setting our students up to be a generation of students who lack the critical thinking skills that will be necessary at jobs that currently don't even exist.

P4 recognized the role politics play in the overall quest for providing students with a quality education, especially when schools are rated according to STAAR exams.

Also, he noted that district leadership provided “a keen focus on student learning, not testing.” He stated:

I have experienced both ends of the spectrum as it relates to the involvement of politics in my day-to-day work. In my current situation, politics have very little bearing on my day-to-day decisions or leadership. I am able to focus on teaching and learning without fear or external pressure. Accountability is still ever present, but the greatest accountability present is my accountability for my students’ academic success. As leaders and representatives of the overall organization, we still carry the responsibility to represent our district with professionalism and excellence at all times.

Principal 5. P5 talked about the importance of having accountability and balancing it against holistic and quality education. She stated:

The answer would have to depend on your individual opinion of what a holistic or quality education is. Accountability certainly ensures that districts around the country “step-up” their individual game plans for academic success. As instructional leaders, we have learned what it takes to get the results needed to be at the top of the accountability ranks. But how do we hold schools accountable for having a culture of engagement, excitement, nurturing or caring on a campus? Common sense would say that the high-performing schools would encompass all of these, but anyone who has been in an educational setting in the last 10 years knows that this isn’t necessarily true. It’s been my goal to ensure that my students have a quality education that is not only measured by academic success, but also

that we produce kind, well-rounded, and talented students that will add value to our communities. Accountability can assist in ensuring some of these goals are reached, but as leaders, we have to make sure that we go above and beyond what the state and federal entities ask us to do for our students to get a truly quality education.

P5 elaborated on the constraints a district or campus may have when faced with state and federal mandates that may negatively impact the focus on the social and emotional needs of a child. She stated:

I believe that stakeholder perceptions about the accountability system impact the focus of our priority in many areas when working to ensure a holistic and quality education for every child. For example, if we have to prioritize spending based on needs, meeting accountability may take priority over social and emotional learning which will affect the holistic nature of our programming.

First Supporting Research Question

The first supporting research question asked the following: What are the principals' perceptions about the state's accountability system? The findings are presented within the principal narratives relating to their lived experiences.

Principal 1. P1 recognized the inadequacies of the current accountability system to measure the abilities of the whole child. He stated:

I think that there's still some gaps there in how we measure effectiveness.

Currently the bulk of the way that our school's graded by the state is really how many students demonstrate mastery and content. It doesn't measure how they

demonstrate mastery in other areas of their life, or the growth that we maybe see in other areas of their life. There's currently a system that measures that. And then kind of going back to question one is, your stakeholders, your community expects more of you than just your kids learning the content. They want them to have a great experience and something special.

P1 did not spend a lot of time talking about the test or the accountability system because it causes unnecessary stress on the teachers and staff and encouraged teachers to focus on authentic learning in the classroom. She stated:

My poor teachers feel a lot of stress. One of the things that I do is I don't spend a lot of time talking about the test. I spend a lot of time talking about learning. I spend a lot of time talking about being effective. So, our hashtag, if you will, I think every campus probably has one at this point, but ours is called Next Level. And so, we started to define two years ago, what does Next Level mean to you as the teacher, or you as a staff member? What's your personal Next Level?

P1 focused on hiring the right people to meet the needs of the whole child. He wants educators who will hold each other accountable for student learning and have a focus on capturing kids hearts rather than focusing on testing. He stated: It's not like one thing. You're going to learn that probably, right? I mean, we have a staff profile, and we team up when we hire people because I'm just one component of holding people accountable to excellence. Their whole team has to hold them accountable to excellence. And if they have say so with whom they hire, then they're going to be much more willing to have some accountability for

that person performing, you know. And if they're not performing, addressing those things.

P1 wanted his staff to stay focused on their main priorities. His focus was not on the managerial issues of the building. P1 sought to concentrate on activities that moved his students academically as the most important actions for the staff and students. P1 described these actions in the following:

I hear stories about principals that are all about testing and dress code. They're all about people being on time. These are all symptomatic problems of one big problem - is everyone there committed to the highest levels of learning for kids? Because if they're committed to that, they're probably committed to a lot of other smaller things, too. Like being at work or dressing like they should have respect of their team and their kids.

So, you learn along the way about things that you don't want to be as a leader, but then you also learn about things ... you grow upon those things that you see are valuable. So, I don't spend a lot of time talking about staff dress. I mean, at the beginning of the year I say this is our expectation, we've got these days that are designed for relaxed dress and these ... you know, whatever. And I communicate those via the staff remind text of when they can dress a certain way or whatever. But then I don't go around checking that. I'm not going to waste my time.

P1 focused on having systems in place to standardize certain processes to ensure student success. His focus was on "student growth, not raw test scores." P1 discussed his focus as follows:

It is a lot about are you able to standardize your processes and assist on this to meet the needs of all students regardless of if they come to you in super good shape with no learning gaps. I think that's probably one of the most important things we're proud of is the distinction that says, you helped students fill in the gap at this rate. You know, we scored a 98 on that. That's something really to be proud of, that we had staff attentive enough and had systems that helped them to be attentive enough that they had that big of an impact on student growth, that they helped those kids fill in those gaps.

P1 talked about the importance of preparing students for life. The focus was working on getting students on grade level and putting students on a level playing field of success. He stated:

Because while that's a great achievement, think about the long term impact of that. They go on to ninth, 10th, 11th, 12th grade. Now we've closed that gap a little bit right? So they're not having to re-take classes over. They're not going to summer school. They're on grade level. They made enough growth to demonstrate that they're ready. That's something to be proud of, you know.

Principal 2. P2 noted there are pros and cons in relation to the current accountability system and how it impacts her leadership to provide a holistic and quality education for every child. She stated:

While many teachers and community members are not fond of our accountability system, these measures are critical to campus and district data, thereby impacting funds, recognition, and management. Thus, I am dogmatic to ensure our systems

give students the best chance at being successful where it counts and matters most. We have to create the right environment that promotes collaboration. Collaboration is key. You must involve the students in their own learning to keep them engage. Also it makes their learning meaningful.

Principal 3. P3 perceived the accountability system as operating in direct conflict with providing a holistic and quality education. P3 elaborated on this belief:

My perception is the current state and federal accountability system hinders the efforts of holistic and quality education. Because the current accountability system determines the quality of instruction and/or schools, leaders and teachers forgo instruction in non-tested areas to devote all time and effort to assessed content. In actuality, the very same accountability system used to determine the effectiveness of instruction actually deter quality instruction because educators use a variety of strategies and methods to cram concepts and expectations hoping students can remember the information long enough to regurgitate it for the one day a year they are assessed on particular content. I do believe schools should have an accountability system too; however, it should be in place as a monitoring tool. I think there should be an end of the year assessment for every content that is based on the state standards. This would encourage a holistic approach to teaching. The test should be used to assess the alignment of curriculum and instructional planning, teacher effectiveness to identify professional development opportunities and to determine student progress.

