THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SUCCESSFUL PRINCIPALS:

ADULT LEARNING AND LEADING

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the amazing women in my life...I am blessed beyond words to have you in my world. You have loved me unconditionally, supported me without cause, and challenged me to be a better person every day. There are many special people included here, I would not be the person that I am without the love and support of each of you. I am a better person because you are in my life. I love you each dearly and I hope that I have made you proud! We did it!

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the reasons why principals from all levels, elementary, middle, and high school, seek out new learning and professional growth. This study sought to gain a better understanding of why school leaders continue to grow, as well as how they know when there is a need for additional learning. In particular, the research focused on the self-directed learning of the school leader and the necessary learning that must take place in order for leaders to stay abreast of new requirements and practices. The study focused on self-directed learning as well as formal and informal professional development.

In order for the researcher to gain a clear understanding of the types of professional development used by the participants, the reasons for learning and how the learning impacted those they serve. The researcher used a grounded theory approach based on an epistemology of constructionism. The participants in this study included four elementary, four middle, and four high school principals. There were two men and two women from each level. The participants were chosen by a panel of central office leaders and college professors based on their knowledge of the participants' work.

Each participant was interviewed twice and invited to share a learning artifact that represented his/her continual professional growth. Data were collected from the interviews. These school leaders demonstrated the need for continuous learning in order to be successful as a school leader. Findings, through intensive analysis of each participants interview, demonstrated how school leaders' personal learning has had an

impact on those around them. Through the study the participants shared how important self-directed learning is to the success of a school administrator. The participants demonstrated the importance of staying abreast of the ever changing role of the principal as well as having a clear understanding of their own personal needs as a leader to continue to learn when needed, thus being a truly reflective administrator as well as a life-long learner. This study demonstrates the importance of being a reflective leader, how school leaders engage in self-directed learning through formal and informal professional development and how the new learning of school leaders has an exponential impact on those that they serve.

I. INTRODUCTION

The job of principal is one of the most difficult and diverse in schools today.

Many dream of the day when they will become a principal, but few realize the reality of

the position. The responsibilities of the principal are constantly being challenged and

changed. Each new initiative, whether state or federal, comes with new roles and

responsibilities for which leaders may or may not be prepared. Many principals today are

of retirement age and the current job of the principal is very different from the work of

the principal in days past. Today's leaders are presented with more diversity among

student populations than ever before, along with greater accountability requirements and

stiffer consequences for not meeting these requirements. These and numerous other

demands have tasked today's principal to do a job that has challenges and expectations

for which many are not prepared (Davila, 2009). Having been in the school

administration business for over a decade, I personally have seen the job change in many

ways, and it continues to evolve, adding new dimensions and responsibilities. As a

leader, I often ask myself, "do I have the skills to do this?"

I have had a diverse career. I have served as an administrator at both the

elementary and secondary levels. I have also worked at the central office level,

mentoring principals and providing professional development to school leaders. These

opportunities have allowed me to have a unique perspective from which to view the

spectrum of school leadership. Leaders come with many different skills and

understandings of the roles and responsibilities of a school-based administrator. I love

the saying "you do not know what you do not know." This is especially true of school

leaders. When entering the world of school leadership, leaders come with skills that were

taught in their preparation programs as well as skills that have been acquired on the job. But, because of the nature of the job, the skill set needed to be successful is constantly changing. How leaders tackle this new learning is interesting. Learning as a leader cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach, especially with the various roles that administrators currently must manage (Mathews & Crow, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

The role of the principal is ever changing. School leaders must be able to adjust to the changes occurring around them, from the various accountability systems to the changing demographics of the students they serve. In order for leaders to be successful it is imperative they adjust the way they view their own work and responsibilities (Davila, 2009). The leadership role haas a direct impact on a school and the success of the students and adults in the building. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016) address these ever changing roles and look at the role of the principal through several lenses. They describe the principal's role as focused around the following areas: (a) mission, vision, and core values; (b) ethics and professional norms; (c) equity and cultural responsiveness; (d) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (e) community of care and support for students; (f) professional capacity of school personnel; (g) professional community for teachers and staff; (h) meaningful engagement of families and community; (i) operations and management; and (j) school improvement. Each of these roles involves a great many skills and tools. In order for principals to continue to lead with success, it is important that they continue to learn in order to navigate their changing roles and responsibilities.

There is limited research that addresses the principal as a learner. There is however, a great deal of information on what the principal needs to know with little on how to go about learning these new roles and skills. It is my hope that this research has helped to develop a better understanding of the types of professional development administrators engage in as well as what motivates them to engage in additional learning. By conducting this research, I hope to develop a theory on which roles and skills leaders perceive the need to grow in as well as the kinds of learning opportunities campus-based administrators seek out.

Purpose of the Study

Principals seek knowledge just like all other adult learners. Adult learning research highlights the fact that adults bring to their own learning a distinct motivation and a clear purpose for participating in learning experiences (Brookfield, 2004). There is also a great deal of research around principal preparation programs. Although preparation programs are always changing to try to meet the needs of the principal of today, I would argue that the change is too slow compared to the emerging needs and responsibilities of principals. The question that challenged me and many of my colleagues is, "where do we go to learn the skills that we may or may not have naturally?" Or, "where do we go to learn more about the new roles and responsibilities that the job continues to require of us?"

In my experience, too often school principals are thrown into professional development designed for teachers. Campus administrators are grouped together and presented professional development from *the district* with a one-size-fits-all approach. Just like teachers, school leaders want to have a say in what is considered relevant and

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valuable. We all bring our own interests, skills and talents to the learning experience, thus making one-size-fits-all ineffective (Newbie & Cannon, 2013).

The purpose of this study, was to investigate how school leaders determine that they have a specific need to learn something new, to whom principals turn in order to be supported in their learning, and what types of experiences they engage in to learn more about leadership.

Research Question

How do successful principals conceptualize authentic professional development? In particular, (a) how do successful principals assess their own professional needs; (b) in what types of meaningful professional development activities do they engage; (c) from whom do they seek support for their professional development; and (d) in what ways do they perceive their professional development as impacting teacher, school, community and student development?

Conceptual Framework

In order to make meaning of my research I began by viewing the principal as an adult learner. Through this lens, I sought to discover how leaders determine what they need to learn about the ever-changing role of the principal. Finally, I looked at the types of learning experience administrators seek out. I see this learning process as cyclical rather than linear. The principal could be involved in many different cycles of learning at a given time that would result in different learning experiences. These components together constituted the conceptual framework for this research. Figure 1 depicts the study's conceptual framework.
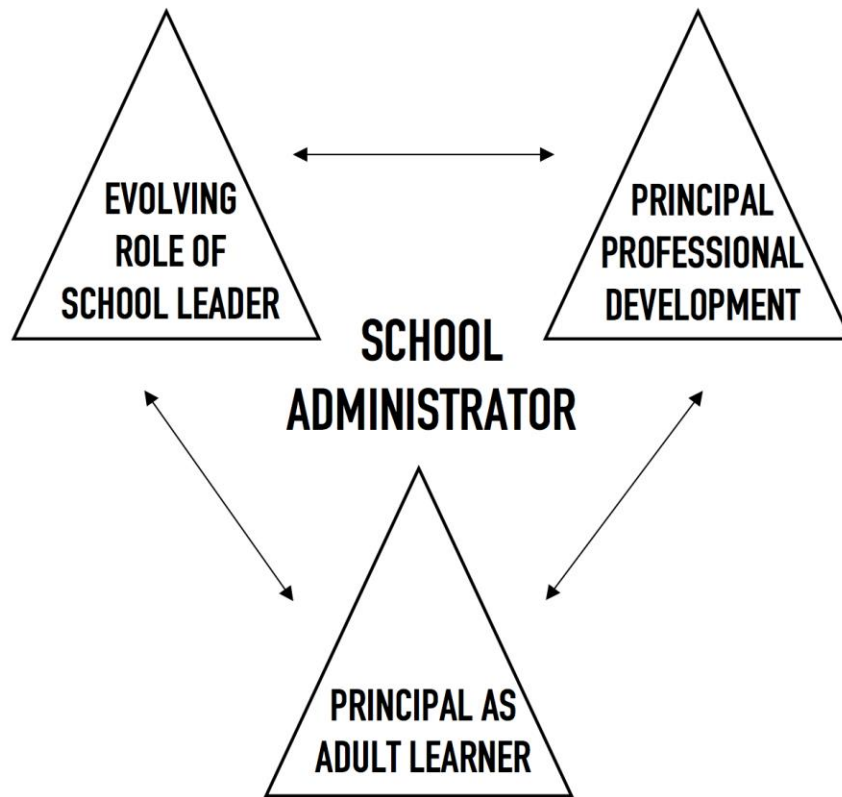
Figure 1. The study's conceptual framework.

The Principal as Adult Learner

Cyril Houle (1961), as cited in Long, (2004) was one of the early scholars who examined adults as learners. He concluded there are primarily three different orientations or motivations for adult learning. The first motivation is goal-oriented: adults seek learning for immediate needs. The second motivation is activity-oriented: adults take part in an activity for reasons other than a desire to learn. Adults seek out educational experiences for the social contact that they gain by participating in these educational opportunities. Finally, motivation can be learning-oriented: adults seek learning experiences for the sake of learning itself and the knowledge that can be acquired. Houle (1961) suggests that learners can have a combination of orientations and motivations for

learning; however, a single orientation is usually the primary motivational factor (Long, 2004; Schwandt, 2008). Others have studied the motives for learning, discovering expanded lists and categories centering on the motivation of adult learners. Long (2004), discusses global motives and specific studies. Global motives for learning include general categories: career, family, health, leisure, art, citizenship, and religion. Specific motives focus more on an action that results in a particular outcome. While there have been many studies of what motivates adults to learn, one common thread seems to be the *problem* orientation. A problem can be defined many different ways, and Long (2004) gave preference to Dewey's (1933) definition. Dewey suggested we extend the meaning of the word *problem* to whatever "…perplexes and challenges the mind so that it makes belief at all uncertain…" (p. 13). According to Dewey it is this perplexity that leads to reflective thinking. This reflective thinking around the problem is what so often leads to learning for adults.

Motivation for adult learning can be either intrinsic or extrinsic. Gom (2009) suggested that extrinsic motivation for adults comes from the desire to attain something that is better. He suggested that internal motivation comes from the actual joy of learning and the excitement of the experience. Aslanian and Brickell (1980) concluded that extrinsic factors can motivate learning. In a nationwide study that sought to understand the timing and causes for adult learning, the researchers found that 83% of the adults surveyed described some past, present, or future change in their lives as reasons to learn. The researchers concluded that the decision to learn at a certain point in time was triggered by a specific, identifiable event.

School leaders must see themselves not only as instructional leaders, but leaders of learning as well. Adult learning focuses on the role of the learner; it is learner-centered, voluntary, and is primarily self-directed and life-centered (Knowles, 1990, Kungu & Machtmes, 2009; Long, 2004). Adults have an inherent desire for immediate application of their learning in their lives (Brookfield, 2004). Learning must therefore be relevant and timely and the leader must be motivated to learn. There are three different types of learning in which leaders can engage: formal, informal, and non-formal. While all of these types of learning have different purposes, activities, and settings it is clear that leaders must engage in one of these types of learning to remain effective (Boeren, 2011; Coombs, Prosser & Ahmed, 1973; Lorek, Dattilo, Ewert, & Datillo 2012; Rogers, 2004).

For school leaders, as for other adults, learning needs to be self-directed. Leaders are looking for ways to learn on a regular basis, and it is important to note they bring many previous experiences and previous learning to each new opportunity (Brookfield, 2004). It is also important that all learners understand what they bring to the learning experience, in order to make the most meaning out of the learning. Self-directed learning can be emancipatory learning in that it can result in social action (Merriam, 2001).

It is easy to see the campus principal as an adult learner. The question, is then, what does the principal need to learn? What compels leaders to get out of their comfort zone and seek new knowledge? What roles and responsibilities do they need to learn more about?

Evolving Role of the School Leader

Sergiovanni and Green (2015) wrote about the heart, the head, and the hand of leadership. This type of vocabulary is different from the vocabulary used in the past by those charged with developing school leaders. The *heart* refers to the beliefs, values, dreams, and commitment of a leader. The *head* refers to the theories of practice and ability to reflect. And finally the *hand* means actions taken, decisions made, leadership, and management behaviors. Traditionally leaders were expected to be managers; while that is still a role of the campus-based leader, it is no longer the primary role. In fact, the management role is one that has diminishing capacity. There are now far more personal skills involved in the principalship than ever before (Sergiovanni & Green, 2015).

Many different organizations have looked at the changing needs of principals in an effort to find how best to serve leaders as they to change their skillset. Sergiovanni and Green (2015), purposed that school leaders need to be able to analyze and engage leadership from four perspectives: (a) understanding self and others, (b) understanding the complexity of organizational life, (c) building bridges through relationships, and (d) engaging in leadership best practices (Green, 2010). These four perspectives together allow a school leader to be effective. Traditional management roles of the principal from the past must now be blended into such new perspectives. These new roles require different skills than those of the traditional manager.

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016) provide guidance concerning the needs of educational leaders. These standards have been revised and changed over time to incorporate new research and best practices for school leadership, further demonstrating that the roles of the

principal are constantly changing. The principal as adult learner has many needs, like all adults and other professionals. The desire to learn requires the principal to determine in what setting and by what means they are going to actualize that learning.

Principal Professional Development

A great deal of research has been done on educational professional development; however, there is little research around the principal and the quest for continuous learning. Fogarty and Pete (2004) discuss five critical qualities of professional development that align with the ideas of adult learning. These qualities are necessary not only for teacher professional development but for principals' development as well. The first of these qualities is that professional development can be sustained; meaning that training is implemented over time. The second principle is that learning be job embedded, occurring at the work site as a part of the day-to-day activities of the educator. Third, learning should be interactive, ensuring that training invites, involves, and engages participants. Learning should foster collegiality and support a community of leaders. Finally, training should be integrated, meaning professional development can come in various forms and structures such as online, in text or in a workshop, but the different forms and structures must be interconnected.

There are many ways for principals to acquire new knowledge. The principal as adult learner must first determine what to learn, then how best to learn it. This is a process that must happen regularly in order for the principal to keep up with the demands of the job and the ever-changing roles and responsibilities of leadership.

Overview of Research Design

Qualitative studies allow the researcher to make meaning of data. For the purpose of this study I used constructionism as my epistemology and interpretivism as my theoretical perspective. Grounded theory was the methodology.

Structured interviews were used to collect data. I interviewed participants on two separate occasions using the interview guide method to structure the interviews. The first round of interviews were primarily focused on the research questions. The second served as a member check as well as an opportunity for me to follow up regarding new questions that emerged from analysis of the first interview. Additionally, each participant was asked to provide an artifact that represented their professional learning. These artifacts were presented and discussed during the second interview. I interviewed 12 principals with a balance between men and women. Participants included four principals from each educational level − elementary, middle, and high school. Participant selection was assisted by a panel of experts who recommended participants based on their ability to lead schools, their history of self-directed professional development, and their school's performance relative to the state's accountability system. I also selected participants who were leading schools with diverse populations.

I used a grounded theory approach to make meaning of the data, initially creating codes for principal perceptions that emerged from the interviews. Following the initial coding, I conducted line by line coding to determine what additional perceptions emerged. Following the line by line analysis, I carried out focused coding to identify significant codes and categories from the line by line analysis. This allowed me to begin putting codes into categories. Next, axial coding identified categories and subcategories.

Subsequently, I used theoretical coding to develop relationships between categories to help me to conceptualize the findings and make meaning from the process. Theoretical coding allowed me to transition into the final phase, where I identified broad themes and constructed theories around the principal as the adult learner. Throughout the process, memos served to help make meaning from the codes, identified themes, and developed categories. The study's research methods are discussed in detail in Chapter III.

Limitations of the Study

There were three limitations to my study. This study, while having a very clear and specific focus, was still conducted by a person who had her own ideas going into the process. I am a practicing principal, and because I am in the field daily, I have some strong opinions about professional development and adult learning. It was important that I controlled my own bias for the research. To do this, I used the grounded theory methodology with fidelity, allowing my coding to bring forth the themes of the research, and not allow my pre-determined ideas to affect my coding (Merriam, 2009).

A second limitation was that I only conducted two interviews with each participant. While these interviews were focused and targeted specific information relevant to my study, time restraints limited the amount of information that could be collected from each participant. While each participant contributed a generous amount of time, the length of the interviews may or may not have been long enough for the participants to recall and reflect on all of the types of significant learning in which they had engaged (Patton, 2002).

Finally, for multiple reasons, political, personal, or ethical, a participant may not have been willing to reveal their whole story with regard to personal learning needs and

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experiences. Due to the times we live in and the state of schools, the work climate may have caused participants to hold back on their experiences and feelings in order to keep from exposing their own perceived weakness or perceived weaknesses of the systems that they worked in.

Definitions of Terms

Critical Incident - an event in a leader's life that causes him/her concern or a need to respond with a skill or a tool that is needed. This event ultimately leads to the principal engaging in a learning activity.

Learning artifact - Evidence of some type of learning that has taken place that allows the school leader to demonstrate growth and/or a learning experience.

Accountability system - The system that is used by the state of Texas to measure student learning outcomes based on a standardized test.

Professional Development - Any learning experience that one engages in to build skills or capacity, support personal growth or enhance their performance.

Diverse Population - A campus that has students that are representative of various ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic status. The measure of the diversity for this study will be based on the Texas Educational Agency accountability report for each campus.

Significance of the Study

While it is clear that principals must do more and know more than ever before, it is not clear what principals should be doing to learn more. It is also not clear when they need to learn and grow professionally. This study has significance not only for principals but also for central office administrators. While districts spend a great deal of money and

effort on professional development, rarely do they focus on the learning of leaders. Developing campus leaders can have a significant effect on all the schools in a district.

This study is also useful to the professional organizations that traditionally provide professional learning experiences and support for school leaders. This study helped to pinpoint areas that leaders seek to learn more about, areas that could become a focus for these learning organizations.

This study may provide principal preparation programs with some insight to what leaders feel that they lack when they leave a program. It also helps principal preparation programs to prepare future leaders for self-directed, job embedded learning. The principal's role will continue to grow and morph, and it is essential that leaders know where to find new information and how to develop new skills.

Policy makers also have a need to know how leaders go about learning and implications for policy. These are times when policy makers create changes that can drastically affect schools and the role of school leaders. This study provides policy makers information on the impact of current polices on principals' growth and development, and the need for new policies regarding principals' professional development.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Life-long learning refers to the acquisition of fundamental competencies with real world application, highlighting the long-term developmental process, and capacities that come with learning over the years (Bell, 2012). Eurostat states,

> Lifelong learning encompasses all purposeful learning activity, whether formal, on-formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence. The intention or aim to learn is the critical point that distinguishes these activities from non-learning activities, such as cultural or sporting activities. (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2015, n.p.)

Life-long learning is a necessity for one to stay abreast in the always-changing and challengingly complex global society (Kungu & Machtames, 2009). While the concept of life-long learning is widely written about, there is still a great deal of ambiguity around the term. According to Jarvis (2004) it is a term that has long been burdened with difficulties. Most definitions include something about learning throughout life, both formally and informally, in many different types of situations (Kungu & Machtames, 2009).

Learning in childhood is focused on teacher-led learning and is primarily non-voluntary. Childhood learning is primarily teacher-centered and teacher directed. This type of learning does not have a great deal of real-world application (Kang, 2007). In contrast, adult learning focuses on the role of the learner; adult education is considered most effective when it is learner-centered, voluntary, and is primarily self-directed, and life-centered (Knowles, 1990; Kungu & Machtmes, 2009; Long, 2004).

Adult Learning and Career Development

Learning in Adulthood: Andragogy

Malcom Knowles (1984) defined the word andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn. This is in contrast to pedagogy, the art and science of teaching. Knowles argued that adults learn differently from children and should be taught differently. However, this perspective has been modified over the years, based on the belief that all learners can benefit from the learner-centered instructional approach that is a key concept in andragogy (Sandlin, 2005). Knowles' ideas about adult learners have revolutionized adult education and training (Holton, Swanson, & Naquin, 2001). The andragogy model has undergone some refinements throughout the years. In its original model, there were four principles, but there are now six. Knowles (1984) later suggested that pedagogy and andragogy are not defined by whether the learners are children or adults but are rather explained by maturation of the learner and the learning within a given situation. As adults mature, the learners' self-concept moves from dependency to increased levels of self-directedness.

Today, there are six principles or core assumptions of andragogy (Holton, Swanson, & Naquin, 2001):

1. Adults need to know why they need to learn something before learning it.

2. The self-concept of adults is heavily dependent upon a move toward self-direction.

3. Prior experiences of the learner provide a rich resource for learning.

4. Adults typically become ready to learn when they experience a need to cope with a life situation or perform a task.

5. Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered, and they see education as a process of developing increased competency levels to achieve their full potential.

6. The motivation for adult learning is internal rather than external. (p.120)

These core assumptions provide a foundation and basis for many different aspects of adult learning. Many of the adult learning models use one or more of the adult learning assumptions of andragogy as a springboard (Long, 2004; & Schwandt, 2008). There is no evidence that Knowles intended for these assumptions to be a recipe for adult learning. In fact, there is more evidence indicating that Knowles intended for these assumptions to be flexible and to be altered and adapted as needed depending on various situations (Holton, Swanson & Naquin, 2001).

While there is validity to the debate of differences and commonalities between how adults and children learn, the development and changes that takes place across a lifetime play a role in why adults learn and how they learn. There are conflicting views of adults as learners. One view suggests that adults are less capable learners than their youthful counterparts. Another suggests that adults are *super learners*. The reality falls somewhere in between; however, it is important to acknowledge the disparity among various beliefs (Long, 1987).

Formal, Informal, and Non-Formal Learning

Malcolm Knowles (1988) had at least three different definitions of adult education. One was a very broad meaning describing the process of adult leaning. A second was a more technical definition of adult education that includes an organized set of activities that ultimately results in a set learning objective. Third, Knowles defined

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adult education as a combination of the two into a movement or a field of social practice (Holton, Swanson & Naquin, 2001; Knowles, 1988). Adults learn for many different reasons and in many different settings. Adult learning usually occurs in settings and situations that are less formal than those of children (Kang, 2007). The learning of adults can be grouped into three different contexts and activities: formal, non-formal, and informal.

Formal learning is characterized by a hierarchical relationship between instructor and learner and usually includes elements of assessment. Formal learning may result in degrees or certification. It is normally delivered by a trained professional with specific outcomes. Formal learning usually takes place within a school setting such as an academy or college. This type of learning tends to have a specific curriculum with set learning expectations (Boeren, 2011; Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973; Lorek, Dattilo, Evert, & Dattilo, 2012; Rogers, 2004).

Informal learning, on the other hand, is about the everyday interactions of the learner. It can be learning by experience or from experience. Informal learning can be anything from the directions on how to build a new piece of furniture fresh out of the box to using a manual to work on the car. Informal learning can be thought of as the accumulation of knowledge and skills from everyday life. Informal learning happens in our communities where learners have the opportunity to observe and to participate (Boeren, 2011; Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973; Lorek, Dattilo, Ewert, & Dattilo, 2012; & Roger, 2004).

Finally, there is non-formal learning, which shares elements of both formal and informal learning. It is situated between the two. This type of learning does not typically

result in a formalized type of certification or degree nor does assessment usually play a role in this learning arrangement. There is a mutual relationship between the learner and instructor. Non-formal learning is often organized and structured, with the goal of increasing knowledge in some way or form (Boeren, 2011; Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973; Lorek, Dattilo, Ewert, & Dattilo, 2012; & Rogers, 2004).

Self-Directed Learning

Just like many other topics in adult education there are many different definitions and models or activities within self-directed learning. The primary tenet of self-directed learning is that the learner assumes the primary responsibility for, and control over, the learning, including the design, how the learning is conducted, and the evaluation of the learning (Brookfield, 2004; Schwandt, 2008). It is important to understand that self-directed learning is not happening in isolation, the learner moves in and out of different learning environments and opportunities throughout the process; the main point is that the decisions about the learning process and resources are in the hands of the learner (Brookfield, 2004).

Garrison (1997) proclaims that self-directed learning is one of the most researched topics in adult learning, and one important reason for this is that adults have a strong desire to be in control of what is to be learned and how to learn it. The idea of being self-directed appeals to adults' desire to learn and the need to learn. The self-directed model is positioned as collaborative constructivism; the individual must take responsibility for constructing the meaning while including others in confirming worthwhile knowledge, thus reflecting the cognitive and social perspectives of the

learning experience. This makes the experience both socially and personally meaningful (Garrison, 1997). Brookfield states (2009),

> Self-directed learners are not to be thought of as Robinson Crusoe's working without human contact. Indeed, a recurring theme of research in this area is the way learners move in and out of learning networks and consult a range of peers. The key point is that whether or not learners choose to be temporarily isolated from, or immersed within, peer networks is the learner's decision. Indeed, in self-directed learning all decisions about how and what to learn, and how or whether to consult external resources, rest with the learner. In the context of a self-directed learning effort, it is quite possible for there to be periods in which the learner decides it is most effective to place himself/herself temporarily under the control of an expert. (p. 2615)

It is also important to understand that self-directed learning is not free of external and internal influences. What the learner brings to the learning experience can directly affect the learning outcomes. Also, those that the learner interacts with during the learning process can also have a direct impact on the learning. Brookfield (2004) states,

> It is important to recognize that the self that is involved in conducting learning is culturally formed and bound. Who we are and how we decide what is important for us to be able to know or do are questions of culture. (p. 1)

Career Stages

Career stages are sequenced work stages in one's life. Gene Dalton, Paul Thompson, and Raymond Price (1977) identified four distinct stages: apprentice, independent contributor, mentor, and sponsor. In each stage there are expected activities

and relationships that need to be performed and acquired. Each stage requires its own psychological adjustment. The apprentice stage is the entry-level position and is unique with new learning, subordinate relationships and learning to perform as a subordinate. The independent stage is where the professional starts to contribute to the organization. During the mentor stage the professional begins to mentor the less experienced professionals. And finally in the sponsoring stage the professional influences the direction of the organization and goals for the organization. This is the highest career stage (Reyes, 2006).

While each person goes through various stages in their careers, with each change in stage comes a career transition. Each time an individual assumes new responsibility, or a new position, he/she goes through a transition. Transitions can be planned and expected or can be unplanned and unexpected. Based on the nature of career transitions, it is impossible to predict how many of these a person may experience in a lifetime. Individuals have their own unique experiences with the number of transitions and when they occur in their careers. Career transitions can be put into two categories: voluntary and involuntary. Both of these types can be caused by many varying factors and both can be considered stressful transitions in one's life (Heppner & Scott, 2007).

Assessing Principals' Learning Styles and Needs

Everyone is born with a predisposition for learning in a certain way and should acknowledge the external and cultural influences that have imprinted their learning patterns and result in learning style preferences. Learning style refers to the way a person uses, stores, and retrieves information (Newbie & Cannon, 2013; Sonbuchner, 1991). Individuals often show a preference for a particular learning style. If individuals

understand their learning styles and preferences, they are more likely to choose congruent

learning activities. Learners bring their own interests, talents, and approaches to learning

activities (Newbie & Cannon, 2013). James and Blank (1993) define learning styles as

the, "complex manner in which, and conditions under which, learners most efficiently

and most effectively perceive, process, store and recall what they are attempting to learn"

(p. 47). This term can also be used to describe how an individual understands

experiences and how he or she converts the experiences into knowledge (Newbie &

Cannon, 2013). It is necessary to understand that there is not just one method that will

reach all learners, and to build a learning environment that includes learning through a

variety of methods (Arvanites, Glasgow, Klingler, & Stumpf, 2006).

Thinking and learning are complex processes. There is a great deal of debate

around learning styles; scholars find it difficult to categorize and define them in simple

terms. It is suggested that the problem is in the lack of a common theoretical base and

validation of contemporary learning styles, as well as the lack of clarity around the styles.

There are three categories of learning styles—cognitive, affective, and psychological.

However, learning styles are not mutually exclusive of one another (James & Maher,

2004; Newbie & Cannon, 2013; Snow, Corno & Jackson, 1994). The cognitive style

speaks to the learner's information-processing habits. This is the learner's typical mode

of perceiving, thinking, problem-solving, and remembering. This preference can be

assessed with an information-processing instrument such as *Kolb's Learning Style*

Inventory (1999) or the *Gregorc's Style Indicator* (1999). The affective (personality)

style refers to the personality of the learner. This includes aspects such as motivation,

emotion, and valuing. Instruments used to assess these factors include, but are not

limited to, the *Briggs-Myers Type Indicator* (1999) and the *Keirsey Temperament Sorter* (Keirsey, 1998). Both of these instruments are based on the work of Karl Jung and are used to help identify common patterns within the dimension of personality. The psychological (perceptual) style includes sensory-based perceptual modes of reception that are a part of the physical environment. Some instruments that may be used to measure perceptual learning styles include, but are not limited to, the *Barbe-Malone Modality Index* (James & Maher, 2004) and the *Multi-Modal Paired Association Learning Test III* (James & Maher, 2004). Both of the instruments can determine the strength of an individual's dependence on a specific or particular perceptual modality (James & Maher, 2004; Newbie & Cannon, 2013).

Knowing one's learning style can be a source of empowerment; it allows the learner to have an understanding of how a particular learning task might be approached with his or her individual learning strengths. Having this knowledge becomes a tool for the learner because it provides the learner with an understanding of his or her own strengths and weaknesses; thus providing insight into how the learner should approach a learning task. When a person knows his/her own learning preferences, he or she knows how to strategize for success when the learning conditions are not optimal. Knowing one's learning style allows the learner to inventory the skills needed for the task, and if need be, consciously seek out compensating strategies and support. This is important considering the significance of self-directed learning for most adults and the value of understanding what is needed in the design of individual learning tasks (James & Maher, 2004).

In order for school leaders to know which areas that they need grow, it is important that they assess their individual needs as a leader. This is done by the principals themselves and not by an outside entity. Some of the tools mentioned previously could be used for this type of process. Leaders must have an understanding of their learning needs in order to create a plan for their own learning. They must be able to identify and articulate their learning needs so that they can seek out various types of learning opportunities. These learning opportunities could include mentoring, in-service training programs, peer coaching, collegial groups, and networks, action research, principals as writers, principal's centers, and self-directed professional development (Gordon, 2004).

Professional Development

Professional development (PD) is one way that today's leaders can continue to learn and grow. Zepeda, Parylo, and Bengston (2014) reviewed the literature on professional development for principals. They discovered that the role of the principal is constantly changing along with the new demands of today's schools. One foundational change is how our schools are moving from a teaching focus to a learning focus. Schools are now much more complex, with increased accountability and ever-changing student needs. Mathews and Crow (2010) argue that the principal has eight major roles: learner, culture builder, advocate, leader, mentor, supervisor, manager, and politician. These roles are directly in line with the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016). These standards have undergone major revisions over the past several years to keep up with the ever evolving role of the school leader.

In order to grow and learn, one must engage in reflection. Brookfield (2004) notes,

> The concept of critically reflective practice, so much a part of contemporary adult education, is in many ways focused on helping people take a critical look at their experiences, while also realizing its contribution to the formation of the adult learner's identity. (p. 5)

Reflective practice is grounded in the work of John Dewey and his concept of experiential learning. It is through reflective practice that we come to know our espoused beliefs (the things that we speak and think) and our theories in use (the actions we take). Only through reflective practice can we ensure that these two are aligned (Arrendondo-Rucinski, 2005; Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001). Reflective practices require the learner to engage in thoughtful analysis of an experience or an activity. Through reflective practice, leaders have an opportunity to improve their performance (Lauder, 2000). The art of reflection can be tied to our fundamental learning and to our future actions. It is not possible to learn from our own actions without reflection (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001).

While much of the research about educational professional development is focused on the learning of the teacher, there clearly are implications for the professional learning of the principal. Gordon (2005) reviews the supervision standards for professional development: involving participants, job-embedded professional development, gathering and analyzing data, opportunities for dialogue, differentiated learning activities and self-assessment. Fogarty and Pete (2004) list five critical qualities of professional development:

(a) sustained: training is implemented over time; (b) job-embedded: training

occurs and/or is continuous at the work site; (c) interactive: training invites,

involves and engages participants; (d) collegial: training builds and supports a

community of leaders; and (e) integrated: training is eclectic (web-based,

online, text, fact to fact). (p. 63)

The following review of methods of professional development reflect these five qualities.

Mentoring

Wadsden (1988) describes the mentor as follows:

The mentor is a master at providing opportunities for the growth of others, by

identifying situations and events which contribute knowledge and experience to

the life of the steward. Opportunities are not happenstance; they must be

thoughtfully designed and organized into logical sequences. Sometimes hazards

are attached to the opportunity. The mentor takes great pains to help the steward

recognize and negotiate dangerous situations. In doing this, the mentor has an

opportunity for growth through service, which is the highest form of leadership.

(p.17)

This definition is directly related to the mentoring of educational leaders. Mentoring is a

mutually beneficial process in which both the mentor and mentee gain something from

the relationship (Daresh, 2004). Daresh (2003) notes there are some distinct benefits to

the mentee or protégé in a mentoring relationship. First, the mentee develops confidence

in their professional competency. Second, the interaction of the two helps to translate

theory into practice. Discussion of a wide variety of topics, issues and concerns develops

collegiality, thus eliminating the idea that the principal must work in isolation. Mentees

are able to learn the job on the job through the process of having and working with a mentor. Finally, this relationship helps the protégé feel a sense of belonging to the profession and gives them confidence to do the job.

Mentoring also provides a significant opportunity for learning and developing professionally. Clutterbuck (1987) notes that the mentor gains greater job satisfaction through the experience of being a mentor. Mentors are seen as leaders among leaders and have an opportunity to tap into the talent of the next generation of leaders. Finally, mentors report that through this relationship, they are able to learn new ideas and develop different insights into ways that they handle problems or work with the organization. Effective mentors are able to capitalize on their new found knowledge as well as translate that knowledge to their own professional development. Mentoring and being mentored are both powerful professional learning opportunities (Clutterback, 1987).

Professional Learning Communities

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010) define a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as,

> An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional Learning Communities operate under the assumption that the key to improve learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators. (p.11)

Fullan (2002) argues that learning in context is important in the role of principal. When teams of principals work together to examine real problems in the district and create the solutions, their learning leads to improved practices. This type of learning has significant

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potential because of the social and moral context of the learning and the fact that it

establishes opportunities for continual development. While PLCs are traditionally used

by teachers to learn about and improve their practice, they can serve a great purpose with

principals as well. There are six characteristics of professional learning communities: (a)

shared vision, mission, values and goals; (b) a collaborative culture with a focus on

learning; (c) collective inquiry; (d) action oriented; (e) commitment to continuous

improvement; and (f) results orientation (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). When

teachers engage in the PLC process the focus should be around instructional practices.

When principals engage in the process with teachers they improve their instructional

understanding as well. When principals engage in the process with other principals, the

focus can be around the work of the principal, with the six characteristics still driving the

work (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010).

      Learning communities support change within a community of inclusiveness.

They are collaborative in nature, and they support autonomy as well as team work. In a

learning community reflection is a key to success. Learning communities thrive in a

positive school culture with trust at center of that culture. Finally, the learning

community uses data to drive decisions and work on a daily basis. PLCs are not driven

by emotions, they are driven by tangible data and artifacts that put the learning at the

heart of the community (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Zepeda, 2012).

Portfolios

      Zepeda, 2012 states,

      The intents of the portfolio are to chronical the growth and development,

      regardless of its use (e.g., pre-service, part of and evaluation system, extension of

professional development), and to capture learning through artifacts that are

respective of practice. The intents of using the portfolio to extend classroom

supervision, peer coaching, lesson study and action research for example are

grounded in the belief that people engage in more meaningful learning when they

learn in the company of others and when they can concretely see the results of

modifying practice. The portfolio supports the ongoing study of the teaching

process by the individual teacher, alone or with collegial or supervisory support

and assistants. (p. 262)

This definition demonstrates the power of portfolios and the learning that can occur

through the process of creation. The learner collects the information for the portfolio,

reflects on that information, and then presents the information and reflection. Whether

the portfolio is for supervision, professional development, or evaluation, the most

important part of this process is that it requires reflection, feedback and goal setting

(Zepeda, 2012).