Principal 4. P4 believed that the accountability system, although stifling in certain areas, has some good components to require student growth or progress. He made a point to “capitalize on the good and avoid the bad parts of the system” and expounded:

The accountability rules require that all students show growth or progress. As a leader, I have to ensure that all students are getting their needs met. This means that I have to have a strong data analysis system so that I am keenly aware of student needs and that I have human resources in place to meet those needs. All of my resources (including time) are leveraged to ensure that all students’ individualized needs are met. This takes ongoing communication and decision-making as students’ needs change over time. Teachers must be guided through this process of continuous improvement on a regular basis.

Principal 5. P5 regarded the accountability system as “something that is here to stay.” She added, “A test measures only a part or snapshot of a child’s skills and abilities at a given time,” and provided the following explanation:

It is my perception that accountability is a necessary evil. Quantifying how much is enough or not enough is extremely subjective. I believe in measuring students’ learning and teachers’ effectiveness. I do believe, however, that there is learning and impact that occurs in classrooms on a daily basis that is immeasurable in any paper pencil or computer-based format. I believe that we must find a way to balance the need for accountability and the “heart” of teaching and understand as leaders that sometimes numbers do not tell the full story.

P5 elaborated on how you have to navigate the political waters to ensure a quality education. She stated:

You have to walk a tight rope between instilling valuable and positive change while also demanding academic accountability. I have tried to impact student learning with a vision of high expectations that staff members have taken on and begun to lead themselves in this current accountability system. As a leader, you do not want politics to lead your day to day decisions. However, in reality you have to be aware of the politics that occur in your community and be smart about how they affect your campus.

Second Supporting Research Question

The second supporting research question asked the following: What are the principals' lived experiences using transformational leadership to ensure each child receives a holistic and quality education? The findings are presented within principal narratives relating to their lived experiences.

Principal 1. P1 was focused on the learning process. He talked about the understanding of delivering on the promise of providing a holistic and quality education for all children and preparing them for life. He stated:

We want to deliver on that promise. We want to deliver on the idea of yes, your kid is going to get a great education here. They're going to be ready to move onto high school, but more than that, what are they going to remember, or what are they going to learn at this place that's going to impact them when they're 25 or 30 years old. And so to answer this question specifically, there's not really an

accountability for that other than what the leader puts in place where it's accountable to them.

P1 attended to building relationships with the community and understanding their desire to produce excellence in education. The school is not focused on an accountability letter grade. He stated:

But it's much more inspiring for your community here that your school's all about the student experience than it is about making an A in school. I think that's a given, right? The given is, I'm going to send my student here every day. They need to be safe and they need to be given every opportunity to learn and grow and be ready for what the next level is. So for us as a junior high, that means high school. Are we preparing them for that transition? And in my mind, if I'm not developing them holistically, then I'm not delivering on the promise that we've made to our stakeholders.

P1 concentrated on the next level of success for his students. He talked about the limitations the accountability system puts on students. He stated that transformation has no limits and wanted his students and teachers to excel. He stated:

And then we built that on to say okay well, what's the next level for your classroom, right? And then what's the next level for our school? So there's no end to this, right? You're always becoming whatever the next level is for you. And so when you think about that process, my hope is that there's no limit to that. There's no parameter or boundary that says oh, I finally arrived, right? This is kind of you know, what we hope for in the T-TESS model too, where we're

supporting teachers and continue to grow. Yeah, there's maybe some days you're distinguished and some days you're proficient, but you're always moving in that direction. You're always growing in that direction. And so, if I make it about a test score then there is a limit. If I don't make it about a test score and I make it about growing and learning, then there's not a limit to that.

P1 wanted his teachers to focus on utilizing instructional time wisely. The entire class period should be used for learning, not managerial activities. He stated:

So what you have to do and what I tell my staff is, I said the most important thing we do every day at our school is the learning that happens between you and a student for 45 minutes at a time. That's your number one job, every single day that you walk in here. You don't turn in a 504 paperwork on time, or you don't do ... yeah, that stuff's going to happen. We'll work with that. But our number one commitment is the learning that happens between you and the student in the classroom, 45 minutes at a time. That's your number one job. And I make that very clear to them.

P1 held staff accountable for the campus priorities. He stated:

It's amazing because when you make that the priority, and then what you do is you try to tear down barriers that are keeping people from doing that, as a leader, then you slowly build that over time, right? So you build that priority over time. And once you establish that priority then it becomes a line in the sand for you, right? So staff members that don't come back to my campus, that don't get renewed on contract, that means that that number one priority was not happening.

If you're five minutes late to work, I can help you grow in that. Obviously, there's a limit to that, right? You have to know ... right? If you don't get your attendance done by third period, I can help you get better at that. We can set up a system for you to make sure you get that done. But the number one commitment of learning time, that's non-negotiable. So I guess one thing about being transformational is you have to know what your priority is, and you have to tear down every barrier of what's holding people back from that number one priority.

P1 discussed the importance of staff retention and creating a thriving environment for the staff to operate in as follows:

There things holding people back from performing at a high level, so do I have control as a leader to improve those things? Because your staff retention is very important. The more turnover you have in your staff, the harder it is to reach your ultimate goal. If you can reach continuity, and that all starts with who you hire, right, I hire people that I know can meet the expectation of this school. And then I nurture them and feed them, and I take down barriers that keep them from being at their best. [If] you do that over and over and over again over a 5-year period, you're going to have some success.

P1 conveyed how his campus moved to toward consistently receiving seven distinctions and how transformation happened on his campus as follows:

When you are able to show your team the impact that they have on students and you put that in front of them over and over and over again, and that's what you talk about and praise, and that's what you recognize in Professional Learning

Communities (PLC), that's when you give awards at a staff meeting, it's revolved around impact around the students, now teachers have efficacy, right? They can see, I'm having an impact on my kids. Look what they've done because of the work that I'm doing. That is transformational.

Principal 2. P2 leadership style was not affected by the accountability system.

She uses her influence as a leader to control the school environment as provided below:

With the state and federal accountability rules set in place one has to be knowledgeable of the academic playing field and rules that are set by the state.

With the knowledge of knowing what is to come a leader can control how the campus approaches state accountability. My leadership style is not affected by the rules and regulations that are set by the state; I just utilize the tools that are needed to be successful while maintaining my leadership tactics.

When something is transformed the original state of the element is modified not thrown completely out. In order to become a successful transformational leader one must understand the holistic system currently in place. Once the system is understood the people will gravitate towards the leader's vision of a better system that is transformed for the betterment of children. It is important to focus on the whole child and develop a system the child-focus, not state-focused.