Through a portfolio, a school leader can demonstrate how they have taken

knowledge or a skill and applied it in a meaningful way (Lauder, 2000). A study by

Klenowski, Askew and Carnell (2006) focused on three different types of portfolios and

their use. Professional development records focus on professional practice with each

participant identifying an issue in their professional practice, collecting evidence of the

skills and competencies, and then reflecting on these skills through the application

process. In the Learning Portfolio, there is a critical analysis of one's learning.

Participants reflect on each entry in order to connect theory to practice. This type of

portfolio also provides a record of each individuals learning, progress and growth. In the

Learning Record, the learner gathers evidence of the learning in a formative process. This type of portfolio demonstrates the learning that takes place over time and allows the participant to reflect on their own learning and growth. All three of these types of portfolio focus on best practice, reflection, feedback and goal-setting (Zepeda, 2012).

Coaching

Many types of professional development can be enhanced with coaching. Coaching is based on trust and collaboration, with a focus on the professional growth of the individual. Coaching takes into consideration the organization as well as the individual. Coaching can be seen as a differentiated practice that is reflective of the learner's experience, maturity, knowledge, and career path (Zepeda, 2012).

While the research speaks to various types of coaching in education the premise of coaching and the building blocks that support principals' in the practice are common. Coaching is about conversations, it is about learning and about asking the right questions (Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). According to Costa and Garmston (1994) cognitive coaching is about the metacognition that occurs when one becomes aware of their own thinking processes. It is this awareness of their own thinking that fosters the learning. Thus, Costa and Garmston's model is about the cognitive development of the one being coached. According to Wise and Jacobo (2010) the main purpose of coaching is to move from being reactive to proactive, spending more time on reflection and planning for improvement. Reeves (2009) contends that coaching is a catalyst for the principal's thinking and creating action. When the principal then coaches others in the school it creates a school where all are engaged in the reality of the vision. Through this work

organizational barriers can be torn down and a culture of sustainable change can be created.

Critical Friends

Costa and Kallick (1993) define a critical friend as,

A trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcome that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of the work. (p.50)

A critical friend provides non-evaluative feedback and support (Bambino, 2002). Once trust is built the critical friend can critique improvement efforts. As Costa and Kallick (1993) state "we often forget that Bloom refers to a critique as a part of evaluation, the highest order of thinking (p. 51)." The critical friend protocol is a formal process that generally has the team work through a complete problem solving cycle. Through this protocol, the critical friend provides both critical analysis and supportive responses to the work (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Zepeda, 2012). It is also necessary for the critical friends' groups to form norms and to develop as teams. Ongoing support must be provided to these teams in order for them to continue to learn and grow professionally. Through this process trust is also gained (Zepeda, 2012).

Online Professional Development

The reality of busy schools and the need for continuous improvement has created a need for online professional development. Within this practice there is a creation of a space for reflection, with a focus on just-in-time assistance. However, little is known

about best practices for online professional development (Ketelhut, McCloskey, Dede, Breit, & Whitehouse, 2006). While the idea of online learning is promising, it is often not the natural choice for administrators who tend to lean toward what they have always done. Most of the time new learning tends to rely on the *training* model, which can be useful in learning a new skill but may not be effective for school leaders' professional development. Training usually is provided by an outside expert imparting knowledge, but by itself this does not adequately prepare leaders to do the many types of work that are expected of them in today's schools (Mouza, Karchmer-Klein, Nandakumar, Ozden, & Hu, 2014).

Treacy, Kleiman, and Peterson (2002) propose several benefits of online professional development. One benefit is learning that meets individual learning goals through access to personalized learning that may or may not be provided locally. Second, leaders have the opportunity to use technology to learn, giving them the experience of the power of technology as a learning tool. With the explosion of multimedia resources and new technologies, there is an abundance of learning opportunities that can address different learning styles. Online learning lends itself to the idea that one can learn at any time and in any place, thus eliminating many of the reasons for resistance to professional development such as release time, travel, excessive cost, etc. Online professional development (OPD) allows for professionals to collaborate with others across time and place and can then be a part of the global learning community. The nature of OPD allows for leaders to then use new technology skills to enhance technology learning on their campus. With OPD, learning can extend beyond a single day and provide ways for the learner to stay connected with colleagues after the completion of the training.

The *informal* use of the internet by school leaders should also be considered as a viable means of professional development, with campus leaders increasingly turning to the internet as a viable source for finding answers to questions that arise in an ever changing environment (Zepeda, Parylo, & Bengtson, 2014).

Action Research

Action research is a valuable form of professional development for several reasons. It engages participants in the improvement of practice, it is contextualized so as to suit the needs of individuals, it necessitates reflection about how and why decisions are made, and it promotes the development of collegial relationships. Additionally, because action research is job-embedded, it provides enough flexibility to investigate and analyze issues as they relate to the specific needs of unique student populations (Zepeda, 2012).

Action research provides a way for gathering data to make informed decisions about how to improve practice. When this type of learning takes place it can play a major role in informing the school system and how we form and reform learning goals to improve our schools (Zepeda, 2012). "Action research, as traditionally defined, is distinct in that it focuses on a problem of practice; is conducted by practitioners in their own organizational setting; and aims at generating, implementing and assessing an action plan to address the problem" (Osterman, Furman, & Sernak, 2013, p. 86).

There are various steps in the action research process, including creating a plan, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting the data, and finally taking action (Zepeda, 2012). There are many different methods used to gather data in action research, such as interviews, portfolios, field notes, diaries, tapes, photos, memos, questionnaires, focus groups, checklists, logs, case studies, surveys, self-assessments, and samples of works to

name a few. Action research sets itself apart from other types of research by its radical

and collaborative approach to helping solve problems. Action research is evaluated more

in terms by how the problem is addressed and how the knowledge gained is used to allow

others to learn from the findings and apply those findings to their own work (Sigler,

2009).

Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is defined by Ayas & Zeniuk (2001) as,

Setting the stage for reflective practices and inquiry at all levels within the

organization, to reveal deeper aspirations and construct shared understanding. It

is about acquiring habits of reflective practice in the project environment to

benefit the individual, the organization and society. (p.63)

It is important to note that there is a difference between managing projects and PBL. If

the time for reflection and the sharing of knowledge is not at the center of the work then

it is not the essence of project-based learning (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001). The Buck Institute

for Education (2015) describes project based learning as "a teaching method in which

students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended time period to investigate

and respond to a complex question, problem or challenge."

Thomas (2000) notes that PBL is hard to clearly define because it lacks a

universal definition, model or theory. Thomas goes on to say that PBL consists of

complex projects and tasks that are based upon challenging questions or problems that

involve the learner in the design of the project, includes problem solving and decision

making and/or investigation activities. PBL gives the learner opportunities to work

autonomously and culminates with realistic products or presentations that take place over

extended periods of time. PBL also gives the learners an opportunity to take learning

risks and it allows them to see that there are additional learning opportunities in not

having all the answers and being challenged by what they may see as a *failure*. In PBL

these failures are ways for the student to challenge their own thinking and learn more

(Bridges, 1992). In a leadership development model presented by Brazer and Bauer

(2013), PBL is a way for leaders to apply what they are learning in novel situations that

allow them to see how these theories work in action and then have an opportunity to

reflect on the learning in a non-threatening, low stakes environment. Learners engaged in

PBL also have the opportunity to work in small groups and to collaborate with others.

Problem solving is also a skill that leaders need to develop in order to be successful.

The Buck Institute for Education (2015) describes PBL as having the following

characteristics: significant content, 21st century competencies, in-depth inquiry, driving

questions, need to know, voice and choice, critique and revision and public audience.

While there are several different definitions of PBL, they all possess some universal

criteria. There is a driving question with which the learner must struggle, there is a

constructed investigation, there must also be autonomy for the learner and the projects

must be realistic (Thomas, 2000).

Bridges (1992) explored the use of PBL while training administrators. He argues

that, through the use of PBL, prior knowledge is activated and the learners have the

opportunity to apply what they have already learned while working within a new learning

environment. He goes on to say that by using PBL learners are able to understand the

information in context so that they can retrieve it later in an appropriate on the job

situation. Through the use of PBL there is an opportunity for elaboration giving learners a greater chance for understanding, processing and recalling information.

Informal Professional Development

Marsick and Watkins (2001), contrast formal, informal and incidental learning: Formal learning is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom-based and highly structured. Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in institutions, but is not typically classroom-based or highly structured and control of learning rest primarily in the hands of the learner. Incidental learning is defined as a byproduct of some other activity such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, or even formal learning. Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organization or it can take place despite an environment not highly conducive to learning. Incidental learning, on the other hand, almost always takes place although people are not always conscious of it. (p.12)

Others classify the learning of adults into formal, non-formal, and informal learning (Knowles, 1990; Kungu & Machtames, 2009). Under these categories, formal learning is characterized by a hierarchical relationship between instructor and learner and usually includes elements of assessment. Formal learning may result in degrees or certification. Informal learning, on the other hand, is about the everyday interactions of the learner. Informal learning can be anything from directions on how to build a new piece of furniture fresh out of the box to using a manual to work on the car. Informal learning can be thought of as the accumulation of knowledge and skills from everyday life. Finally, there is non-formal learning, which shares elements of both formal and

informal learning. This type of learning does not typically result in a formalized type of certification or degree nor does assessment usually play a role in the in this learning arrangement. There is a mutual relationship between the learner and instructor. Non-formal learning is often unorganized and situational (Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973; Lorek Dattilo, Ewert, & Dattilo, 2012; Rogers, 2004; Boeren, 2011).

Informal learning is a term that refers to the practice of knowledge and skills acquisition outside a formal setting of instruction. Adults learn for many different reasons and in many different settings. Adult learning usually occurs in settings and situations that are less formal than those of children (Kang, 2007; Heath 2012). Informal learning in professional development is usually intentional but not high highly structured. Informal learning can include such activities as coaching, mentoring, networking, and self-directed learning. These activities can also be formal programs depending on the involvement of the individual and the level of the engagement. Informal learning takes place wherever people have the need, the motivation, and opportunity for learning. Informal learning has some distinct characteristics that help to categorize the learning: it is integrated into daily routines, triggered by a need, does not have to be highly conscious, and can be haphazard and influenced by chance. It is an inductive process which depends of reflection and action. Finally, it is linked to the learning of others (Heath, 2012).

Self-Directed Professional Development for Principals

Learning experience for a principal must start with a question that is important to the principal as learner (Zepeda, Parylo & Bengtson, 2014). While there are many different definitions and models of self-directed learning, the primary tenent of self-

directed learning is that the learner assumes the responsibility for, and control over, the learning, including its design, how it is conducted, and the evaluation of the learning (Brookfield, 2004; Schwandt, 2008).

While there is little information that specifically addresses the role of the principal and self-directed learning, it can easily be argued that all of the professional development strategies reviewed here could be self-directed. All of the strategies lend themselves to the principal engaging in learning because of a need. Research about adult learners highlights the idea that adults bring a distinctive motivation for learning and a clear purpose to why they participate in particular learning experiences (Brookfield, 2004).

As reviewed in the conceptual framework for this present study, adults have three different orientations or motivations for learning. The learning motivation can be goal oriented where education is sought for a specific purpose. The learning can be activity oriented where the learner takes part in a particular activity for reasons other a desire to learn. Or the motivation can be learning-oriented where learning is desired for the sake of learning the knowledge that is acquired. Adults can also have a combination of these motives for learning as suggested by Houle, (1961). A single orientation appears to however be the primary factor for motivation (Long, 2004; Schwandt, 2008).

Roles of the Principal

The leadership of the principal is a key ingredient to an effective school. A principal must understand themselves and others as well as the complexity of organizational life, build relationships, and engage in leadership best practices (Green, 2010; Sergiovanni & Green 2015). Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) found that leadership is the second most important ingredient in the success of

schools, second only to teaching. The study goes on to state that the importance of leadership is greatest in schools where the student's needs are more acute.

Principals currently are dealing with a great deal of change, from the changing demographics of the students being served to the changing expectations of the principal's role. In order for leaders to meet these demands it will mean that they will need to change the way they view their own work (Davila, 2009). In this section, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016) are used as a model for the work of school leaders. These standards are useful as a tool to take a comprehensive look at the various roles of the principal in the ever changing environment that principals are currently entertaining. The standards have been under revision for the past few years. The revision was necessary to keep up with the changing needs of today's principal. The standards emphasize that all students must achieve at high levels and the role of the administration is critical to meeting this goal. The new standards center on what the research says about effective school leadership and student achievement. These standards address the leader's role in the development of instructional improvement, human capital, distributed leadership, technology, equity, and continuous school improvement. The standards were developed based on empirical research around these topics as well as the involvement of over 1,000 practitioners. The standards suggest that principals need to be transitional leaders with the following dispositions: (a) growth oriented, (b) collaborative, (c) innovative, (d) analytical, (e) ethical, (f) perseverant, (g) reflective, and (h) equity-minded. These standards are not required to be adopted by each state, but they are the standards that most states use as a basis for assessing administrators, (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016). The

standards see the role of the principal focused around the following areas: (a) mission, vision and core values; (b) ethics and professional norm; (c) equity and culture responsiveness; (d) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (e) community of care and support for students; (f) professional capacity of school personnel; (g) professional community for teachers and staff; (h) meaningful engagement of families and community; (i) operations and management; and (i) school improvement.

The Principal's Role in Developing a School Vision, Mission, and Core Values

Sergiovanni and Green (2015) state the following:

It is imperative that an individual leading one of today's schools as principal have a vision of what the school should become under his or her leadership. And that vision must be shared with all stakeholders. Additionally, a process must be put in place to monitor the vision and to evaluate the progress that is being made toward its attainment. (p. 148)

Shared vision building requires a set of tools and techniques for bringing various stakeholders' aspirations into alignment based around the things that they have in common or hold true. Through the process of developing a shared vision, the group develops a sense of mutual commitment. It is important to note that without a sustained process for building a shared vision, there is no way for a school to articulate its purpose. Vision is not a top down responsibility. It is something that takes time, care and strategy (Senge, et al., 2000). Vison can be referred to as the capacity to create and communicate a view of desired state of affairs for the school community that creates commitment for those working in the organization (Sergiovanni & Green 2015).

The vision and mission of the school must reflect the shared values and beliefs of the staff. In schools where beliefs and values are shared they go beyond the laundry list of what individuals say schools should be and become what the school practices. Teachers demonstrate these shared beliefs and values in their own classrooms and through their individual actions. Based on shared values and beliefs the school can create its goals. The goals are tied directly to the vision and mission of the school. It is on the school's goals that action is based. Goals should be used to create performance standards and everyone in the process should monitor the school's performance closely. Vision, mission, and goals should be focused on learning for students and teachers (Eaker, DuFour, DuFour, 2002).

In schools today there is a strong understanding that in order to be successful there must be collaboration among the staff. This collaboration provides the core for how the school works together and functions as a whole. It is through this collaborative spirit that the vision and the mission of the school must be accomplished. The role of the principal in this process is to create structure and processes that foster a collaborative culture. In many cases that means introducing the structure of PLCs (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002). When there are shared beliefs and a collaborative culture, the school community can focus on what it wants its students to know, how it is going to ensure that all are learning at high levels and how it will we respond if they do not (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002). The school's vision must demonstrate the hopes and dreams, as well as the needs and interests, along with the values and beliefs of the school stakeholders—teachers, parents and students (Sergiovanni & Green 2015).

In order for the vision to become a reality it must be shared by those that will put it into action. This type of vision is based on a collective inquiry of best practices rather than a wish list of various needs (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002). Educators are motivated by goals that they feel are compelling, challenging, and achievable. Goals help people make sense of their work and find a purpose within the work. Establishing a vision and congruent goals provides an opportunity to articulate high expectations for performance and enhance the school's work by monitoring performance and ensuring effective communication and collaboration (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Many still equate improving schools with restructuring. It has become apparent that restructuring and reorganizing schools does little to improve student achievement. The changes needed for school improvement happen within the classrooms (Harris, 2002). If schools are to improve and build the capacity to sustain that improvement, the principal must foster the development of leaders at all levels (Fullan, 2002). Until we have strong teachers who also are strong leaders, we will not have a strong group of principals, because teachers form the pool for the next generation of leaders. In order for school improvement to truly take place, we must create situations for educational change that is sustainable. It is no longer acceptable to think that schools can change with the principal in the only instructional leadership role. It is necessary for principals to build capacity for leadership in others around them, including teachers (Fullan, 2002).

The idea behind school improvement is to improve people. When the focus is on people, change occurs. In order for principals to foster change, they must create structures and processes that allow people to improve (DuFour & Berkey, 1995).

Schmoker (2006) argues that reasonable changes in supervision, with monitoring and feedback for the classroom teacher, would reduce the number of poor instructional practices that take place in the classroom. Replacing these poor practices with high-leverage strategies and high-order thinking opportunities could lead to reasonable amounts of change in schools in a short period of time.

According to DuFour and Berkey (1995) the following are the conditions for school improvement: (a) create a consensus for the change you hope to see, (b) create shared values, (c) monitor the improvements that you hope to create, (d) ensure and create opportunities for systematic collaboration, (e) encourage teachers to experiment, (f) model professional growth, (g) provide coaching to individual teachers to reflect and grow, (h) ensure that the campus learns together with research-based professional development that is purposeful and meaningful, (i) promote self-efficacy for the campus and for individuals, and finally, (j) stay the course when the going gets tough. Schools that function as professional learning communities are still few and far between, but it is clear that when leadership understands the value of self-managed teams looking at their own teaching practices the potential for school improvement is greatly increased (Schmoker, 2006). In order to improve schools, there must be a clear expectation that all students can learn, there must be a collective responsibility and a culture where everyone−adults and children−is learning. Finally, there must be a culture of improvement and a drive to improve practice (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

The Role of the Principal in Building Instructional Capacity, Curriculum, and Assessment

Fullan (2002) argued that it is necessary to have leaders that can develop the school as a transformational learning culture. It is not enough to just be an instructional leader, the leader must be a problem solver that can nurture and motivate as well as engage learners. This work requires the leader to energize the teachers through improving the conditions in which teachers work and even working to improve the profession. In order for schools to become learning organizations focused on instruction and continuous learning, it is imperative that leaders start looking within the organization and create their own catalyst for change and improvement, rather than assuming the answers are outside of the school. In schools that are learning organizations teachers have a shared vision, and they work together to design curriculum, instruction, and assessment (DuFour & Berkey, 1995; Eaker, DuFour & DuFour 2002).

Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) define shared leadership as "teachers' influence over and participation in school wide decisions" (p. 461). In schools with shared leadership, teams work with data to analyze the progress of students and adjust their practice to meet the needs of the learners. They also conduct action research, and create study groups to learn together. There is individualized professional development, peer coaching, and team collaboration to identify and address school problems, and educators share their learning with one another (DuFour & Berkey, 1995; Eaker, DuFour & DuFour 2002). It is important that a school acknowledges the knowledge and skill levels of the individual teachers as well as the group as whole. It is necessary to develop a deep understanding of pedagogy, classroom management and student assessment. It is important to hold high

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expectations for all students (Youngs & King, 2002). Sergiovanni and Green (2015) state,

> Principal leadership can be understood as an enabling process. Principals practice enabling leadership when they help teachers, students and staff to function better on behalf of the school and its purposes, to engage more effectively in the work and play of the school, and to promote the achievement of the school's objectives. It is crucial to build up the leadership capacity of others, and, in the sense, the principal is the leader of leaders. (pp. 205-206)

In order to build instructional capacity, City, Elmore, Fiarman and Teitel (2009) proposed that we must focus on the instructional core, truly understanding the interactions between students, teachers and content. It is also necessary to understand how tasks predict performance, which means that what students are asked to do in the classroom directly correlates with the level of understanding of the content being covered. If students are not asked to engage in high-level tasks, it can be assumed that the learning will not be at a high level. City and associates final point about the instructional core is that accountability begins with the tasks that students are asked to do. If the tasks do not reflect an adequate level of rigor, students will not be able to meet the expectations of the school or external accountability standards.

Instructional leadership is often defined as the art of blending several key ingredients into the establishment of what we currently call schools; this blending includes supervision of the classroom instruction, staff development, and curriculum development (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). Schmoker (2006) states "The single greatest determinant of learning is not socioeconomic factors or funding levels. It is instruction"

(p. 7). In order for instruction to improve, it is imperative that there are structures and processes enabling teachers to continuously learn (Harris 2002; Schmoker, 2006). In order for teachers to improve their instruction, professional development is essential, with collegial relationships and collective learning the anchors for such development (Harris, 2002). In order for schools to be successful they must have a process for continuously building capacity. In schools that are raising academic performance, professional development is targeted to meet the specific needs of teachers in light of the children that they serve (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). In order to improve learning at scale, we must increase the level of knowledge and skills that a teacher brings to the table, increase the complexity and the level of knowledge that a student is tasked to learn, and change the role of the student in the learning process (City et al., 2009).

In an analysis of highly successful schools, some shared attributes have been identified, including a focus on classroom improvements, discrete instruction with appropriate pedagogical strategies, teachers following common expectations, systemic evidence of student success in the classroom, culture and structural changes, professional dialogue among teachers, and external support (Harris, 2002). In order for teachers to be successful in the classroom, they must believe that all students can and will learn at high levels and that all students should have the same access to learning. This means that teachers must have a system in place to monitor and assess learning at all times and must take swift and responsive actions when students are not being successful (Eaker, & DuFour, 2012; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Instructional practices should also include cultural responsiveness. "The basic premise is that teachers should teach using

philosophies and methods that respect, value and use positively the strengths of students' home cultures, contexts and languages" (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p. 48).

The instructional core of a school provides a framework for the quality and level of student learning. City et al. (2009) identify seven principles of the instructional core:

(a) increases in student learning occur only as a consequence of improvement in the level of content, teacher's knowledge and skill, and student engagement; (b) if you change any single element of the instructional core, you have to change the other two; (c) if you can't see it in the core, it's not there; (d) task predicts performance; (e) the real accountability system is the tasks that students are asked to do; (f) we learn to do the work by doing the work, not by telling other people to do the work, not by having done the work at some time in the past, and not by hiring experts who can act as proxies for our knowledge about the how to do the work; (g) description before analysis, analysis before prediction, prediction before evaluation. (p. 23)

In the large scheme of school improvement curriculum plays a key role. In many cases the curriculum has become more restrictive with an emphasis on science, technology, and basic skills such as literacy and mathematics (Harris, 2002). Curriculum standards can be a controversial topic, but are essential in creating equitable and excellent schools. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) argue that when there has been a lack of standards many student populations suffer, including students of color and students from low socio-economic families. Scheurich and Skrla argue that the more structured the system of standards, the more the details, and the more opportunities for understanding around the standard or curriculum, the better everyone can understand and implement standards.

Teachers and administrators must use these standards to set the goals for what students should know and be able to do. Clear curriculum standards are vital to an equitable and excellent education. Curriculum and assessments are often mismatched. This is what makes the use of high stakes testing so difficult. When the standards and the assessment are mismatched, this can create a problem for teachers who are teaching the standards and not the test (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). More likely they'll be teaching the test and not the standards.

The fundamental purpose of assessment is to improve student achievement, teaching practices and leadership decision making (Reeves, 2009). Most legislators and policy makers at both the state and national level view assessment as a catalyst for school reform, believing that the use of the data from such assessment tells educators where to focus attention for improved student learning. Unfortunately, due to the timing of the test and the way the data is presented, these assessments do little to target specific improvement (Guskey, 2007).

Assessment is a leadership issue and a reflection of what learning is valued by the campus. In meaningful assessment teachers reflect on their own practice and use assessment data to improve instruction for all students (Reeves, 2009). Assessments should have a clear purpose. They should be designed with the achievement target at the center of the assessment activity. The assessment should clearly communicate to the intended user the level of student achievement. Assessment *of* learning tends to lend itself to the high stakes accountability type of assessment, while assessment *for* learning is more of a diagnostic type of activity for both students and teachers. When using assessment for learning, students are able to see where they are and what they need to do

to improve. Likewise, teachers can use the information from an assessment to guide their

own practice and strengthen the strategies they use in the classroom (Stiggins, 2007).

Assessment should not be a one-time only opportunity. Once teachers have had an

opportunity to reteach, students should be reassessed. Educators should use assessment

to indicate mastery for the learning (Guskey, 2007).

The Role of the Principal in Developing Professional Culture

"Schools won't improve until the average building leader begins to work

cooperatively with teachers to truly, meaningfully oversee and improve instructional

quality" (Schmoker, 2006, p. 29). Fullan (2002) states that *cultural change* principals

must understand the big picture of the organization. The cultural change leader possesses

five characteristics. First, they must have *moral purpose*, a social responsibility to others

and the environment. Such a leader makes a difference in the lives of children and of the

stakeholders. A leader with moral purpose works with other leaders around them so that

the change and performance can be sustained. The second characteristic is *understanding*

change; one must know that the change process is not easy, but will come with resistance

from some. The leader understands that resistance is part of the change process and uses

it to improve the change. This process is complex, not a step by step plan but a

convoluted process. This part of the change is focused on re-culturing. The third

characteristic is *improving relationships*; the change process leader understands and

values relationships. When relationships and teams are created and valued there is an

opportunity for the organization to thrive and create the necessary change within a culture

that can sustain it. The fourth characteristic is that *knowledge creation and sharing* be

the cultural change principals ensure. The understanding is that teaching is both a moral

and intellectual profession, and that teachers must engage in refining, practicing, and studying the work of education. Teachers in schools where the leader is concerned about creating knowledge are engaged in professional learning communities with an expectation of sharing and learning together. Finally, the cultural change principal creates *coherence making* by working to ensure that there is coherence in the process of change by maintaining a check and balance system.

Schmoker (2006) states, "no one can lead effectively where constructive feedback is regarded as an invasion of privacy, an affront to professionalism" (p. 29). Working as a team to build shared knowledge on the best way to meet the needs of those they serve is what professionals do in any field. Education is no exception. When educators work in this way, they are able to move quickly to turn the vision and mission of a school into action. Change-focused educators recognize that learning by doing helps develop a more profound knowledge and greater commitment to the work. These educators understand that until they do things differently there will not be any different results (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010). When new policies are determined, the correct drivers must be behind them, not fear and punitive action, but opportunities that develop new capacities among educators. Four drivers of change as identified by Fullan are capacity building, social capital (the quality of the group), instruction and systems (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

Sergiovanni and Green (2015) suggest that leadership consists of three different things: the heart, the head and the hand. Each principal must understand self and how these three things work together in order to be a successful principal. The heart is about

beliefs, values and commitments. The head refers to theories and practices and the hand is about actions and decisions.

The knowledge base around education is constantly changing; it is not something that can be universally applied, but rather informs decisions of leaders as they continue to learn in their own practice. Principals that are change agents learn to reflect on their own practices and make that reflection a part of their continuous learning (Sergiovanni & Green, 2015).

The Principal's Role in Promoting Social Justice and an Inclusive Culture

Muhammad (2009) argues that in a school with a positive culture of care, educators have an unwavering belief that all of their students are able to achieve success and they share this belief in the way that they conduct school business. They also create policies and procedures as well as adopt practices that publicly communicate the belief of the ability of every student. When there is a message that all students can learn and all students will learn because of what we do, there is a culture of care (Muhammad, 2009).

Similarly, Scheurich and Skrla (2003) state,

If you are going to successfully lead a school to attain both equity and excellence, you first have to believe it is possible. If you don't have the belief, you are going to have to develop it because having, deepening, and sustaining this belief is central to convincing others, central to maintaining this belief over the long haul and central to creating equitable and excellent schools. (p. 10)

It is not unreasonable to expect schools to accommodate all of the children in public education. If we are to create schools that are multicultural to replace those that are mono-cultural, inclusion is essential. Inclusion refers to all students who are at risk of

marginalization, exclusion, and underachievement. When schools are inclusive, they

create a culture where diversity is valued and discrimination is challenged. These schools

create a community where everyone is welcomed and everyone belongs (Banks & Banks,

2010). Inclusion is one of the core values of education, and one of the central themes of

democracy (Biesta, 2010). Norman Kunc (1992) writes about the need for all students to

be included, arguing that all students deserve a free, high quality education in a least

restrictive environment. While Kunc's focus has been on special education, his work

speaks for all marginalized student groups, in that the education system must ensure that

all students are included in our schools and that education is not a place for the chosen,

but a place for all.

Scheurich and Skrla (2003) suggest "principals and other school leaders have the

responsibility for investing in high-quality, sustained professional development to build

the capacity of the teachers in their schools to be successful with the students they serve"

(p.48). Scheurich and Skrla go on to say that this development should include learning to

be culturally responsive. The premise of culturally responsive teaching is that educators

should teach with a philosophy and methods that support and honor the students they

serve. The percentage of students in our public schools who are students of color has

increased dramatically; however, the demographics of our nations teachers are not

changing as dramatically as the student population, and therefore many of the teachers

serving these diverse groups of children are white (Scheurich & Skerla, 2003). This

creates the need for additional professional development in the area of cultural

responsiveness. Teachers who are successful with students of color do more than care for

their students, they love their students. They hold themselves and their students to high expectations and accept nothing less because of this love.

Schools have a responsibility for ensuring that every child learns despite their personal circumstances and the quality of individual teachers (Muhammad, 2009). When schools are able to eliminate bias, the chances of creating systems that are fair for all students increase (Sergiovanni & Green, 2015). The most important characteristic of a social justice leader is a strong ethical or moral core focused on equity and excellence as the only right choice for schools in a democracy. A second characteristic is faith that all students can and will grow and improve. A final characteristic of a leader for equity and excellence is that they never quit. Their tenacity keeps them moving toward their goals (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) state that in order for schools to truly become places where students thrive, students must be a part of the process, they must have a say in what they are learning and how to learn it, they must be involved in the decision making process and be able to initiate political actions in school. When this is the case, a school becomes a place where change agents are being developed, and where the world can truly be changed through education. Leadership for social justice is at the forefront of this work.

There are many definitions for social justice leadership that include many different actions and components involving disruptions and making changes that eliminate or greatly reduce marginalization and exclusion practices (Gewirtz, 1998). Thoeharis (2007) defines social justice leadership as a way for the principal to advocate for, and keep at the center of, their practice the issues of race, gender, disability, sexual

orientation, and other traditionally marginalized populations. The concept of eliminating

marginalization is a critical component of the social justice leader. This include creating

inclusive environments for all learners to include those that are traditional separated in

schools, such as students with disabilities and English language learners (Theoharis,

2007). Sapon-Shevin (2003), speak to the idea that inclusion is not about disabilities but

rather about social justice and embracing the inclusive model for education.

Theoharis (2007), found that social justice leaders possessed some common traits:

a mix of arrogance and humility, leadership with clear and focused passion for their

vision, and maintained a deep commitment to their vision of social justice, and the

empowerment and nurturance of their staff. "Social justice supports a process built on

respect, care, recognition, and empathy" (Theoharis, 2017, p . 223). Gordon and Boone

(2012), suggest that there are seven components that should be considered in creating a

balanced approach to social justice: awareness, care, critique, expertise, relationship,

community, and accountability. These components working together can create a

balance for how to address social justice through the role of school leader.

The Principal's Role in Family and Community Engagement

Davies, Henderson, Johnson, and Mapp (2007) tell us that the research shows that

involving family and community in the education of students enhances the learning

opportunities. Stating that those who have parents engaged in the learning process have

higher grades, enroll in more challenging educational programs, have a higher graduation

rate, and finally are more likely to enroll in post-secondary education. They go on to say

that when families are engaged, students have more interest in what they are learning and

respond with a more positive attitude toward school. Students do their best when parents

play various roles in the student's education, from volunteering to supporting the student at home; when this continues through middle and high school, students tend to have a more realistic plan for the future and are less likely to drop out. Students from diverse cultures, tend to be more successful when the school and the families work together to bridge the gap between home and school. Parent involvement is a win-win-win situation for the school, parents and teachers. The school benefits from the support and the positive social and emotional outcomes that are granted to the students through this process. Parents benefit from the confidence, self-esteem, and understanding of the school and their child's education. Finally, teachers win through the increased knowledge of the child, the culture and the home situation, as well as improved parent and professional relationships. With relationships comes more willingness to participate in school related activities and volunteerism (Banks & Banks, 2010).

School-community partnerships help to sustain public support for the education. Davies et al. (2007) offer three strategies that have the greatest benefits to schools and the community. First, they suggest conducting programs to engage the public, working closely with community organizations to help students and families move toward educational equality, and promoting greater citizen participation in our democracy. Schools should embrace partnerships with the community and families, creating a culture of trust and openness. The more this relationship is cultivated, the better the reputation of the school in the community.

The Principal's Role in Operations and Management

The role of the principal has changed quite drastically over time. Traditional definitions of the role focused on the administrative processes and functions that must

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happen in schools, the more managerial type of work (Sergiovanni & Green, 2015). According to the Professional Standards for School Leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015) operation and management functions include: developing and demonstrating well-honed interpersonal skills, managing student behavior with a focus on learning, providing effective leadership throughout the school, connecting management operation, policy and resources to the vision and values, monitoring and evaluating operations for effectiveness and impact, ensuring the implementation of data systems, using technology to improve operations, managing organizational politics with an eye on values and mission, understanding and supporting relevant policies and laws, acting as a steward for public funds, and developing and managing relationships with the district office.

Reviewing the work of Mintzeberg from 1973, Sergiovanni and Green (2015) stated, "the work of administrators was characterized by brevity, variety, fragmentation and that the majority of administrative activities were of brief duration, often taking only minutes" (p.46). Sergiovanni and Green (2015) also noted that this work is often random and changes rapidly, and there is often no real pattern to the work of the administrator, and no real depth. This gives an impression that the work can be superficial, with the principal doing an extraordinary amount of tasks in a fast paced environment.

Often described in the managerial part of the job of the administrator are the *demands* or *must do's* of the job. Ignoring these demands could create a problem with accountability and possibly sanctions or even the loss of one's job. These demands can include accountability, legal requirements, bureaucratic rules and regulations, and the additional responsibilities imparted by the district (Sergiovanni & Green. 2015).

Summary

A review of the literature demonstrates that the role of the principal is ever changing and there is a need for the school leader to continue to learn and grow. Today's educators are more stressed and stretched than ever before. According to the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013), principal job satisfaction had dropped by 9 points in the previous 25 years. The study went on to state that the responsibilities of school leaders have changed significantly and that many say the job has become too complex and highly stressful. Schmoker, (2016) states,

> School leadership has become an unduly profuse, complicated, and unfocused
>
> business. Administrative training and certification programs have contributed to
>
> this complexity: they abound in theories, principles and approaches that rarely
>
> clarify and equip leaders to execute the most obvious principles and routines that
>
> lead to better education. (pp. 4-5)

The changes in the role of the principal and the continued accountability placed on leaders drives the motivation for learning more about how do leaders learn and what prompts the learning for today's school professionals.

III. REASEARCH DESIGN

The role of the principal is constantly in flux. There are new demands of the principal; it is no longer possible to remain stagnant and be successful in schools. The dynamic nature of schools requires a transformational leadership style, wherein the principal creates a collaborative culture, develops teachers, and utilizes creative problem solving. In order to embody this leadership style, the principal must take on two key roles: principal teacher and principal learner. The principal teacher models specific dynamic behaviors needed for teachers, such as creativity, risk taking and collegiality. As principal learner, the principal acts as lead learner by modeling the need for learning to occur by all members of the staff or school community (Gordon, 2004). Based upon this understanding of the need for continuous learning by the principal, this research was designed to further investigate the following questions: How do successful principals define authentic professional development? In particular, (a) how do successful principals assess their own professional development needs, (b) in what types of meaningful professional development activities do they engage, (c) who do they seek support from in their professional development, and (d) in what ways do they perceive their professional development impacts teacher, school, community and student development?

In order to explore these questions, a qualitative approach to the research was used. Merriam (2009) stated, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5).

Epistemology: Constructionism

Constructionism is the making of meaning. According to Crotty (1998), meaning is constructed by people as they engage in and interpret the world around them. Before meaning is interpreted, there is no meaning. From this viewpoint, meaning cannot be described as objective or subjective, but rather as constructed. Further, reality is not something set; it is what each individual makes of it. The world is made up of cultural and linguistic constructs, thus are socially constructed (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) contends "Constructionism, then, consistent with postmodernism, is relativistic in stance, meaning knowledge is viewed as relative to time and place, never absolute across time and space, thus the reluctance to generalize and the suspicion of generalizations asserted by others" (p.100).

Assumptions of constructionism reviewed by Patton (2002) include: (a) truth is constructed, (b) facts have no meaning and cannot be objective, (c) cause and effect have no meaning without construction, (d) phenomenon can only be understood in the context within which it is studied and it cannot be generalized, and (e) data is simply another construction that can be taken into account. Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as:

> It is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (p. 42)

As indicated in the review of literature in Chapter II, little research has been conducted on school leaders' continuous learning or professional development. Using a

constructionist approach for this research provided an opportunity to make meaning of how leaders seek out learning experiences, how they determine what they need to learn more about, and how they construct knowledge based on their experiences as leaders.

Theoretical Perspective: Interpretivism

Interpretivism was the theoretical perspective that guided this research. The interpretivist approach "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Interpretivist research is where much qualitative research is situated as it examines the ways in which reality is socially constructed. Within each reality there are multiple realities or interpretations of events; thus, within this theoretical perspective, researchers do not find one single meaning. Additionally, prior experiences are always included in the way each new experience is interpreted (Merriam, 2009).

Charmaz (2006) stated, "Interpretive theory calls for the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon. This type of theory assumes emergent, multiple realities, indeterminacy; facts and values as linked; truth as provisional and social life as processual" (p. 126). With a focus on school principals' ongoing learning needs, using this theoretical perspective allowed for analysis of each individual story told by a leader. Each leader's unique voice and perspective was then studied through various lenses that served to uncover the multiple realities that existed in a single experience. Further, interpretivisim calls for the construction of new meaning in my own interpretation of the interviews that were conducted in this study, thus bringing my own reality into the process of data analysis.

Methodology: Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was the methodology that was used to structure this study. According to Charmaz, (2011), "Grounded theory directs researchers to study the most fundamental process in the field setting and to construct a fresh theoretical analysis of it" (p. 170). Glesne (2011) defined grounded theory as "a research process of building theory that is grounded in research data through a continuous reflexive process of gathering data, coding, identifying themes, and then seeking more data" (p. 281). In grounded theory, the investigator or researcher is the primary instrument in data collection and analysis. As the primary investigator, the researcher assumes an inductive stance and strives to derive meaning from the data. The results of this type of research emerge organically from the study and thus are grounded in the data. The primary application of grounded theory is on building or creating a new theory. This type of research is useful in addressing research that is process-oriented or focused on change over time. The researcher develops a substantive theory by looking at specific actions that are often lacking in more global types of research. Data gathered from grounded theory can come in the form of interviews, observations, and a variety of documents (Merriam, 2009). Charmaz (2011) described grounded theory as "a systematic yet flexible method that emphasizes data analysis, involves simultaneous data collection and analysis, uses comparative methods and provides tools for constructing theories" (p. 165). She went on to explain that grounded theory is a way for qualitative researchers to create new theories from construction and interpretation of the research.

Method

The interview was the primary method for data collection. Interviews were conducted and analyzed using specific methods of grounded theory. I interviewed each participant two times. The first interview focused primarily on the principal as an adult learner, and was organized around my research questions (Appendix A). The second interview served as a member check, an opportunity to follow up on the first interview and a space to share artifacts that demonstrated each leader's professional growth as an adult learner (Appendix B). Merriam (2009) described an interview as a conversation focused on questions that are relevant to the study; primarily a person-to-person encounter with one party collecting information from another. When a reaction, feeling, or behavior cannot be observed, an interview is a tool that can be used to gather information on such phenomena. Patton (2002) stated:

> The purpose of the interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories. (p. 341)

Interviews help researchers discover things they cannot observe, such as feelings, past events, thoughts, and intentions. One cannot observe the way people have organized their role and how they make meaning of them; however, through the use of an interview, these aspects of people's lives can be understood (Patton, 2002). Through the use of interviews, I was able to collect information that allowed me to gain meaningful insight

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into my research questions, thus developing a theory of why and how principals continue to learn professionally.

<div align="center">**Research Procedures**</div>

Participant Selection

For the selection of the participants I used a panel of experts to help identify and select outstanding principals for my research. The panel of experts consisted of university professors and central office staff members who had firsthand knowledge of campus level administrators leading schools where improvement was taking place. The panel was asked to identify outstanding principals. Basic criteria for principals to be considered by the expert panel included serving diverse student populations at schools rated by the state of Texas as acceptable. These schools were making academic gains from year-to-year on state accountability measures and early literacy initiatives. It was anticipated that there would be twelve participants in total. The goal was to select four participants from each level: elementary, middle, and high school. I selected two women and two men from each level. Participants were from Central Texas. The interviews were conducted in person.

Data Collection

Understanding the kinds of rich responses that that I wanted to elicit from my research participants, I determined that the interview was the best data collection instrument for my research. Charmaz (2006) explained the value of collecting rich data:

> Gathering rich data will give you some solid material for building a significant analysis. Rich data are detailed, focused, and full. They reveal participants' views, feeling, intentions and actions as well as the context and structures of their

lives. Obtaining rich data means seeking 'thick' description, such as writing

extensive field notes, of observations, collecting respondents' written personal

accounts and/or compiling detailed narratives (such as from transcribed tapes of

interviews). (p. 14)

Rich data, are high quality data that can be used in the research process. A priority of the

interviews conducted in this study was to gather rich data on the participants' perceptions

about their own professional development as an adult learner.

Patton (2002), categorizes interviews into four different types. In the informal

conversation interview, there are no predetermined questions or topics; questions

percolate from the immediate context and are asked and worded in that context. The

informal conversation interview matches the circumstances of the setting and the

situation. The drawback to this interview type is that different information is collected

from different participants, giving it a less systematic and comprehensive feel, which

makes it difficult to organize and analyze the data.

A second type of interview is the interview guide approach. This type of

interview requires an outline of the topics and issues to be covered. The interviewer

decides sequence and wording of the questions throughout the process of the interview.

The outline helps to maintain a sense of order and direction during the interview while

still giving the interviewer flexibility. This approach is more systematic than an informal

conversation, but still gives the interviewer the opportunity to explore topics and follow

up with ideas. The interview guide is still quite conversational and situational in nature.

There can be some difficulty with the interviewer wording questions differently for each

participant; by doing so there is an opportunity for each participant to make their own

meaning of the question and thus elicit different types of responses, making the analysis of the interviews more challenging (Patton, 2002).

The standardized open-ended interview requires the researcher to have the exact wording of each question prepared in advance. The sequence of each question is also predetermined. All participants are asked the exact same questions that are completely open-ended. In this type of interview, the researcher biases are reduced when using several participants. This type of interview allows for organized and systematic data analysis. However, the standardized interview is less flexible than other types, possibly leading to some limitations in the responses (Patton, 2002).

A closed quantitative interview is an interview that asks participant specific questions with responses and categories determined in advance. The respondents must choose from the fixed responses. This type of interview makes data analysis much easier to do, but can be very limiting in the information collected. Participants do not have the opportunity to tell their own story or accurately portray their own understandings (Patton, 2002).

For this study I used the interview guide method to conduct my interviews. This approach allowed me to collect compressive and rich responses from my participants while still ensuring that there was some structure to the interview. It allowed me the opportunity to ask very similar questions of all the participants while still giving me flexibility to follow up on a particular response. The interview guide found in Appendix A was used for the initial interview. This interview focused primarily on my research questions. As mentioned previously the interview guide in Appendix B served as a member check, an opportunity to ask follow-up questions and a chance for participants to

share an artifact that represented their professional growth over time. Using these guides allowed me some flexibility while still providing the types of data that allowed comparison across participants.

Charmaz (2006) described the intensive interview as being an in-depth conversations in which the participant interprets personal experiences. The interviewer seeks to gain as much from the interviewee as feasible and the participant chooses how much information on the topic to share. The interviewer asks questions in a way that will allow the interviewee to articulate and expand upon responses in order for the researcher to gain maximum access to the insights of the interviewee. These types of responses are not likely to occur in day-to-day conversations. Charmaz (2006) proposed that the intensive interview allows an interviewer to:

- Go beneath the surface and described experiences

- Stop to explore a statement or topic

- Request more detail

- Ask about the participant's thoughts, feelings and actions

- Keep the participant on the subject

- Come back to an earlier point

- Restate the participants point to check for accuracy

- Slow or quicken the pace

- Shift the immediate topic

- Validate the participant's humanity, perspective, or action

- Use observational and social skills to further the discussion

- Respect the participant and express appreciation for participating. (p. 26)

In order to get the types of responses that were needed for deep analysis using a grounded theory approach, I provided my participants these types of opportunities through the questions that I asked.

Charmaz (2006) went on to say that a research participant also has conversational prerogatives in the interview. Intensive interviews allow research participants to:

- Break silence

- Tell their stories and to give them a coherent frame

- Reflect on earlier events

- Be experts

- Choose what to tell and how to tell it

- Share significant experiences and teach the interviewer how to interpret them

- Express thoughts and feelings disallowed in other relationships and settings

- Receive affirmation and understanding (p. 27)

Knowing the participants have the ability to provide insight into what I am trying to learn more about helped me to understand they served many roles in the process of data collection, and I remained open to the understanding that there are many ways to analyze the data that are gathered during an interview.

Patton (2002) describes six different types of questions: experience and behavior, opinion and value, feelings, knowledge, sensory questions, and background/demographic questions. Using these six types of questions elicits different types of responses from each participant. Experience and behavior questions are designed so that the respondents give information about behaviors, experiences, actions, and activities that are a part of their world. Opinion and values questions are structured so that the researcher can

understand the "cognitive and interpretive process of people asked opinions, judgment and values" (p. 350). Knowledge questions give the researcher information about the participant's personal information base. And finally, background and demographic questions provide the researcher with information about the participants. By using an open-ended response question, the researcher is able to "locate the respondents in relation to other people" (p. 351). By using different types of questions, I had the ability to gather the data needed to conduct an in-depth study.

Using the detailed interview guide allowed me to concentrate on the research questions during the limited time I had with each participant. The interview guide provided me the opportunity to interview several different people with a systematic and/or comprehensive approach while still being able to explore individual perspectives and experiences (Patton, 2002). Two interviews were conducted with each participant. Each interview lasted up to one hour. The first interview primarily focused on gathering information directly connected to the research questions. Prior to ending the first interview I explained the purpose of the requested artifacts and suggested some ideas on how to select artifacts to share and discuss during the second interview. The first interviews were transcribed and analyzed prior to the second round of interviews. For each administrator, follow-up questions for the second interview emerged from the analysis of the first interview. The second interview began with a series of questions asking the school leader to clarify, expand upon, and confirm perceptions shared in the first interview. The rest of the second interview focused on the artifacts that the participants were asked to provide to support their professional learning. Each

participant was asked to explain their artifact to enhance the interview and the data collection process.

Data Analysis

My first analysis of the data was for initial coding. This was done in a fast-paced manner with an emphasis on looking for things that initially stood out. Assuring my codes fit my data rather than attempting to make my data fit the codes was crucial. An important reminder from Charmaz (2006) about creating codes, was to "remain open, stay close to the data, keep your codes simple and precise, construct short codes, preserve actions, and compare data with data, moving quickly through the data" (p. 49).

Once I completed my initial coding, I turned my attention to line-by-line coding to look at each line in particular and assign the line a code. This was done for every line even when it was not a complete sentence or thought. Through this process, new ideas were identified that may have been overlooked in the initial thematic sweep of information. Line by line coding allowed me the opportunity to be open in order to see nuances in the actual data. This was the information that I then used to focus on in the second interview and, to further explore emerging trends (Charmaz, 2006).

Next, I analyzed the data using focused coding; this refers to the process of identifying the most significant or frequent codes from the line-by-line analysis. It was through this process that I put codes into categories based on what made the most analytical sense. From my focused coding came axial coding. "Axial coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis" (Charmaz, p. 60).

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Finally, I used theoretical coding to develop possible relationships between categories. Theoretical coding helped me to conceptualize the findings of the original coding while moving the process on to where the actual analytical story starts to take form (Charmaz, 2006).

Once I started my initial coding process, I quickly transitioned to writing extended notes called memos. These memos discussed and analyzed the various codes. Some codes were more relevant to the data than others and therefore became the tentative analytic categories that were subsequently elaborated upon and checked. Anything and everything that stood out to me as the researcher was analyzed through memo writing. Through this process, particular codes started to stand out and eventually took the form of a theoretical category. It was through the memo process that I was able to clearly compare data to data and develop my thinking around the individual data sets. From the memos, I made meaning of the research (Charmaz, 2006). Memos can do the following:

- Spell out and detail processes subsumed by the codes or categories

- Make comparisons between data and data, data and codes, codes and codes, codes and categories, and categories and categories

- Bring raw data into the memo

- Provides sufficient empirical evidence to support your definitions of the category and analytic claims about it

- Offer conjectures to check in the field settings

- Identify gaps in the analysis

- Interrogate a code or category by asking questions of it (Chamaz, 2006, p. 62)

In the last phase of data analysis, I identified broad themes cutting across the data as well as the relationships among those themes. Based on those themes and relationships, I constructed a theory of effective professional development for school leaders.

Ethical Considerations

One ethical consideration for this study related to the reality that I brought to this study my own personal bias (Merriam, 2009). As Charmaz (2006) described, I must remember that the codes must fit the data, and I must be careful not to start making codes to fit the way I wanted to see the data. I brought to this research my own passion about professional development and my opinions around the changing roles of the principal as a leader. I understand that I had to separate my personal bias from the researcher in order to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of school leaders and how they are best served in their own professional learning.

Another ethical consideration was the protection of the participants. I ensured that each participant understood the purpose of the study, the time commitment, the parameters of the study, and how the study would be used. All participants remained anonymous throughout the process, as well as in the dissertation and any follow-up publications. Information shared with me was used strictly for the purpose of this research and in no way would the participants' identities be revealed during the research process or to anyone other than the expert panel that assisted in participant selection, and members of the dissertation committee.

<center>**IV. RESULTS**</center>

The participants were selected based on recommendations from an expert committee comprised of university professors and central office administrators from various districts in Central Texas. When a participant was recommended, phone contact was established with the nominated participant to establish initial contact as well as to explain the purpose of the study, the time commitment and the confidentiality of the participants. Once the participants were nominated and had committed to participate, an in-person interview was scheduled. A total of twelve participants were chosen for the study. Each participant was interviewed twice. The first interview focused on the principal's experience with professional development and self-directed learning. The second interview consisted of a member check as well as discussion of an artifact chosen by the principal to represent herself or himself as an adult learner.

<center>**Participating Principals**</center>

Twelve principals participated in this study, including four elementary, four middle school and four high school principals. Within each group two men and two women were interviewed. There was a great deal of diversity among these principals, from the types of schools they led to the differences among the leaders themselves. There were four Hispanic, three African American, four White and one Asian school leaders. All the names of the participants have been changed; each has been assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their identity.

Priscilla

Priscilla, a Hispanic woman in her late thirties, is an elementary school principal in a suburban school district. Priscilla, who is from a family of educators, was

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alternatively certified to become a teacher. She holds a bachelor's degree in International

Studies and earned a MBA in Mexico City. When she returned to Texas she started

teaching as a bilingual teacher. She returned to school to get a master's degree in

educational leadership. Priscilla has been in education for fourteen years and has been an

administrator for five years and a principal at her current campus for two years.

Priscilla's campus is a Title I school with 97% of the students economically

disadvantaged. The population is of 15% African American, 79% Hispanic, 2% White,

2% Asian and 2% two or more races. At Priscilla's school, 62% of the students are

English Language Learners, 87% of the students are at risk and 5% of the students are

special education.

Priscilla shared data that she had collected after reading a book that she chose as

her learning artifact. The data were based on walk throughs that she had conducted for

some of her teachers that were struggling. The way the book had structured the walk

throughs allowed for her to have more meaningful conversations with teachers. She

shared both data from the walkthroughs as well as her notes from structured

conversations with teachers. Priscilla explained,

> Our campus has so many new teachers and struggling teachers, so this was a good
>
> opportunity to have that one-to-one talk. The book helped me to kind of go back
>
> and look at the videos and bring some things out. So it really helped to give that
>
> feedback, and for me as a learner, I think that after reading the book and doing
>
> this, I wish I would have started with it. As a new administrator this helps you to
>
> connect with teachers that are struggling.

Melinda

Melinda is an African American female in her mid-forties. She pursued education because of high school teachers that touched her life. Melinda got her undergraduate degree in education and then continued with a master's degree in elementary education. She taught for ten years and then decided that she needed to pursue an administrative certification. She was an assistant principal for three years and has been a principal for six years. Melinda's school is a rural/suburban school. It is a Title I campus with 83% economically disadvantaged students. The student body is 21% African American, 69% Hispanic, 7% White, 1% Asian, and 2% two or more races. At Melinda's school, 50% of the students are second language learners, and 81% are considered at-risk. Special education students make up 8% of the population. The campus meets expectations set by the Texas state accountability system.