Principal 3. P3 focused on providing a clear vision, creating staff's buy-in for monitoring processes, and leading for positive change that enabled the school to reach the goal of holistic student success. She stated:

When leading major change initiatives, I feel it is most important for the individuals affected by the change to believe in the vision. This is done by defining the change and communicating how the change is aligned to the goals of the campus. It is also important to address the pros and cons of the change so that the staff members will feel they have a voice. Staff members should be trained, and follow-up support should be provided to help with a successful implementation. Lastly, data should be used to monitor the change.

P3 maintained a focus on people. She stated that “people make the difference” in the school environment. P3 used measurable and attainable goals and celebrated the successful attainment of her campus’ goals as follows:

I know that I have reached my goal when the goal set has a measurable outcome and that outcome has been achieved. When my staff or students reach a goal, I try to recognize them and celebrate their success whenever possible. Depending on the situation, I will increase the goal to give the staff and students something to work towards.

Principal 4. P4 elaborated on the importance of keeping the campus focused on putting systems in place and “keeping the main thing the main thing” of student learning. P4 noted, “In doing so, you can bring about transformation on a campus in the era of accountability.” P4 described his leadership:

I do consider myself a transformational leader within the current accountability system because I am learning how to put systems in place to ensure that the majority of my time is spent on improving teaching and learning on my campus.

P4 expressed the need to focus on professional development to ensure a sustainable environment of success for the students and staff. He focuses on job-embedded training that provides educators with real-world practicums. He stated: The best training has been the opportunity to practice leadership without so much of the accountability as an administrative intern. This practice included watching the decision-making of my previous principal and trying it myself. It also included listening to how those principals talked to parents and other stakeholders in a way that built trust and community. Even when I made mistakes, I was able to learn from those mistakes without being penalized. Beyond the internship, I have had several years' experience in various leadership roles from the campus level to the central office level which has helped me in my current role.

P4 worked toward making a positive impact on the lives of students and transforming the system by focusing on teaching and learning. He stated:

I define transformational leadership as leadership that builds outstanding organizations and make the greatest possible impact on the lives of students. Transformational leaders must ensure that the majority of their time is spent on the main things: teaching and learning and that there are systems in place to address managerial duties.

Principal 5. P5 intentionally focused on providing a holistic and quality education for all students on campus. She stated:

In my experience setting high expectations for teacher and student performance in every area for every student has been integral in providing leadership that is

transformational. I believe that you must meet students where they are and bring them along with you to the destination or goal. That starts with first knowing where they are not just academically, but socially, emotionally, mentally and physically. Education is rooted in self-actualization. All other needs must be met in order for students to reach that level of functioning. So, in order to truly be transformational a leader must intend to educate students holistically understanding that what they desire for students academically occurs subsequently to the meeting of some of their other needs.

P5 expressed the need to make necessary, small changes that the team will embrace and execute. She stated:

In my opinion, transformational leadership is being a change agent which doesn't just mean coming into an environment and making sweeping changes but [also] presenting ideas and a vision that a team embraces and buys into. I have learned that in order to transform a campus, you first have to be reflective about your own vision, goals and leadership style to be able to make real transformations on a campus. When stakeholders see value and positive changes in you and themselves, they begin to grow and lead the change as well, causing breakthrough and transformation.

P5 recognized the pressures the system could have on leaders. However, she explained that "you have to persevere to produce the best learning environment for the teachers and students." P5 added:

Although difficult at times, I do consider myself a transformational leader. You have to walk a tight rope between instilling valuable and positive change while also demanding academic accountability. Even though it's hard, I don't know any other way to be. I ask myself constantly ... how do we yield the best academic results while still creating an environment where students love to come learn and teachers love to come instruct? I have tried to impact student learning with a vision of high expectations that staff members have taken on and begun to lead themselves in this current accountability system.

Overview of the Emergent Themes

This chapter reported the lived experiences of five principals in a Texas urban area. The qualitative interviews were conducted with five middle school principals from high achieving schools with various student demographics as evidenced by the Texas Assessment and Performance Report (TAPR) by the TEA. The study was designed to examine the transformational leadership by principals. The questions were designed to explore the perceptions the principals have about the accountability system and how their leadership behaviors affect the success of public schools.

The data reflected the following themes:

- Navigating the political environment;
- Clear vision and focus on main priorities;
- High expectations;
- Collaborative environment,
- Teamwork;

- Inspiring and motivating teachers and students; and
- Effective and ongoing professional development.

Chapter VI presents the introduction, summary of the study, summary of the findings, discussion of the findings, conclusions, implications for practice, recommendation for future research and concluding remarks.

CHAPTER VI

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of five principals and their perceptions concerning the state high stakes accountability system and how it may impact their transformational efforts for innovation instruction in ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child. This chapter begins with the summary of the study, which provides an overview of the problem, the purpose statement and research questions, a review of the study design, and a summary of the major findings. The conclusions section includes analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of findings from the study. The chapter contains the implications for principals and recommendations for future research of this phenomenon. The personal insights the researcher gained from this study appear in the concluding remarks in the final section of the chapter.

Summary of the Study

Brief overview of the problem. Leaders are vital to successful schools and have had to adjust to ensure the success of the students and teachers. School leaders are responsible for conveying and guiding attainment of a mission and shared vision by using both tactical and strategic thinking. They must know how to create a culture and environment that promotes success. As principals work to improve school climate

through vision sharing, they generate opportunities for enhancements to teacher effectiveness and student achievement and behavior (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014).

Effective leaders establish empowerment among their followers (Nielsen et al., 2008).

Furthermore, leaders must believe in their abilities and capabilities to generate transactions between their followers and themselves that ensure successful outcomes, such as students' academic achievement (Bandura, 1997). Effective leaders develop innovative climates in which teachers take risks and institute novel ideas and practices to improve student performance (Moolenaar, 2012). Such leadership capacity involves having the self-efficacy necessary to build trusting relationships with followers.

According to Maxwell (1995) building leadership capacity is part of the foundation to ensure sustainable success. Leaders must empower the individuals around them to build a highly effective organization. The practice of collaboration and dedication to growth increases the potential of both leaders and their organizational followers (Maxwell, 1995, 2018). In the age of accountability, transformational leaders need to be knowledgeable and skillful at navigating political waters (Nelson & Squires, 2017). Creativity in leadership is a challenge when a multitude of legislative mandates affect school leaders in the age of accountability. For instance, No Child Left Behind, instituted in January of 2002, produced a legal landslide of mandates as the federal government began to regulate public schools that received federal monies, such as Title I schools in which the numbers of students who were eligible for free lunch were over half of a school's population (Klein, 2015). Even though these mandates and accountability measures were intended to show how students benefited and achieved, they lacked

funding to support their institution. Without proper funding to support the mandates, schools leaders, teachers, and students suffered from decreased motivational levels (Moller, 2009).

Moreover, the accountability measures required school districts to allocate over \$1 billion in educational funding to address NCLB-related requirements, but none of this funding was found among regular annual budgets. Furthermore, during NCLB, testing requirements led to both parents and educators questioning the validity of testing as “a serious limitation of this form of accountability” (Moller, 2009, p. 5). The NCLB accountability era became a great burden to school districts by 2015 and led to the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act.

Mullen and Johnson (2006) argued that standardized testing is not equitable for children from low-income homes. In 2011, Hays showed that standardized testing can artificially create wider achievement gaps between students of diverse ethnicities, not reduce them. The effort to close the achievement gap between White middleclass and upperclass children and their counterparts who may be children of poverty or who are African American or Hispanic may have flaws; “achievement tests have served as a racist and class biased tool for the sorting and socialization process that capitalist and racist schools perform” (Mullen & Johnson, 2006, p. 93).

While school leaders aim to address their students’ needs regarding curriculum, their decisions are sometimes driven by the demands of the accountability system. This approach forces leaders to work with “predetermined ends” (Mullen & Johnson, 2006, p. 95) because of the forced requirement to hold all students to the same level of learning,

regardless of the context of challenging curriculum (Nieto, 2007). Therefore, ethical issues and concerns plague the use of standardized assessments as a form of equal access to education because the differences between children's abilities based on their home lives alone suggests standardization is not feasible (Mullen & Johnson, 2006).

Operationally, principals are leaders with major roles in the successes of their educational facilities. Principals fulfill complex roles by being tasked to guide their schools toward attaining some standard of academic progress annually and serve as primary actors charged with creating the visions for their local campuses. Daly (2009) noted principals must help their teachers collectively "develop shared understanding about the organization and its activities and goals that undergird a sense of purpose and vision" (p. 177). Being the visionary leader of a school is not an easy task and is complicated by standardized accountability processes.

Purpose statement and research questions. The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of principals and their perceptions concerning the state accountability system and how it may impact their transformational efforts in ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child. The phenomenological inquiry yielded the opportunity to compare administrators' in-depth perceptions of the accountability systems in Texas that may impact how they applied transformational leadership behaviors to their efforts to educate all children. Although many studies have focused on different aspects of transformational leadership, the practices of the school leaders affected by the accountability system when making decisions and attempting to transform schools despite state and federal demands need to

be understood in order to improve these systems. The design of the study enabled the exploration of the principals' views about how they lead their schools transformationally and attain the goal of educating all students under the regulations of state and federal accountability systems (Van Manen, 2014).

The primary research question (PRQ) guiding this phenomenological inquiry was: What perceptions about the state accountability system impact how school leaders work toward ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child? The two supporting research questions (RQ1 and RQ2) were:

RQ1. What are the principals' perceptions about the state's accountability system?

RQ2. What are the principals lived experiences with ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child through transformational leadership?

Review of the study design. The study was designed to examine transformational leadership by principals. The study explored the perceptions of principals regarding the accountability system and how their leadership behaviors affect the success of public-school organizations. The framework that guided the rationale for the study involved transformational leadership and the accountability model used in the state of Texas.

Participants. Principals of schools that administer the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness End of Course (STAAR EOC) exams and whose schools consistently showed high academic performance year-to-year in a Texas urban area according to TEA criteria for distinctions were selected to participate in the research. Marion and Gonzales (2014)

noted that principals improve with experience; therefore, estimating a time trend is meaningful. The researcher only considered principals with two or more years of principal experience, up to and including the 2017-2018 academic year, and whose schools produced academic distinctions within any of the following areas: (a) academic achievement in reading and English language arts; (b) academic achievement in mathematics; (c) academic achievement in science; (d) academic achievement in social studies; (e) top 25% in student progress; (f) top 25% in closing performance gaps; and (g) postsecondary readiness.

Data collection. The researcher employed a phenomenological approach to data collection. The researcher used care and thoughtfulness when making initial contact with the participants in order to establish strong interviewer-participant relationships (Seidman, 2006). First, principals were identified through use of publicly available databases at the state and school district levels. Next, an initial recruitment e-mail was sent to principals identified as potential participants including an introduction to the study and the researcher (see Appendix C). The e-mail included the purpose of the study and the time commitment needed from participants. Third, the researcher set up interviews with any principals who responded as interested in participating in an interview. The researcher presented an Informed Consent form for the participants to read and sign at the opening of the interview session (see Appendix D). The participants were advised that participation was voluntary and about the right to withdraw participation at any time. As well, the participants were informed that all individual names and school district names would remain confidential. A three-tier interview protocol was used to conduct

individual interviews (see Appendix B). The researcher developed clarifying questions for a second and third follow up meetings. One-hour interviews were conducted in-person with five participants at sites chosen by the participants.

Treatment of the data. Data analysis is a process that includes constructing one's own theory based on the data collected (Creswell, 2009). The data analysis plan included steps to easily organize the information garnered from data collection. Creswell (2009) further declared data analysis to be an “ongoing process [that] involves continuous reflection about the data, asking analytical questions, and writing memos throughout the study” (p. 184). Data analysis continued after the collection of data and was conducted concurrently during data collection (2009). Therefore, the data analysis for the individual interviews and reviews of artifacts was completed during and after data collection as part of a constant comparative analysis process.

Ethical Consideration. According to Walker (2007), phenomenology is acknowledged as a suitable methodology for gaining insight into the essence or structure of the lived experience. Therefore, ethical consideration and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given to all participants (Lund et al., 2016). Van Manen (2014) promoted describing the experiences of the participants in the most faithful way possible as the most critical ethical obligation of the qualitative researcher. Therefore, the participants' identities and their schools' identities were masked with pseudonyms, such as generic use of middle school 1 corresponding with principal 1, middle school 2 corresponding with principal 2, through middle school 5 corresponding with principal 5.

Summary of the Findings

The study was designed to examine transformational leadership by principals. The study explored the perceptions of the principals about the accountability system and how their leadership behaviors affect the success of their public-school organizations. The framework that guided the rationale for the study involved transformational leadership and the accountability model used in the state of Texas.

The Primary Research Question findings included district support plays a vital role in the success of the campus and communicating and keeping a clear focus on the main priorities of the school are valuable parts of the process of ensuring continued success with providing a holistic and quality education for every child.

Discussions of their perceptions about the state's accountability system showed that principals had an overall negative perception of the accountability system but understood the spirit of the system as designed to ensure every child received an education without being overlooked. Two themes emerged from this data that answered the research question: (a) Setting high expectations to meet the needs of every child is more important than focusing on the accountability system; (b) Transformation happens when there are no limits.