Melinda was offered the opportunity to open a new campus during the time of data collection. The learning artifact that Melinda presented to reflect her work was the vision and mission statement that was created with her new staff to start the process of developing culture and climate for her campus. As a group her team has collaboratively developed the vision and mission for the campus. They also adopted the theme of HEROS with each letter representing a word that is in alignment with their vision and mission. Melinda believes that this work truly represents her as a learner,

> I am a lifelog learner and I told my staff…I am not perfect, I do not have all the answers to everything. I do not know everything and just as we are opening the school together, I am learning and I am learning from them (the teachers). That makes all of us life-long learners, and I want them to be mindful that our students

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are learners, and I want them to make sure that they are making those connections and building relationships, because ultimately we want to do what is best for students.

Maxwell

Maxwell, a White man in his early fifties, comes from a family of educators. He is the principal of an affluent suburban elementary school. He has been at the same school for over sixteen years. He has a degree in education and started his career teaching computer science at the high school level. From the beginning of his career in education he knew he wanted to run his own building, so upon graduation he immediately started working on his degree in educational administration. Maxwell taught for two years and then became an assistant principal. He was an assistant principal for one year and then became a principal. He has twenty-five years of experience as a principal. Maxwell's school population includes 6% economically disadvantaged students. The ethnic distribution is 2% African American, 14% Hispanic, 70% White, 8% Asian, and 6% two or more races. Special education students make up 8% of the student population.

Maxwell presented his end of year SMORE as his learning artifact. A SMORE is a web tool that is used to design newsletters. Communication was the goal Maxwell had picked for the school year. He was excited to present this to me as his learning artifact, because he believed it truly represented learning for him. He felt his communication with parents and staff needed to improve, he found a tool that allowed him to do this and he utilized it regularly. The artifact that he presented was his "year in review" edition.

I was able to send it out (final edition) to my parents kind of like a school year book with all the principal's messages and pictures. I have had a lot of positive feedback from my parents, my teachers and even my students who were in there throughout the year.

Pops

Pops is a principal in his mid-sixties who serves in rural/suburban district. Pops was a teacher and a coach for fourteen years. He went into administration because he wanted to make a difference as an effective leader. He got his master's degree in mid-management, and since then has been an elementary supervisor, a migrant coordinator, a middle school assistant principal and an elementary principal. Pops also was a superintendent for three years before retiring from that position. After his retirement, he had been rehired to be an elementary principal and during the study was in his second year in that role. The school that he was assigned to was in trouble and needed a strong leader to bring discipline as well as a focus on instruction to the campus. Pop's school is a Title I school serving a student body in which 97% of the students are economically disadvantaged. The population of the campus consists of 13% African American, 84% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% two or more races. English language learners make up 68% of the campus, and 8% of the students receives special education services.

Pop's learning artifact was what he called his "Total Education Plan." This was a discipline plan that he has created over the many years he has been in education. He has used it in many different settings. The plan has been tweaked for each school in which he has worked. The plan includes positive rewards as well as clearly defined expectations and consequences. The plan was based on research on discipline Pops has conducted

throughout the years. The plan supports the campus vision and mission while allowing students, parent and teachers the opportunity to clearly understand the rules and expectations. Pops stated,

> It became apparent and obvious to me that if we did not get the kids' attention then it would be kind of hard for them to learn the material and master the material that we wanted them to learn.

Pops explained how this plan was a clear example of the things that he has learned over time about discipline and the needs of his students. He said it has taken a long time for him to finally get the plan right.

Sophia

Sophia is a White middle school principal in her late forties. Her campus is located in the suburbs of a large city and is considered to be a very successful school. Sophia has a traditional education degree and taught for ten years at the elementary level. She served as an assistant principal for five years at two different campuses before becoming a principal. She was an elementary principal for five years and is now a middle school principal who has been at her current position for three years. The campus student population is 5% economically disadvantaged and is 1% African American, 14% Hispanic, 75% White, 5% Asian and 5% two or more races. At risk students make up 15% of the student body and 7% of the students receive special education services.

Sophia presented as her learning artifact a writing piece that she had recently written while participating with her teachers in a writing project sponsored by a local university. The essay she presented is what she put in the end of the year memory book to which each participant contributed. The writing piece gave a glimpse into something

that was very personal and emotional for Sophia. She explained that her learning artifact represented how much she valued the opportunity to go through a yearlong training experience with her teachers, with her teachers seeing her sitting in the sessions in the learner role. Sophia shared,

> The writing project is what I think was one of the powerful pieces of embedded professional development that I have ever done. And so I got to be one of the biggest learners in the room, because really in that room, I'm not the expert in writing and reading, those teaches are, and so I tried to let them be in the seat of where they were the experts and I was there learning from them, and it was really powerful!

Monica

Monica is a White middle school principal in her late forties. She has a traditional elementary education degree. She taught for eight years in a very diverse school and returned to college to get her master's in administration. Monica was an assistant principal for three years and then returned to the campus where she started teaching to be the principal. She was there for four years. She then went to central office for three years, then returned to the role of principal at the elementary level for another three years. She has been in her current role as a middle school principal in a large urban district for the past three years. Monica has a doctoral degree. The population of Monica's campus is 3% African American, 22% Hispanic, 62% White, 8% Asian, and 5% two or more races. Special education services are provided to 9% of the students at the campus.

For her learning artifact, Monica shared the final product of a committee she served on at the district level. The committee started from scratch and created the

district's campus administrator evaluation tool. The tool included an observation of the administrator as well as conferences to provide feedback to the campus leader. Monica is very proud of this work; she is a passionate administrator and feels that the fair evaluation of an administrator requires more than the data included in a report generated by the state. Monica stated,

> I had been at my previous campus for 5 years and my supervisor had never walked my campus, not one time. I think that is unacceptable. Then my evaluation has all these comments and it was all data driven. I could tell that he did not write it. There was not one personal thing about me and that was frustrating.

RJ

RJ is an African American male in his mid-thirties. He is the principal of a middle school in a suburban district. RJ started his career in education as a teacher's assistant. He then was alternatively certified and became a teacher after his first year. RJ taught at the middle school level for five years. During the time he was teaching he returned to school to get his master's in educational administration. His first job as an assistant principal was at a middle school; he was there for half a year before being placed at the high school to help with a special project. The next year he returned to the role of middle school assistant principal in the same district. The following year he helped to open a new middle school in the role of assistant principal. He then became the principal of his current campus. RJ's school is Title I, serving a student population that is 80% economically disadvantaged. The student population is 23% African American, 66% Hispanic, 4% White, 5% Asian, and 2% two or more races. English Language

Learners make up 38% of the student population and special education services are

provided to 10% of the students.

Shortly after our interview, RJ was named to a new position. For his learning

artifact RJ presented a very meaningful and extremely touching artifact that came from

his staff. The artifact was a "memory book" that his middle school staff put together for

him to show their appreciation for the work that he had done with the campus. The book

consisted of pictures, stories, quotes and well wishes. RJ was extremely touched by the

gesture of the staff and it was evident that the book was meaningful to him. RJ speaks of

the book,

> Several campus and community members wrote quotes that are really kind and
>
> motivational and affirmation to continue to inspire me to continue to do the work.
>
> So this is one of those tokens that I take as direct evidence of having a positive
>
> impact on the organization that I am serving.

When asked what he has learned from this artifact, RJ stated, "to show humility.

That was my goal for this year. I am very focused, very business, very let's get the job

done, and sometime there is not enough emphasis from me to show humility."

Michael

Michael is a White a middle school principal in his mid-thirties. He is the

principal of a Title I middle school in a suburban school district. Michael is alternatively

certified to be a teacher. He taught for four years. After his first semester of teaching,

Michael started his master's program in educational administration. His first

administration job was at a high school, and after a year there, he became the middle

school principal in the same district. Michael has served as the middle school principal

for five years. The campus is 77% economically disadvantaged, with 30% of the students English language learners and 10% of the students receiving special education services. The ethnic distribution of the students for his campus is 20% African American, 68% Hispanic, 10%, White and 2% two or more races.

The learning artifact that Michael shared with me was a series of binders that housed the documents from the professional development and training he has acquired over the years. Some of the contents were handed to him at the start of his career, while he has added other items because he has found value and meaning in them professionally. The binders basically demonstrate the evolution of his professional career. Michael shared,

> It kind of chronicles experiences that I have had, I see trends…because all of my experience has been in one district to date, it kind of highlights trends with instructional focus or with organizational focus and you can somewhat see where the state has done some changing as well. It is pretty interesting, it shows history. Great reflection tool.

Sue

Sue is an Asian high school principal in her mid-forties. She is the principal of a high school in an urban school district. Sue has been in education for twenty-four years. She was traditionally trained as an educator and taught high school and middle school English for thirteen years. She earned a master's in educational leadership at a university where she worked with one of the gurus of servant leadership. She has been an administrator for twelve years, serving in roles as an assistant principal at the high school, an elementary principal, a middle school principal and now a high school principal.

Economically disadvantaged students make up 50% of the population at her campus, where 12% of the students are served by the special education program. Sue's school is 16 % African American, 52% Hispanic, 28% White, 2% Asian and 2% two or more races.

For Sue's learning artifact she presented an agenda for the latest training that she had attended. Sue had been involved in an on-going professional learning experience that lasted throughout the school year and involved various levels of administrators from different states. This experience was very meaningful to her professionally. She discussed the professional learning in her first interview, and it was no surprise when she presented the agenda as her learning artifact. Sue stated,

> I think that this is pretty representative of me as a learner in that at this point it's about leadership through curriculum, and I think that everything we do right now, and the success of schools around the county is all around the content of the curriculum that we are utilizing.

Sue went on to say,

> I think it's indicative of me as a learner because it is all about collaboration, which as you and I have talked before, is really important. We say that students don't learn in silos, but I think that as administrators and district level personnel we end up trying to work or function in silos, but this is a reminder that at all levels we really have to work collaboratively to move education forward.

Susan

Susan is an African American woman in her early forties. She is the principal of an alternative campus in a suburban school district. Her campus is a campus of choice

for students that need to navigate high school differently from the traditional route. Susan is alternatively certified to teach. She taught middle school science for four years, and while teaching she earned her master's degree in educational leadership. Susan is currently working on her doctorate. Her first administration position was at the middle school level, but she has served as assistant principal at the high school and elementary levels as well. Susan has also worked at the district level. The campus that Susan serves is fairly small, but it is a valuable asset to the community; it allows students who may not have graduated if they had to attend a traditional high school an opportunity to get a diploma. The demographics of the campus are as follows: 35% African American, 53% Hispanic, 10% White and 2% two or more races. Special education services are provided to 14% of the students on the campus, and 89% of the student body is economically disadvantaged.

The artifact that Susan brought to discuss was a product she had created at a training that she attended. The training was in the area of special education, and while she had been an administrator for several years, this was an opportunity for her to explore some of the tools and reports that special education personnel work with. The artifact that she presented was her learning product, for which she journeyed from a functional behavior assessment to a behavior intervention plan for a student. Susan expanded,

> It definitely opened my eyes to what needs to happen if we have a student who is needing an FBA. I know now what my special education teacher or case manager needs in order to get all the information that is necessary to write a meaningful behavior intervention plan.

Susan went on to explain that, while she has had plenty of experience with special education, she had never really had training where all the ins and outs of the process were explained, and she had the chance to actually put the learning into action.

Joe

Joe is a Hispanic high school principal in his mid-forties. He is the principal of a large urban high school. Joe completed an alternative teacher certification program. He started his career in a private middle school, then moved to public education and was a teacher and a coach. He returned to school to get a master's degree in educational leadership. He has served as an assistant principal at both the middle school and the high school level. He has been the principal of his current campus for the past five years. Joe has only worked at high poverty schools. His current campus serves a population of 78% economically disadvantaged, with 16% of the students receiving special education services and 26% of the students English language learners. The population that Joe serves is 10% African American, 84% Hispanic, 4% White, and 2% Asian.

For Joe's learning artifact he brought a golf ball that had a small logo on it. Joe told me the story of the golf ball. The ball was one that he found when golfing in a tournament. The logo was the one from the country club that his dad was a member of when Joe was growing up. Joe's dad has been deceased for several years now, but he was Joe's mentor and hero. He was an avid golfer. Joe spent a lot of time with him on the golf course and one thing that he would always tell him is to keep his eye on the ball. This is something that Joe carries with him all of the time, the reminder to keep his eye on the ball. Joe's dad would tell Joe that you can't hit what you can't see. Joe explained to me that he took this with him into his life and work,

If you don't keep your eye on the prize, you will never get there. If you don't

keep your eye on the ball, you can't hit it. So when you create a goal or a target,

you can't hit it if you don't remember it. You can look around this room (we

were in his office) and see everything that we talk about and think about, but if I

don't keep my eye on it and I don't make it a priority we are never going to meet

these goals.

Raul

Raul is a Hispanic male in his early forties. He is the principal of a high school of

choice in a suburban school district. The campus runs on a lottery system. While

students are not admitted based on any educational criteria, only a certain number of

students are admitted each year. The campus is committed to strong instructional

practices that provide students hands-on learning experiences. Raul completed

alternative teacher and administrator certification programs. He taught middle school for

three years before accepting a teaching job at the campus where he is now the principal.

He has been the principal for the past three years. His campus student population is 19%

African American, 56% Hispanic, 18 % White, 5% Asian, and 2% two or more races,

with 42% of the campus considered economically disadvantaged.

Raul had the opportunity to attend two powerful professional development

programs the year of the study, and for his learning artifact he brought an infographic that

he created during one of these professional development opportunities. He explained

how these two learning experiences were valuable in helping him wrap his head around

being a leader and building capacity. The infographics were a way for him to organize

his notes that was visual and made sense to him. Raul went on to discuss how he liked to

share the information that he learned with others, that his infographics were a way to do that, and that he learned from the process of putting the graphic together as well as helping others learn what he had learned. Raul explained,

> I think that I get commonly accused of two things: one making very colorful graphics and putting a lot of information into very small spaces. I think that I am tempted to do both because I like to make them fit on the paper. So the formatting reflects that, and the reason for that is I like to be able to put them on my wall or share them out with other people so that they can see the information, and they can write notes on them, and they can ask questions.

Through analysis of the information that each participant shared when discussing their learning artifact, the evidence showed that these school leaders were extremely reflective in their practice. These leaders demonstrated a reflective disposition.   The participants sought to gain new knowledge and then used this knowledge to grow in their role as leaders. These school leaders demonstrated how they were continuously reflecting on their practice and seeking out opportunities to learn when the need arose.

Emergent Themes

Based on the principal profiles, it is evident that the group of participants was quite diverse. The participants varied from the number of years they were administrators (2 to 30+), and the type of certification they held. While some of the participants came into education through a traditional degree plan, several were alternatively certified. The group consisted of administrators on their first tour of duty along with others who had been in many roles as leaders, and who served on multiple campuses. This diversity brought to the study many different viewpoints and voices on the topic of professional

development; however, there were a number of themes that cut across the principals'
perceptions. These themes concerned the principals need for continuous learning, self-
assessment of professional needs, the undertaking of formal and informal professional
development, the impact of professional development, and turning to others.

The Principal's Need for Continuous Learning

All of the principals in the study saw themselves as learners. They all saw
themselves as leaders that sought out professional development and self-directed learning
experiences. Although they knew they had to continue to learn and grow, as Sophia
explained, "We don't get a whole lot of guidance as principals about what we should be
doing to develop our own skill set. We don't get a lot of feedback." Maxwell
commented,

> The danger of not providing quality PD for yourself is that you are not going to
> just be stagnant; you are going to lose ground. Especially now, with the whole
> accountability system changing yet again. Everything is changing; you got to
> learn and you got to teach your staff. The curriculum will change again. It just
> will. Funding is not going to be there for PD; you got to go find the funding. But
> I think the danger in our profession is that when all we do is be the fireman, and
> granted there are days when you got to be a fireman, you're not going to stay
> where you are at, you are going to lose ground, and when you lose ground, your
> teachers lose ground and your students lose ground.

Joe declared,

> We need to learn as humans to stop being hypocrites and providing professional
> development in ways that pisses us off. You don't want to sit down for 90

86

minutes, but yet you'll lead PD session for 90 minutes. Let's talk about note taking. No, let's give people real PD. It takes a lot of time, it is intense, you have to have someone who knows what they're doing, you have to have buy in, you have to talk about what topics will be spoken about, and know what you want to teach, but it has to be differentiated.

The twelve participants all saw themselves as instructional leaders and believed that being the instructional leader was the primary focus of their jobs. The participants reported that, with the focus on accountability and student achievement, the instructional leadership role is one that requires a great deal of time and commitment on behalf of the leader. Pops stated, "I view myself as a leader who supports instruction. You cannot have good instruction unless you have an orderly classroom. I view myself as someone who is going to support teachers first; give them the systems to be successful." Melinda explained,

> Reflection is powerful, so being mindful of decisions that are made and how they impact other people is very significant. Keeping instruction at the forefront, but at the same time maintaining positive relationships and helping teachers to understand their responsibility to be accountable for the students that they serve.

The participants understood that there was a need for them to continue to learn and grow. They acknowledged that the role of the instructional leader was a key role for them and that they had to continue to seek ongoing knowledge to remain instructional leaders because of changing practices and changing demographics. In order to keep up with teacher and student learning needs it was necessary to grow.

Themes Related to Self-assessment of Professional Learning Needs

School administrators have professional needs just like everyone else. The role of the principal is ever changing; pair that with the fact that no two school years are ever alike and one can see quickly that there is a need for school leaders to continue to learn and grow. This study sought to understand how successful principals assess their own professional needs. Two main themes that came to light include: (a) the continually changing role of the principal, and (b) critical incidents can often spark the learning for school leaders.

Changing role of the principal. The participants described how the role of the principal has evolved in order to support the demands of the current political environment in society and education, moving away from the principal as the building manager to the principal as the all-knowing leader. These changes include accountability, school finance issues, curriculum changes, and changes in campus demographics, to name a few. For these reasons many participants are driven to learn more. Joe, a high school principal, summed up the current situation:

> We have parents and society and co-workers and community members who
> expect the school to do literally everything. I would love to, with the right
> resources…The role of the principal -not to throw anyone under the bus- but this
> office fifty years ago had a person in here who sipped whisky and smoked cigars.
> You just made sure the building did not burn down. Life changes, the job
> changes. Literally, there is not anything that goes on in this world that schools
> aren't asked to deal with, or fix or do. The role has changed dramatically and I

have to stay informed of all things from immigrations law, to school law, to street law.

This statement speaks directly to the political environment, where there are constant changes based on who is in office, the community served, the demographics of the campus, as well as the new challenges involved with school vouchers and public education. All of these elements can put stressors on schools and school leaders in particular.

How long one had been a principal affected participants' perspectives on the changing role of the principal. For example, Pops, the most senior participant in the study, stated,

> During my tenure the role of the principal has changed from manager, to disciplinarian (carry the "big paddle," right?) to the coach kind of style. Sitting in your office close the door and do the paperwork, while with the teachers, here are your books go to your classroom, I'll see you in the spring, to what we have now, which is an instructional leader.

Susan, who was early in her career, with less than five years of experience, lamented that all the paperwork and administrative responsibilities limited her in the amount of time that she was able to be the instructional leader for the campus. She stated, "My role as principal is not what I expected in most cases. I really want to be at every PLC and be in classrooms 24/7, but because of the other work, I have to find the balance."

When asked where she learned of the changing role of the principal, Sophia who had seven years of experience as principal, explained that she learned from journals that she subscribed to through professional organizations.

> For the most part, principals I know are treading water…typically the pool that you are in within your own district isn't going to be the pool that you're in to help grow and push you necessarily. Its bigger organizations, typically, where you make connections with people that are doing great work in the field. And when you find somebody who's really doing something innovative, then you start picking their brain. But it may not be close to home. Or it may just be the people that are doing that great work, the only way you have contact with them is through published journals and things.

> Sue, with over thirteen years of experience, agrees with Sophia, "I think it is important to belong to professional affiliations…to keep up with things." Priscilla, with fewer than five years' experience as a principal, and Maxwell, who has more than 15 years in the principalship, both shared that they also learned more about the changing role of the principal through district meetings and new mandates. When Priscilla was asked where else she received information from, she discussed the monthly administrators meeting, and added "I think it just kind of happens. And then you kind of know, okay these are the things I have to do now." Maxwell, however, described the negative side of learning about new demands of the principal's role through district meetings:

> We literally get called into a meeting and it is sit and get. We literally call it kill day, where we kill lots of things, where it is literally forty-five minutes of this department followed by forty-five minutes of that department. All of these things

coming at you. There is no collaboration or working together, it is literally wham,

wham, wham, and this is what is now expected.

Often when new information is delivered in this form, there are more questions than

answers and school administrators still have a need to continue to learn in order to be able

to successfully carry out the new expectation. Susan explained how she learned about

her changing role at the district level:

Happenstance. I mean, it just kind of happens. We have meetings and we're told

what to do. We get changes from the legislature. It usually comes…particularly

in this district, straight from the superintendent.

Principals need various resources to learn about their changing roles. The

administrators seemed to know that the job continues to change and that they need to

continue to learn and grow in order to keep up with the work demands. While the

demands continued to change, the understanding was that it was just part of the job, and

that when there are political changes and social changes these will also require changes to

the work of the school leader. It could be said that under these circumstances the

professional development needs of the administrators appeared to be more reactive than

visionary. However, even when the administrators in this study were reacting to the

situation, they were still very reflective in the process of discovering what additional

learning needed to occur. There were times and places when these administrators were

able to seek new learning based on being reflective and visionary.

Critical incidents. The second theme that unveiled itself when investigating how

principals assess their need for professional learning was critical incidents. All 12

participants could name at least one critical incident that projected them into a learning

experience. A number of the critical incidents involved students with special needs. When asked about incidents that led to his professional learning, Maxwell responded, "That would be my high needs special education students. When I have a student that has needs that I don't know much about, I have to learn more." Raul also indicated a shift in his student population demographics became a critical incident, requiring him to develop new understandings and skills.

> We are seeing a lot of things that we just did not account for, primarily because our demographics are changing, our school is changing, our student population is changing, and so figuring out how to best serve them pretty much leads to some new discovery or new need that we didn't know was there.

Pops told a story of his critical incident in Houston as a young administrator,

> We were all on performance contracts. And by the spring, if you didn't meet your goals, and the goals were agreed upon over the summer for the upcoming year, then you were gone. And we brought somebody else in that would do the job. So, that wasn't so much of a motivating factor. What motivated me was taking over a school, and it wasn't just any school. It was my school. The school that I went to as an elementary student. It had one foot in the TEA coffin and had been low performing for years. So it motivated me to give something back to that community.

Priscilla recalled that discipline problems on her campus became a critical incident for her. When she had the opportunity to study the issue she found that the discipline was not the only problem, but student behavior had an academic effect as well,

I was frustrated with our discipline, especially with our African American boys. Seeing the number of referrals and suspensions…[I] started conversations with the staff. Looking at the data, we also found that we had 20-30% of these students failing.

Learning about the changing role of the principalship in light of their current skill set was also seen as a critical incident for some administrators. The data revealed that these leaders were in a continuous learning process. Their changing roles as well as critical incidents provided opportunities to learn. These opportunities were not predictable and it took a leaders with a reflective disposition to be able to react to both of types of situations. The key to these principals being able to assess their professional learning needs was their on-going professional reflection. These leaders were able to reflect on their current skill set and understand what they needed in order to grow and develop in a particular area. Melinda explained,

I am not afraid to say I don't know and I need to get more information. I need to get up to speed on what's going on, and…I can admit to myself that I don't have all the answers and I'm still learning myself…Education is lifelong learning. It is ever-changing.

Sue shared,

To be able to have those conversations outside of the protocols and all that with colleagues, I think that's a big part of how I stay current. I have people that think different than me that challenge me, because I'm always right. All of us in leadership, we have that mentality, "no, I'm always right" but to have people that are similarly minded, you know we have the same focus and have a heart for kids.

We want the very best for them, we want to push them but how we get there is

very different. I think engaging in those types of conversations is critical.

A critical incident may create a learning need for a campus leader. The

participants in this study shared different experiences and their need for additional

knowledge. The new learning may have been sought out by formal or informal learning

experiences, however; this was determined by these leaders through being reflective on

their own knowledge and skills.

Themes Related to Types of Professional Development

Another question for this study concerned the types of professional development

in which school administrators engage. There are many different types of professional

development in which a person can participate. Once the principal determines a need for

learning, he or she must also consider personal choices in learning style and format to

find a professional development activity that will maximize learning opportunities.

Formal professional development. Formal professional development is

organized by the school district or an institution, organization or association outside of

the district. The principals in this study engaged in a number of formal professional

development frameworks, including training, professional learning communities,

portfolio development, critical friends protocol and formal online professional

development.

Problems with training as information delivery. The primary concern about

training for the school leaders was training as merely the delivery of the information.

Maxwell explained,

When the training follows new research models, i.e., where we are never going to

be sitting more than fifteen minutes in a presentation or a training, where we are

working on a project, typing, writing, practicing, modeling sure…traditional

lecturing to me, for eight hours, I learn nothing.

Michael stated that training at the beginning of the school year felt very overwhelming,

"Here are your 35,000 new initiatives that we are doing and here is your data." Susan also

shared her concerns about training:

I have not been to very many trainings that have been very helpful. Most of the

time we are talked at. Just like students and teachers, we need to have hands on

activities too. We have different ways of learning, but most presenters don't

appeal to that. They think we are adults so we are expected to just sit there and

listen. I don't think I learn that way, and I don't think that most people learn that

way.

The participants agreed, training should be engaging and meaningful. These learning

experiences should enhance their knowledge and skillset and should be presented in a

manner in which they are meeting the needs of the learner.

Professional learning communities. All of the administrators reported that they

had participated in a professional learning community (PLC) as a school leader. The

participants identified one caution concerning PLCs: many group meetings called PLCs

in reality do not possess the characteristics of authentic PLCs, where four questions are

the focus of the learning opportunity (a) what do we want our students to learn? (b) how

are we going to know if they learned it? (c) what do we do if they do not learn it? and (d)

what do we do for those that already know it? (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010).

Maxwell shared,

> PLCs, we call it that but that is not what we are doing. We are doing professional
> working communities, which I do like. I like that we are given time to sit down
> as administrators and work on a problem or a thing. What we call our principals'
> PLC is a sit and get.

Sophia talks about how important it is to learn about authentic PLCs:

> I worked with a principal one time who taught me about PLCs, it was about the
> time that they were really hitting the scene and she brought a book from a training
> she went to and told me to read it. We both read it and I will tell you that it was
> pretty brilliant. I think that one of the things that she understood and that I
> learned from her was that you don't wait until you have a perfect plan for
> everything, you just jump in and start the work. And you learn as you go.

One of the high school principals explained they used PLC, "sort of, we have a literacy
group and they come out and we talk and use the PLC structure, but it doesn't happen
often."

While the participants agreed that PLCs were meaningful learning experiences,
most of them shared that they had not participated in a PLC that was focused on student
learning and student data. Many of the participants had the experience of coming
together and having conversations about various school problems, but not with a focus on
the four questions per se.

Portfolio development as an early career experience. A portfolio, can help a
school leader demonstrate how he or she has taken knowledge or a skill and applied it in
a meaningful way. The portfolio is a collection of artifacts that represents and chronicals

the growth and development of the learner. Through this process, the learner must reflect

upon the artifact to demonstrate how it adds to his or her personal growth as a learner

(Zepeda, 2012)   In the process of developing a portfolio, the administrator includes

artifacts of and reflections on professional learning. There were mixed reactions to the

use of portfolios by the school leaders. The participants that were in the early stages of

their careers were more likely to have portfolios, while the more experienced principals

no longer had one. Susan discussed the assistance she received in creating a portfolio:

> I hired someone to take what I've done and help me put it together in a
>
> professional manner so that I can add to it. I basically had a conversation with
>
> this gentleman about my career. He wanted to know a little more about me
>
> personally, then he produced this wonderful portfolio. It's basically my resume
>
> on steroids…I had never been in a portfolio building training before, but I think
>
> that would be something useful to us as educational leaders. I didn't know to beef
>
> it up, I just had a resume.

Pops too had a portfolio. He described his as "a series of compilations, with the first one

being his philosophy of education." Many of the participants had portfolios from their

graduate work, but had not kept up with them, Sophia shared, "I did one for my Master's

thesis. I'm not great about going back and collecting all of the stuff on my own learning."

Most of the participants in this study did not have a current portfolio, thus they

were not using the portfolio process as part of their current professional development.

Most of the participants, however, had been responsible for creating a portfolio in their

Master's program. All the participants who shared that they were responsible for

developing a portfolio during their graduate work found the process to be useful, but for

one reason or another had not continued this highly reflective practice.

   Coaching is a useful tool. Coaching is a process that is based on trust and

collaboration. The process of coaching allows the principal to transition to being

proactive instead of reactive while allowing time for the administrator to reflect and

planning for improvement while working with an individual that is focused on asking the

right questions (Zapada, 2012). Priscilla shared that she enjoyed coaching others in her

work as a leader, but that she also appreciated the opportunity to be coached:

> I have learned that you are going to get something out of it and then I have been
>
> fortunate to work with really intelligent people and I was really lucky to have
>
> people that, when they give the feedback, it's not belittling or hurtful, and then at
>
> the same time they let me be my own person and lead the way I want to. It has
>
> been a good experience.

Susan, a high school principal, had a coach assigned to her:

> She comes and sees me once a month, and we talk about some of my challenges
>
> and strong points. She helps me out and brainstorms with me. We talk a lot
>
> about my creativity and she helps me create a plan. It's been awesome. She has
>
> really helped me a lot.

   Critical friends. Critical friends is a protocol that calls for critical analysis, where

others take a deep look at the work that is being presented, and open dialogue is then

facilitated by a colleague or group (Costa & Kallick, 1993). The protocol is a formal

process that works through a problem solving cycle. Many of the principals reported that

this is a valuable process for them. Michael stated,

When I was an assistant principal those first few years, virtually every meeting we

had involved critical friends and we would take topics and situations on our

campus and listen to the perspectives of somebody else and they would give us

their feedback…I think what I was impressed with about that process was that our

superintendent and our assistants [superintendents] at that time would stay there

talk and listen; they wouldn't leave, they would engage in it, so they would

comment and ask questions and follow up when they came and visited our

campus.

Sue laughed when I asked about critical friends. She stated, "Who doesn't have critical

friends!" She went on to say,

I use that quite a bit…when we had issues that we had to solve. Dr. Stephens was

a huge proponent of that. I have always utilized those types of protocols. To have

those types of discussions, and then the school leadership network that I belong

to, they use it as well. I think that [for] critical friends, it's important to have that

dialogue, not only in the structure of the whole critical friends protocol, but even

the concept of what critical friends truly means. When critical friends is utilized

in a positive way to provide learning for the administrator it can be a powerful

tool. There is much to be gained from having others look at your work and

provide feedback in a way that is supportive and collaborative, that allows for the

receiver to hear the message and feel value in the feedback.

Formal online professional development. With all multimedia resources and

technology available, there is an abundance of opportunities for online learning. These

opportunities can meet the needs of various learning styles preferences. The appeal of

online learning is that one can engage in it at any time while eliminating many of the cost factors associated with professional development. The online experiences for these participants ranged from compliance training to taking doctoral-level courses on line. Many of the participants received their school leadership degrees through online programs. All participants demonstrated evidence that they took advantage of the online learning opportunity to fulfill many learning needs. One of the participants is currently working on her Ph.D. online. All the participants mentioned the compliance training that is required each year as an opportunity for online learning as well. These are two extremes in the opportunity, but both were learning experiences that leaders took advantage of. Maxwell commented, "It is my preference. First in my superintendent certificate it was predominately the way we learned. And I loved talking to other professionals while I was working on it."

One of the middle school principals, Michael, discussed the back-to-school online learning required by many districts at the start of the year. However, he said that he did not seek out additional online learning opportunities. He believed that the back-to-school training can be quite unpleasant. Structured online professional development got mixed reviews from the campus administrators. While some preferred this method of learning, others did not utilize it much as a learning resource unless it was mandated.

Other types of formal professional development. Most of the principals in the study mentioned other types of formal professional development that did not necessarily fit into one of the above categories. For example, Sue had been part of a school leadership network. This network consisted of a group of school administrators who attended graduate school together. This group would come together on a regular basis

and provide various types of support for one another. Sue considered this one of her most useful forms of professional development. Many of the principals also talked about the experience of going to conferences and having opportunities to see speakers that were inspirational to them. Sue had the opportunity to attend a principal's institute at Harvard one summer, and she reflected,

> I don't know that I really necessarily connected with everything. But…I still think about it. It's the constant pushing of the envelope that really makes me reflect on why I make decisions. Why am I doing that? For me, that's why Harvard is such a quality professional learning opportunity.

Pops stated,

> When I think of structured professional development I think of professional learning communities, of course the three R's, Daggett's work…Those are the two things that have guided my career; I did professional learning communities and also Daggett's work on the 3Rs [rigor, relevance and relationships].

All the participants were able to clearly articulate how important it was for them to continue to learn and grow as leaders. One interesting result was the sparcity of high quality formal learning experiences for school administrators. While some of the participants were able to share some unique opportunities, not all participants had participated in formal professional development that was life changing, or visionary or provided an opportunity for deep reflection and growth.

Informal professional development. There are many types of professional development the school leaders can engage in. The need and the learning style of the leader influences the type of informal professional development that is deemed valuable.

Leaders must continue to learn, but meeting learning needs in a formal setting may not always be an option for the principal; therefore, the leader may need to seek out a more informal learning experience. Informal professional development that the participants in this study engaged in included informal action research, mentoring, and self-directed learning.

Informal action research. Many of the participants indicated they learned through informal action research projects at their schools. While most had engaged in formal action research while in their graduate programs, various school situations provided opportunities for the participants to employ the foundational tenets of acknowledging a problem of practice, conducting research to learn more about the problem, and enacting solutions based on their findings.   Pops stated, "I have never actually done a formal action research." Priscilla shared, "I did in graduate school, when I was an administrative intern and that was about it." However, she went on to say,

> I think you do action research the whole year as you do the Response to
>
> Intervention   (the process for which schools assess and monitor students to
>
> ensure that they are making progress) and changing things…it's not as formal but
>
> you adjust constantly."

Sue shared,

> I think that everything that we do really…is based around action research. You're
>
> looking at everything that is happening, whether you're looking at formative data
>
> or summative data or anecdotal. Whatever it is that you're looking at and
>
> formulating a plan and saying, you know, "I am going to take a risk, we're going
>
> to do this." You have to be in an environment, though, were that risk taking is

supported and encouraged, and try it, and see. Let's collect the data on it and see

if it works. If it doesn't, then ok, let's go back to the drawing table. That's what

action research is all based around...Everything has to be tried in the real world. I

think we're involved in it informally. We may not formally document it and all

that.

While the participants may not have been using action research in a formal

manner, the informal use of action research was a powerful learning tool for school

leaders. They were able to monitor and adjust based on the information they gain

through this experience

Informal online learning. Another learning opportunity for the participants was

online informal learning experiences. When interviewing Sue and discussing online

learning she stated, "In terms of structured classes? No, but in terms of online reading

and online webinars, yes." This was the sentiment of most of the principals that

participated. Throughout the interviews, the use of the internet and research and reading

online came up often. The consensus regarding online learning was that it was used more

for informal learning as opposed to structured courses. All the principals shared they

used the online platform to find articles and for general research, which ultimately lead

them to some kind of learning experience.

Maxwell stated that he preferred to use online resources over any other. He

stated, "I do Twitter chats, hashtags, podcasts…I watch webinars, I prefer online to [have

up to date knowledge] in my hand." Informal online learning was found to be a resource

for many of the participants, Sue indicated she was not interested in "structured classes…

but in terms of online reading and online webinars, yes." This was the sentiments of most

of principals in the study. Throughout various sections of the interview, the use of the internet and research and reading online came up often. The consensus for online learning was that it was more valuable as an informal type of learning experience as opposed to structured on-line courses.