Primary Research Question. The Primary Research Question (What perceptions about the state accountability system impact how school leaders work toward ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child?) involved investigating the perceptions about the state accountability system impact on school leaders work toward ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child. Each principal acknowledged the impact

the political system has on student success and decision making. The Primary Research Question findings included district support plays a vital role in the success of the campus and communicating and keeping a clear focus on the main priorities of the school are valuable parts of the process of ensuring continued success with providing a holistic and quality education for every child.

Supporting Research Question 1. The findings from research question one provided what the principals' perceptions about the state's accountability system were. Discussions of their perceptions about the state's accountability system showed that principals had an overall negative perception of the accountability system but understood the spirit of the system as designed to ensure every child received an education without being overlooked. Two themes emerged from this data that answered the research question: (a) Setting high expectations to meet the needs of every child is more important than focusing on the accountability system and (b) Transformation happens when there are no limits.

Supporting Research Question 2. The findings from research question two provided what are the principals lived experiences with ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child through transformational leadership. Discussions established the principals' lived experiences with ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child through transformational leadership. The principals viewed themselves as transformational leaders in the era of accountability. Four emerging themes from the analyzed data were: (a) teamwork is necessary; (b) creating a collaborative environment aids in continued student success; (c) the need for inspiring and motivating teachers and

students, and (d) having effective and on-going professional development is critical to sustaining student success.

Discussion of the Findings

The principals viewed themselves as transformational leaders in the era of accountability. Four emerging themes from the data that answered the research question: (a) teamwork is necessary; (b) creating a collaborative environment aids in continued student success; (c) the need for inspiring and motivating teachers and students, and (d) having effective and on-going professional development is critical to sustaining student success.

Navigating the political environment. Working in a school district that has a focus on student achievement, not student testing, creates a fertile environment for principals to lead their staff and students. The principal must understand the politics of the district in which he or she works and know how to navigate through the system to ensure the focus is on student learning and meeting the holistic needs of every child. A savvy principal can provide transformational leadership by keeping a clear focus on the main thing of a holistic, quality education for every child.

P1. "Politics doesn't play a huge role because I have a lot of support from the school board, from my supervisors, the assistant superintendent, superintendent."

P2. "They shield me from state and federal politics because their focus is on student learning. They offer the wisdom and assistance."

P3. "I try to steer away from politics when making decisions because often times politics involve personal feelings."

P4. “I have experienced both ends of the spectrum as it relates to the involvement of politics in my day-to-day work... “You have to walk a tight rope between instilling valuable and positive change while also demanding academic accountability.”

P5. “I believe that stakeholder perceptions about the accountability system impact the focus of our priority in many areas when working to ensure a holistic and quality education for every child.”

Clear vision and focus on main priorities. The principal must ensure that the vision for school success is clear so that the entire campus focuses on the main priorities for assuring the academic success of every student. The vision must be clearly communicated, and the staff held accountable and reminded to keep their focus on the main priorities of the campus. By keeping priorities on student learning and quality instruction, principals make sure their students succeed beyond the measures of any state testing.

P1. “So what you have to do and what I tell my staff is, I said the most important thing we do every day at our school is the learning that happens between you and a student for 45 minutes at a time.”

P2. “It is important to focus on the whole child and develop a system the child-focus, not state-focused.”

P3 focused her attention on leading organizational change creating an open environment for exchanging ideas geared toward student success. “Leading organizational change through systems ... making with the end goal being of collective benefit rather than individual good.”

P4 elaborated on the importance of keeping the campus focused on putting systems in place and “keeping the main thing the main thing” of student learning. P4 noted, “In doing so, you can bring about transformation on a campus in the era of accountability.”

P5. “I believe in measuring students’ learning and teachers’ effectiveness.”

High expectations. Transformational leaders have high expectations for the staff and students. The staff and students will rise to the expectations of the building principal. High expectations come with accountability. Leaders must understand the importance of holding individuals accountable when expectations are not met. High expectations are established through a collaborative process. Everyone must hold each other accountable to ensure the success of the organization.

P1. “It’s not like one thing. You’re going to learn that probably, right? I mean, we have a staff profile, and we team up when we hire people because I’m just one component of holding people accountable to excellence.”

P2. “I recently started reading *Culturize* by Jimmy Casas. He states, “We cannot allow average to become our standard.” So, even after a goal is accomplished, I start to look for additional areas for improvement. The goal is to chase perfection, while knowing we will not obtain it.”

P3. “It is also important to have high expectations and not let important processes or expectations slip by or go unaddressed.”

P4. “Teachers must be guided through this process of continuous improvement on a regular basis.”

P5. "...setting high expectations for teacher and student performance in every area for every student has been integral in providing leadership that is transformational."

Collaborative environment. Effective leaders of sustainable and high performing campuses create collaborative environments. Democratic decision-making processes and effective systems are established within the school. Students feel a sense of ownership in creating an environment that will ensure a holistic and quality education.

P1. "So, you have to have the open door policy and you have to have key parents that you're like, it's okay to email and call me even if you don't think it's a big deal."

P2. "Collaboration is key. You must involve the students in their own learning to keep them engage. Also it makes their learning meaningful."

P3. "As a leader, I believe in providing support for my staff and keeping the lines of communication open so that employees feel free to discuss issues with me."

P4. "We do it together. It is important to stick together as a staff and work through issues that are contrary to student success."

P5. "When stakeholders see value and positive changes in you and themselves, they begin to grow and lead the change as well, causing breakthrough and transformation."

Teamwork. Teamwork is a key element of success on a campus because working together, you achieve more. When teachers and administrators work collaboratively as a team, they create environments conducive to learning and student growth. Teamwork is an essential part of the process to improving and sustaining student success.

P1. “You know, we scored a 98 on that. That’s something really to be proud of, that we had staff attentive enough and had systems that helped them to be attentive enough that they had that big of an impact on student growth, that they helped those kids fill in those gaps.”

P2. “We continue to work together to achieve greatness in our school.”

P3. P3 maintained a focus on people. She stated that “people make the difference” in the school environment.” “It is also important to address the pros and cons of the change so that the staff members will feel they have a voice.”

P4. “We have to work together as a team to get the job done.”

P5. “In my opinion, transformational leadership is being a change agent which doesn’t just mean coming into an environment and making sweeping changes but [also] presenting ideas and a vision that a team embraces and buys into.”

Inspiring and motivating teachers and students. Inspiring teachers and students to strive for excellence is an important part of transforming an environment. Transformational leaders understand the importance of inspiring others to do things and to make things happen. When individuals are inspired and motivated, the morale of the campus is high, which creates a productive environment and excellent school climate for achievement. A positive environment has a greater impact on student learning according to the participating principals.

P1. “One of the things that I do is I don’t spend a lot of time talking about the test. I spend a lot of time talking about learning. I spend a lot of time talking about being

effective. So, our hashtag, if you will, I think every campus probably has one at this point, but ours is called Next Level.”

P2. “High-levels of success motivate others around you to be successful and it’s up to you as a leader to be consistent and continue to evolve.”

P3. “When my staff or students reach a goal, I try to recognize them and celebrate their success whenever possible.”

P4. “Working with people, understanding people and motivating people will propel an organization forward.”

P5. “Even though it’s hard, I don’t know any other way to be. I ask myself constantly ... how to we yield the best academic results while still creating an environment where students love to come learn and teachers love to come instruct?”

Effective and on-going professional development. On-going professional development is a vital part of a successful and productive organization. Leaders must understand the importance of developing self. Self-development is critical to staying abreast with the latest research about effective educational practices.

P1. “When you are able to show your team the impact that they have on students and you put that in front of them over and over and over again, and that’s what you talk about and praise, and that’s what you recognize in Professional Learning Communities (PLC)...”

P2. “We teach and learn from each other.”

P3. “Staff members should be trained, and follow-up support should be provided to help with a successful implementation.”

P4. “P4 expressed the need to focus on professional development to ensure a sustainable environment of success for the students and staff. He focuses on job-embedded training that provides educators with real-world practicums.”

P5. “It is done through a process of continuous improvement and professional learning.”

Conclusion to the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry is to explore the lived experiences of principals and their perceptions concerning the state accountability system and how it may impact their transformational efforts in ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child. Leading a school is a complex job. School leadership makes a difference. The role of the school leader, as an administrator of a school or district, is complex and relies upon the varied skills, educational experience, and background of the individual who pursues the leadership position.

Transformational leadership. Within education, transformation cannot occur unless school participants engage in critique and critical study, even while also believing that change can occur (Oreg & Berson, 2011). Transformational leaders can continue to transform schools within the era of accountability by consistently reflecting and incorporating the practices that are known to have produced an environment that supports providing students with a holistic and quality education. The study identified key components of successful transformational leadership practices, perceptions and behaviors that could be used by school leaders.

The transformational leader must “allow all voices and arguments to be heard regardless of race, class, and gender” (Quantz et al., p. 97). All principals expressed the importance of focusing on the whole child and making decisions that are in the best interest of children. Political expedience is not the driving force in the school environment. It is only a small part of the educational process. Transformational leaders are not limited by the accountability system. They understand that transformation has no limits and testing has limits.

Leading in high stakes accountability. Within education, transformation cannot occur unless school participants engage in critique and critical study, even while also believing that change can occur (Oreg & Berson, 2011). The transformational leader must “allow all voices and arguments to be heard regardless of race, class, and gender” (Quantz, et al., p. 97). Transformational leaders are known to exemplify authentic leadership practices and ethics of leadership and responds to many of the concerns about the lack of honesty and integrity in leadership (Duignan, 2014).

Leading innovations for instruction. Teachers have applied research to their classroom activities for many years and thrived on using several data sources to explore their instructional practices (Brown & Zang, 2016). Teachers need to be able to access the right types of research to support their instructional practices which requires them to be supported by competent administrators who are well-versed in applying research to the classroom. Furthermore, as advocated by Glen et al. (2017) teacher and staff leadership is equally important because all members on a school’s team play crucial roles in improving instructional practices for increasing student achievement.

Holistic and whole child instruction. Student underachievement is not an isolated situation, suggesting teachers lack empowerment to approach student learning holistically (Wiggan & Watson, 2016). Teaching the whole child requires cultural responsiveness to create an environment that would meet the needs of every child. When students know that you care about them as a human being first, they are more open to learning and building relationships that foster authentic learning in the classroom. The development of the curriculum is an important part of the process. A multicultural curriculum approach, anti-racism perspective, and valuing of diversity to teach the whole child will ensure high student achievement (Wiggan & Watson, 2016).

Implications for Practice

School leaders continue to make difficult decisions and overcome significant challenges in their pursuit of serving all children in the public education system. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) established student and teacher accountability guidelines for measuring student achievement through a system of rewards and sanctions. NCLB's nearly 15-years as law formed the age of high-stakes accountability, during which testing and measurable outcomes guided most aspects of the teaching and learning process in K-12 schools, and during this period, the federal government prescribed how measurements would be made and reported (Sherman & Grogan, 2003).

At the end of 2015, NCLB became obsolete as ESSA was signed into law. ESSA offered greater control over choosing and implementing accountability processes and measures to the states. However, in Texas, the accountability system has been ever-

changing due to the state's legislature meeting every two years and the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2017) adjusting its regulations annually. The TEA made several changes to the accountability system since the inception of NCLB and continues to redefine its regulations for accountability during the new ESSA era. The adjustments to accountability have generated considerable challenges for public school administrators.

Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the lived experiences of transformational principal leaders at high achieving schools that are providing a holistic and quality education. Based on the conclusions of the findings of this study, the researcher offers the following suggestions and implications for principals:

1. School districts need to focus on student learning and providing students with a holistic and quality education. Transformational leadership should be encouraged to ensure an effective educational environment that focuses on the whole child, not one snapshot of the year from one single day.
2. School leaders are encouraged to present a clear vision that is well communicated to all stakeholders. The vision should always guide the staff and keep them focused on their main priorities. The principal can always be a living example and guide the staff and students to keep their focus on the priorities of the campus.
3. School leaders are encouraged to establish a collaborative environment that fosters teamwork and high expectations. These leaders need to operate under democratic processes that involve students who can also make decisions about their learning and success. By doing so, inclusive school leaders create

motivating environments for inspiring their students and staff to achieve excellence.

4. School districts need to continue offering opportunities for professional development and collaboration among administrators. The sharing of ideas among effective leaders is a key component of establishing systems to produce success within the school. Transformational leaders who are life-long learners are prepared to educate the public school students of today and the future.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to five middle principals in a Texas urban area in highly-rated schools with seven of seven Texas Education Agency designated distinctions for student success and their own lived experiences. The researcher gained insight throughout the process of investigating the lived experiences of these principals. However, the conclusions drawn from this study cannot be generalized over a larger population or across state lines. Therefore, additional research is recommended in order to have a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

The study examined the principals' perceptions of their own leadership behaviors. Therefore, the data shows only the principals' perspectives. The researcher encourages future studies to be done on a larger number of principals with diverse backgrounds at the high school and elementary levels. Furthermore, because this study specifically focused on schools with three consecutive years of success in all areas of student achievement

identified by the Texas Education Agency, it did not examine other various measures of student success identified by other organizations.

Concluding Remarks

The principals gave of their time to participate in this study. The researcher is thankful for the principals' honesty, and openness. Hopefully, this study could be used by various educational practitioners to provide a holistic education for every child. We want students to have self-sustaining success and to leave a lasting legacy. It is important for leaders to ensure that transformation is happening in every classroom, every day. The researcher looks forward to implementing these practices and behaviors throughout the district with the leadership team in which he serves as superintendent.

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APPENDIX A

Example of Communication to Secure Permission from the School District

SAMPLE SUPERINTENDENT'S LETTER

February 4, 2019

XXXX

Superintendent
XXXX Independent School District
XXXX, Texas

Dear XXXX,

My name is Elijah Granger, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership at Stephen F. Austin State University. The purpose of this letter is to solicit your support and cooperation in my dissertation study, which is a phenomenological inquiry of principals transformational leadership. The purpose of this inquiry is to identify phenomenological practices being lived and implemented by principals to produce transformational results in the era of accountability.

I am requesting your permission to interview a principal in your district for the inquiry. This research project is a qualitative inquiry that includes collection of data via interviews. The interviews for the administrators will be conducted at their convenience and are expected to last 30-60 minutes.

All interview data collected will be held in strict confidence. To ensure confidentiality, the school and participants will be identified with a special code, respectively, in the final documentation of the study. Names of school sites and participants will not be used in the study. Transcripts of the interviews will be available in order for participants to confirm the information provided.

If you choose to consent to the participation of your teachers and administrators in the qualitative research, please sign below. If you have any questions or require clarifications, please contact me at 972-567-9882 or Dr. Patrick Jenlink, chairman of the dissertation committee, at 936-468-1756. Any concerns with this research may be directed to the office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (936) 468-6606.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Elijah Granger
Doctoral Candidate

Pauline M. Sampson, Ph.D..
Chair, Dissertation Committee

Department of Secondary Education and
Educational Leadership
College of Education
Stephen F. Austin State University
P. O. Box 13018
Nacogdoches, TX 75962
972-567-9882

Department of Secondary Education
and Educational Leadership
College of Education
Stephen F. Austin State University
P. O. Box 13018
Nacogdoches, TX 75962
936-468-2908

I consent for administrators to participate in the study by meeting with the researcher in interview sessions. I understand that all responses, schools, and the school district will remain confidential through the use of a coding system, and the purpose of this inquiry is to identify phenomenological practices being lived and implemented by principals to produce transformational results in the era of accountability.

Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent

Date

Person obtaining consent

Date

Note: The participant will receive a copy of this letter for his/her information, and the researcher will keep a signed copy in his files.

APPENDIX B

Interview Instrument Protocol

Level 1 Interview:

Level one interviews will begin with introductions between the participant and the researcher. The researcher will briefly explain his role, why this study is being done, and provide a brief summary of his background. The researcher will secure a signed Informed Consent form for each participant. The researcher will create a trust relationship with each participant, on a personal level, through casual conversation, to create a comfortable and trusting setting.

Example questions:

1. How do you define transformational leadership?
2. What are your perceptions about the state and federal accountability system in relation to ensuring a holistic and quality education for every child?
3. Do you consider yourself a transformational leader within the current accountability system? Why or Why not?
4. What training, if any, have you received to prepare you for the leadership role you are currently in?
5. In leading major change initiatives, what are different ways that you have empowered others to envision, adapt, and embrace change?
6. Can you think of a specific time that one of your projects hit a roadblock? How did you react? What did you do to solve issue and overcome the roadblock?
7. What role does *politics* play in your day-to-day decisions or your overall leadership in general?
8. Do you think your leadership approach would differ if you were in a different industry other than education?
9. How do state and federal accountability rules affect your leadership style or behaviors?
10. What role do stakeholders, such as parents and community, play in your day-to-day leadership?
11. What role do central office and other non-campus personnel play in your day-to-day leadership?
12. When do you know you have reached your goals? What do you do when that happens?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience as a leader of a high performing school?
14. What recommendations do you for professional development programs seeking to produce effective school leaders?

Level Two Interview:

Level two interviews will begin with a review of the member check provided in the interim between level one and two. Based on the analysis of the data collected in the level one interviews, questions will be derived for further investigation or clarification.

1. Every child" is very broad, therefore, do you also have perceptions about the state and federal accountability system in relation to ensuring a holistic and quality education for a specific demographic student group? If so, which one(s)?
2. If you were not subject to the currently accountability system, would you consider yourself a transformational leader?
3. How have your formal education, that is required as a prerequisite for your current leadership role, prepared you for this role?
4. : How do you choose which people or roles within the organization to empower in order to envision, adapt, and embrace change?
5. Were there any roadblocks you anticipated before setting out on a particular leadership task or goal? If yes, did you predetermine how it would be addressed when occurring or did it change the plan altogether?
6. Have the particular roadblock you mentioned resurfaced in any manner? If so, did your approach to solve the issue differ from the first time, if so how? If not, why did you not take another approach?
7. Have you every worked in a leadership role in another industry? If so, how specifically did your approach differ?
8. Have you ever led a campus that was not successful? If so, what is the difference?
9. Are there other school leaders, of whom you are aware, that embodies the "recommendations" you offered?

Level Three Interview:

As required for saturation of data, questions will be formulated based on analysis of interview responses for level two. Level three interviews will begin with a review of the member check provided in the interim between level two and three. Again, based on the analysis of the data collected in the level two interviews, questions will be derived for further investigation or clarification.

1. What other type of successful leadership styles, other than transformations, do you think exist in education?
2. Would your perceptions about the state and federal accountability system in relation to ensuring a holistic and quality education for students differ if you had a different student demographic than the one you currently serve?
3. [IF THE PARTICIPANT ANSWERED YES TO THE ORIGINAL QUESTION] Would you still consider yourself a transformational leader within the current accountability system if you had a different student demographic than the one you currently serve? Why or why not?
4. Are there any books, publications, or regularly occurring training (i.e. educational conferences) that you feel provides quality ongoing professional development for you in your current role?

5. Do certain "political" issues play more of a role in your day-to-day decisions or your overall leadership in general than others? If so, which ones and why?
6. Do certain community organizations or specific parents/parent groups play more of a role than others. Why?
7. Are there people or roles within the organization that you intentionally do not choose to empower in order to envision, adapt, and embrace change? If so, why those individuals or roles?
8. Do non-instructional campus staff (i.e. secretaries, custodians, etc.) play in your day-to-day leadership?
9. What do you do when you do not reach your goals?
10. Have you ever worked on a campus that was unsuccessful in a role other than an official leader (i.e. teacher, instructional aide, etc.)

APPENDIX C

Example Participant Recruitment E-mail

Dear Prospective Administrator Interviewee:

My name is Elijah Granger, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership, College of Education, Stephen F. Austin State University. For my dissertation, I am conducting a phenomenological inquiry of principals transformational leadership. Please accept this invitation to participate in the study.

Your participation in this research inquiry will involve one-hour interviews. The questions will be open ended in nature and will focus primarily on the phenomenological practices of transformational principals. Confidentiality of responses will be respected at all times.

All data collected will be held in strict confidence. The school and participants will be identified with a special code in the final documentation of the study. Names of school sites and participants will not be used.

If you choose to participate, please sign and return the attached Agreement to Participate. If you need clarification or have questions regarding the study, please feel free to call me at 972-567-9882 or Dr. Patrick M. Jenlink, chairman of the dissertation committee, at 936-468-1756. Any concerns with this research may be directed to the office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (936) 468-6606.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Elijah Granger
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Secondary Education and
Educational Leadership
College of Education
Stephen F. Austin State University
P. O. Box 13018
Nacogdoches, TX 75962
903-759-1818

Pauline M. Sampson, Ph.D.
Chair, Dissertation Committee
Department of Secondary Education
and Educational Leadership
College of Education
Stephen F. Austin State University
P. O. Box 13018
Nacogdoches, TX 75962
936-468-2908

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

Agreement to Participate

in

ENSURING A HOLISTIC AND QUALITY EDUCATION FOR EVERY CHILD:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY OF PRINCIPALS

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

I consent to participate in the study by meeting with the researcher in interview sessions. I understand that all responses, schools, and the school district will remain confidential through the use of a coding system, and the purpose of this inquiry is to identify phenomenological practices being lived and implemented by principals to produce transformational results in the era of accountability. I am available the following dates/times for participation in an interview.

Date and Time Available for Interview _____

Position/Number of Years in Position _____

Administrator Participant

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Note: The participant will receive a copy of this letter for his/her information, and the researcher will keep a signed copy in his files.

APPENDIX E

Balanced Leadership Framework Responsibilities, Average r , and Associated Practices

| Responsibilities | Avg r | Practices Associated with Responsibilities |
|--------------------|---------|--|
| Affirmation | .19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematically and fairly recognizes and celebrates accomplishments of teachers and staff • Systematically and fairly recognizes and celebrates accomplishments of students • Systematically and fairly acknowledges failures and celebrates accomplishments of the school |
| Change agent | .25 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consciously challenges the status quo • Is comfortable leading change initiatives with uncertain outcomes • Systematically considers new and better ways of doing things |
| Communication | .23 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is easily accessible to teachers and staff • Develops effective means for teachers and staff to communicate with one another • Maintains open and effective lines of communication with teachers and staff |
| Contingent rewards | .24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes individuals who excel • Uses performance vs. seniority as the primary criterion for reward and advancement • Uses hard work and results as the basis for reward and recognition |
| Culture | .25 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes cooperation among teachers and staff • Promotes a sense of well-being • Promotes cohesion among teachers and staff • Develops an understanding of purpose • Develops a shared vision of what the school could be like |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|---|
| Curriculum, instruction, assessment | .20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is involved with teachers in designing curricular activities and addressing instructional issues in their classrooms. • Is involved with teachers to address assessment issues |
| Discipline | .27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protects instructional time from interruptions • Protects/shelters teachers from distractions |
| Flexibility | .28 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is comfortable with major changes in how things are done • Encourages people to express opinions that may be contrary to those held by individuals in positions of authority • Adapts leadership style to needs of specific situations • Can be directive or non-directive as the situation warrants |
| Focus | .24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes high, concrete goals and the expectation that all students will meet them • Establishes high, concrete goals for all curricula, instruction, and assessment • Establishes high, concrete goals for the general functioning of the school • Keeps everyone's attention focused on established goals |
| Ideas/beliefs | .22 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds strong professional ideals and beliefs about schooling, teaching, and learning • Shares ideals and beliefs about schooling, teaching, and learning with teachers, staff, and parents • Demonstrates behaviors that are consistent with ideals and beliefs |
| Input | .25 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides opportunities for input from teachers and staff on all important decisions • Provides opportunities for teachers and staff to be involved in policy development • Involves the school leadership team in decision making |
| Intellectual stimulation | .24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stays informed about current research and theory regarding effective schooling • Continually exposes teachers and staff to cutting-edge ideas about how to be |

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| | | <p>effective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematically engages teachers and staff in discussions about current research and theory • Continually involves teachers and staff in reading articles and books about effective practices |
| Knowledge of curriculum, instruction assessment | .25 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is knowledgeable about curriculum and instructional practices • Is knowledgeable about assessment practices • Provides conceptual guidance for teachers regarding effective classroom practice |
| Monitors/evaluates | .27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the curriculum • Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of instruction • Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of assessment |
| Optimizer | .20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspires teachers and staff to accomplish things that might seem beyond their grasp • Portrays a positive attitude about the ability of teachers and staff to accomplish substantial things • Is a driving force behind major initiatives |
| Order | .25 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides and enforces clear structures, rules, and procedures for teachers, staff, and students • Establishes routines regarding the running of the school that teachers and staff understand and follow |
| Outreach | .27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures that the school is in compliance with district and state mandates • Advocates on behalf of the school in the community • Interacts with parents in ways that enhance their support for the school • Ensures that the central office is aware of the school's accomplishments |
| Relationship | .18 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remains aware of personal needs of teachers and staff • Maintains personal relationships with teachers and staff • Is informed about significant personal issues in the lives of teachers and staff • Acknowledges significant events in the lives |

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| | | of teachers and staff |
| Resources | .25 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures that teachers and staff have necessary materials and equipment • Ensures that teachers have necessary professional development opportunities that directly enhance their teaching |
| Situational awareness | .33 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is aware of informal groups and relationships among teachers and staff • Is aware of issues in the school that have not surfaced but could create discord • Can predict what could go wrong from day to day |
| Visibility | .20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes systematic and frequent visits to classrooms • Is highly visible around the school • Has frequent contact with students |

Note:

The r correlations reported in this table were derived from McREL's leadership

meta-analysis.

VITA

Elijah Granger graduated from Lufkin High School in 1992. He attended Angelina College, and received an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Computer Information Systems in 1997. After attending Angelina College, he continued his education and received a B.S. in Agriculture at Prairie View A&M University in 2002. He began teaching at Middle School Science in Lufkin Independent School District and continued working on a Master of Education at Prairie View A&M, which was conferred in 2004. He continued his education at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU) and obtained his Superintendent Certification in 2006. While attending SFASU, he was promoted to assistant principal and interim principal, at Nacogdoches High School. He worked as an Intermediate, Middle & High School Principal in various districts. He later became an Exec. Director and Asst. Supt. in the Lancaster Independent School District. He returned to Stephen F. Austin State University to pursue his Doctorate in Education in Educational Leadership in 2014. Currently, he serves as the Superintendent of Schools in Lancaster Independent School District.

Permanent Address: 955 Ten Mile Rd., Duncanville, Texas 77049

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Typist: Elijah Granger