Mentoring. Mentoring appears to be the most powerful form of professional development that all of the principal participants have engaged in. Mentoring was a key factor in principals' learning and professional growth. The participants reported that mentoring had its greatest impact when the interaction was planned and organized. The principals also stated that their successful mentoring relationships were based on mutual respect and trust. All of the principals shared that they valued the mentors they had in their lives, and each was specific about how they used their mentors and the growth they experienced from the mentoring. Mentors were valuable resources in the lives of these administrators.

Supervisors and colleagues as mentors. This relationship occurred when the principal's official supervisor served at the mentor. The participants believed that in order for this type of mentorship to work the principal must see the supervisor as a person that she or he can trust, confide in, and collaborate with only in some cases did the, participants view their supervisors as mentors. Joe spoke of his supervisor stating, "I've worked with him from the moment he walked into the district. When I talk to him we are equals. I talk to him and we go through stuff together. He's awesome." Pops shared,

> I have not always used my supervisors. It just depends on the relationship I had
>
> with them. If it was positive, and we were on the same page, then I would involve
>
> them anyways I possibly could…but if I didn't have a good relationship, I

obviously didn't do that. And luckily, I had a lot of supervisors that we thought

things the same way and I was able to ask them to be mentors or to again give me

feedback for growth.

RJ shared that some of his supervisors have also been mentors, but others have not:

I can't say that I respect every supervisor. Now, I respect them in terms of yes sir,

yes ma'am, I'm going to do what you need me to do. I'm going to do the best of

my ability, but to supervisors that I'm like, "I can learn so much. This person is

going to make me a better leader," I really try to create that relationship and ask

those questions like, "Hey what's some advice you can give me? What are some

things you'd recommend?" Before I know it, [I'm] creating another mentor.

Colleagues were also instrumental as mentors for the participants. In this type of

relationship the participants sought mentorship from those whose opinions they valued.

Many of the participants were open to this type of mentoring and learned from these

mentors on a regular basis. This type of relationship was based on a sense of trust,

collaboration and mutual respect, and was ongoing rather than episodic.   Pops shared

that when he was a superintendent there were not a lot of opportunities for him to use his

colleagues as mentors, but in the role of principal, "Oh gosh there are always

opportunities to get feedback."

Speaking of his leadership team, Raul stated,

I like to get their perspectives because they approach things from very different

angles. Our counselor very much looks at things from an emotional standpoint

and meeting the emotional needs of people. Our academic dean looks at and

has…a very good mind for logistical things and being great at checking small

details, whereas I think our instructional coach is very focused on growth, and

people's personal growth and so I think the combination of our team is very

helpful in that way.

Sue shared,

I think it's important to connect with them [fellow principals] on a personal level,

because our positions are just so isolated. You have to find people you can trust

to have honest conversations with around the frustrations and challenges of the

principalship.

All the participants claimed great value in having mentors. Each could clearly

articulate how they connected with and communicated with their mentors. Some used

mentors more often than others, but all of them had mentors at hand. Mentors were

clearly valuable resource for these school leaders.

Mentors from outside the district. These are the mentors who were sought out

because they valued that person or because they were drawn to that person for one reason

or another. Some mentors were not in the field of education, but rather were trusted

individuals that the school leader turned to for help and growth. These mentors seemed

to be more long-term mentors in an individual's life.

In more than one situation, the participants had mentors that were family

members. Michael, for example, said that he used his wife as a mentor. He explained

how important her perspective as a teacher was to him as a leader, "My wife is an

educator, and because we're both educators and parents, her perspective is the one that

usually keeps me a little more grounded, if you will, because she hears everything."

RJ shared, "The mentors that I have outside of the profession have a lot to do with more of a spiritual side, through my church." Maxwell, considered his father, who was also an educator, one of his mentors.

> We would talk through my issues both when parents and teachers brought difficult situations, he was that someone I could call and talk to. Or when someone above me was doing something stupid, I needed help on how to handle it, I would call him. I could tell him a problem and he could basically ask me questions to lead me to the direction I needed to go to solve it.

All participants in the study had at least one mentor that was either a colleague or supervisor that they received assistance from on a regular basis. While the participants used their mentors in different ways, the use of the mentor was the most positive form of professional development reported by the principals. They all valued the relationship, the trust and the camaraderie, and believed that mentoring was beneficial.

Self-directed learning. There are many different definitions of self-directed learning. Self-directed learning cuts across the categories of structured and informal learning. The primary characteristics of self-directed learning is that the learner takes on the responsibility for the learning, which includes the design of the experience, how it is conducted, and how the learning is evaluated. Describing his self-directed learning, Maxwell explained,

> Knowing how much is out there for technology, I have pursued a lot of technology training to help my staff, from the very simple things of organizing your Google drive to complex things that you can do during genius hour."

Melinda, one of the elementary principals, explained some of the things that she has done as a part of her own self-directed learning.

> [I engage in] learning about and understanding the campus improvement planning process. Researching other school districts and look at their campus improvement plans because when you do that, it tells you a lot about what they are doing and how they do it. And then not being afraid to reach out to other school to ask, "hey, tell me about what you are doing, or show me what you're doing."

Sophia shared that she took on the task of figuring out the grading policy on her campus as a self-directed learning experience that started with reading articles. She shared, "I really began to realize that they (teachers) were practicing what I would consider antiquated grading practices that kept kids from having opportunities to learn, and so that's when I went out and started reading articles."

She went on to explain how she found an article written by an author she had seen at a conference and remembered how much she connected with what he was saying. She went out and purchased his book, which later became a book study for her campus and eventually resulted in the changing of the grading policy at her school. All the participants confirmed that they learned a great deal from reading journals, articles and the latest books. Reading is one of the many ways for a leader to engage in self-directed learning.

Based on the responses of the participants, it is clear that the participants used various types of learning opportunities to meet their needs. Whether it is formal or informal, the most valued learning was self-directed. The administrators sought out the learning, planned the learning and evaluated the learning on their own terms. These

school administrators were continuously learning in order to keep up with the ever changing school environment, making them life-long learners by definition.

Themes Related to the Impact of Professional Development

All the participants were able to see the direct connection between what they learned and how it impacted those that they served. In many cases, principals sought out specific learning in order to have a direct impact on teachers, students or the community.

Impact on teachers. Each participant in the study reported that what they learned had a direct and positive impact on the teachers at their schools. Sue shared, "When I learn new things, I want to share. It's been impactful for the teachers who absorb it and see the positive in it, and want to implement." More than one participant joked about how their teachers were always concerned when they went to professional development because it meant that something new was coming to the campus. Many of the participants commented that what they learned had a direct impact on teachers because the learning strengthened their ability as an instructional leader. For example, Michael stated, "You can't help but translate what you are learning into your instructional leadership." The principals also felt that by continuing to learn they set an example for their teachers to continue to learn and grow. Discussing his own learning, Maxwell said, "I think it motivates them. I think they see that I come up with new ideas and new things and that they [the teachers] are not stagnant either." Participants shared that they took what they learned back to their school and applied it. Sophia explained,

> I think when I target specific professional development it's because I see a need to
> use it on my campus and I need to learn more about it so then I can use it. I rarely

pick something and spend a bunch of time and money and effort on it and then go, "eh, that's not for us."

It is not a secret that the teachers have the greatest impact on the campus. "Schools won't improve until the average building leader begins to work cooperatively with teachers to truly, meaningfully oversee and improve instructional quality" (Schmoker, 2006, p.29). The participants agreed, it is important for the principal to gain new knowledge, however; if they are not sharing what they are learning, the opportunity to have an impact is missed.

Impact on students. All of the participants were able to connect their professional learning and growth to the work that students did on their campus. Melinda, discussing her students said, "You always lead by example. You're always teaching your students. Kids are always watching the adults. They watch everything we do and we set the tone for the way they think." Raul stated,

> I think the way [my learning] impacts students really has more to do with long-term planning and me being patient and realizing that it's not enough for me to come back from learning something and then lay out all the expectations for people…I think it impacts my students in that I want things that I learn to take care of the teachers, because if I take care of the teachers, then they will feel happier and more fulfilled and they will take care of our students better.

Susan shared,

> Things that I have learned that I thought would be impactful have changed the culture here. The students feel it and we notice it. The halls are quieter. The classrooms are more engaging as teachers are owning and starting to teach

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more…we've had to change our instructional culture quite a bit. You can see the

change in the kids and you can see it in the scores.

The participants understood how their learning clearly had an impact on the students they serve. They realized that when they shared knowledge with the teachers, they also enhanced the experience for students.

Impact on the school culture. All the participants recognized that, when they impacted their teachers and students, they also impacted the school culture. While it may not have been that the participants specifically set out to change something about the school culture, the interviews revealed that when there was a change made with teachers that impacted students, there was also a chain reaction that included the school culture. For example, Monica wanted to learn more about the grading policies and find a better way to grade and meet the needs of her student. While her initial work was to learn more about alternative ways to grade and hold students accountable, she then had to turn to the teachers to help them to better understand the need for change, and then how to actually implement the change. When the grading changed in her building, the failure rate in her school decreased significantly. This changed the culture of the school in a very positive way. Melinda saw the impact on school culture somewhat differently. She stated, "When you have a school it is not just about teachers, it's about everybody. Everybody has to get involved to impact students."

The information that the participants shared demonstrated that it is very difficult to categorize or separate the impact that the school leader's learning has on each aspect of the school. Learning is much like the domino effect; when it touches one thing another is touched, and so on, so that one learning experience can have an impact on the entire

learning environment. When teachers are touched, students are affected and the school as a whole feels the impact. It is impossible to separate the impact on teachers, learners and school culture from one another. All of these elements work together to create the system that we call school.

Impact on community. While all the participants were able to articulate the need to serve the community, they were not as articulate when explaining how what they learned professionally had an impact on the community. Michael shared,

I'm going to go with relationships because, I mean, people, if they're still telling you how you are doing and still happy to see you, that sort of thing, then…the translation of what you are trying to do is positive. But if they're going to go down the other aisle because you're on it, at Wal-Mart, it's not translating well.

Sue shared,

I think that it's sort of a by-product, right? If you're using what you're learning to improve academics, social and emotional development for kids, it sounds so trite, but it goes back to developing better citizens, which ultimately affects your community. You have an outstanding school which affects your community. More people want to move into your school zone which increases the tax base for your community, which increases the economy, which flourishes the neighborhoods. So everything is a by-product.

The principals were confident that their learning had a significant effect on the learning community in general. What was more difficult for them to do was to describe specific affects. It seemed to the participants that impacts on teachers, students and community were interconnected and difficult to separate. Throughout the interviews, the

principals continued to connect professional learning, students, teachers and community. Sue elaborated,

> I feel like I am repeating myself because none of it is in isolation. As much as we'd like to see these as all separate cogs and machines, if you want to take it down to that level. It is all just one machine. There's just all these parts but if the gears don't perfectly align, then nothing works and everything comes to a grinding halt. All of it affects kids.

Pops summed up the impact of the principals learning on the teachers, students and community,

> It's a domino effect. Each of these things are a domino that falls. We must start the motion of ideas, and the dominos fall into place, with each one affecting the others. So each one is a benefactor of the learning and putting into practice.

To summarize, while not all the participants were able to clearly articulate what the effects of their personal learning had on the community, all of them believed that the work they did at the campus level impacted the community as a whole.

V. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how the campus principal seeks new learning as an adult learner. School leaders bring their own motivation and purpose for learning as they seek professional development. This study investigates when and how school leaders determine the need to learn more, how they seek this new knowledge and how the new knowledge affects the learning community around them. Adult learning is a complex process. Principals bring many different qualities, needs and factors to the learning process. Witte and Witte (2012) tell us that adult learners bring their own interests, skills and talents to the learning process, making a one size fits all approach to learning difficult for school administrators.

This study has one question with four parts. How do successful principals define authentic professional development? In particular, (a) how do successful principals assess their own professional needs, (b) in what types of meaningful professional development activities do they engage, (c) from whom do they seek support in their professional development, and (d) in what ways do they perceive their professional development as impacting teacher, school, community and student development?

This qualitative research study was conducted with a constructivist approach. Specifically, I was interested in ascertaining how campus principals construct and make meaning about their learning through both formal professional development and self-directed learning. Two interviews were conducted with each of the 12 participants. The sample included principals serving across the K-12 context, four each from elementary, middle and high school settings. Six men and six females were interviewed using an interview guide approach. The first interview was approximately 45 minutes to an hour

long, with the second interview serving as a member check for clarifications needed and an opportunity for the participants to share a learning artifact representing themselves as learners. Using a grounded theory methodology, analysis of the individual transcriptions helped to make meaning of the data through focused analysis   (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After coding the interviews and reviewing researcher memos, I identified themes that emerged from the data (Patton, 2002).

Interpretations

Principals Assessing Learning Needs

The term life-long learner could easily be used to describe the successful principal. Though it sounds trite it truly is the expectation of the successful campus principal to be continuously learning, throughout her or his career. Bell (2012) asserts a life-long learner is one who continues to acquire foundational competencies that apply in the real world (including the work place) as a long-term developmental process, thus learning and growing over the years. The importance of staying current with new policies, procedures, practices and expectations in the always changing and complex world of the school leader is a necessity (Kungu & Machtames, 2009). All the participants in this study recognized the importance of staying current in their own learning practices, and in order to do so, the participants engaged in various types of professional development, both formal and informal.

While there is an implied expectation that school leaders must continue to learn and grow, there is no a standardized process in place that helps administrators understand exactly what these expectations include. When leaders assess their own learning needs, it is imperative that they reflect upon their leadership practices (Gordon, 2004). Principals

must engage in continuous learning that is both formal and informal, and this learning will come in many different types of situations and settings (Kungu & Machtames, 2009). The principals in this study reflected regularly on their practice and engaged in new learning to meet their professional needs.

Principals are first teachers, and then they pursue the additional education to become a principal. The additional learning is usually done through a university principal preparation program. These programs are not standardized, and each university brings a different perspective to the learning experience. This demonstrates that principals come into administration with different backgrounds and educational preparation. And, the schools in which they lead provide unique contexts and administrative challenges. There are many things that the principal must learn and be able to execute in order to be successful. There is no feasible way to prepare principals for everything they must know in a principal preparation program. The need for continual learning was demonstrated by the participants in this study. The participants sought out learning opportunities on a regular basis to address their professional needs.

This study concurs with the findings from Mathews and Crow (2010) who posited, that learning as a leader is not a one-size-fits all approach, especially given the ever changing roles that a school leader must manage. This is why school leaders must be lifelong learners who continuously assess and address their own learning needs and current situations. Additionally, they must consider their own personality traits and the learning experiences (Leung, 2008).

There are many reasons why principals engage in new learning opportunities. Due to the nature of the work and ever changing expectations, it is difficult to put

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principals' learning needs into specific categories. Two factors stood out in this study concerning principals' explicit needs for continual learning. First, the work of the leaders continued to change due to the many influences on education and the needs of the students. Critical incidents and other workplace events also triggered participant's immediate need for learning. Critical incidents described in the study align with the problem orientation to adult learning, which holds that adult students learn in response to a problem they need to solve (Long, 2004). It is difficult to say if the evolving role or the critical incident is the chicken or the egg. Many times these two things intersect. For example, one of the principals discussed the fact that he had a transgender student who had filed a law suit based on transgender issues. While this topic is one in which administrators need to become well versed. It is now a part of the realities in education (changing roles of the administrator). The law suit made it a critical incident as well, prompting the participant to seek new learning opportunities.

All the participants indicated that there is not a one-size-fits-all professional development approach for school administrators. Participants also confirmed that principal preparation programs were not enough to address the shifting complexities of leadership in schools. For these successful principals, continuous contextual learning needed to be grounded in specificity regarding current law, district and community expectations, changing student needs, and teacher development opportunities. As the context changed, the participants' learning needs changed, yet often the participants lamented not having support for their ongoing professional development requirements. This led to their need to be self-directed in their professional development endeavors.

It was evident that principals in this study were forced to find out new information on the changing roles of the principal on their own. They did this in various ways: attending professional conferences and district meetings, engaging in intentional interactions with peers, staying abreast of legislative updates, etc. The study confirmed that learning can be done either formally through structured professional development or informally through self-directed learning and mentorships. It is important for learners to understand their learning style preferences in order to select the type of learning they want to engage that best suits the situation they need to address (James & Maher, 2004). The successful principals in this study were able to assess their learning needs and identify the learning activities they needed to undertake. They sometimes acknowledged a sense of urgency for the learning, depending on the need and the complexity of the situation. The self- assessment of the principal regarding his/her learning needs is directly in line with the work of Gordon (2004), who emphasized that for school leaders to grow they must be able to assess and articulate their own needs as leaders.

The principals in this study understood that there is no universal road map for professional development for the school leader, and there is often little support for learning opportunities geared to the principal as the adult learner. To summarize, two factors appear to have great impact on the successful principal regarding to the importance of continuous learning: first, acknowledgement of the evolving and changing role of the job, and second, recognizing critical incidents in schools and communities that requires the leader to seek out additional knowledge and skills. The leader must reflect on his/her learning style and career development stage to understand how best to attain this new knowledge.

Principals Engaging in Formal Professional Development

      The need to continuously learn was clearly articulated by the participants. It was not a question of if they needed to continue to learn and grow as a school leader, but how best to do it. These successful leaders discovered a learning need and sought ways to find solutions. In some cases the principal was able to do this through formal professional development. Formal professional development tended to address areas of leadership in general. However, in many cases formal professional development was not the answer for school leaders when they needed to know something in a timely manner. Much of these successful school leaders' learning was based on their reflective practices. The successful school leaders were attuned to the demands of their schools and understood the directions in which their schools were moving and that they were very complex organizations (Mathews & Crow, 2010). These realizations meant that the principals had many reasons to participate in formal professional learning. One example of how formal professional development met the needs of a participant was the case of Pops, who wanted to establish professional learning communities (PLCs). He was able to attend a large conference that was targeted at helping school establish and maintain high quality PLCs. Through this experience, Pops gained the knowledge he needed to go back to his campus and work with teachers to implement PLCs. Implementing PLCs is not one of those "I must learn immediately in order to survive" learning experiences. Beyond attending initial professional development on PLCs, a leader can learn a great deal through leading the PLC process and from the professional development associated with a PLC, and from reading the extensive literature about PLCs.

The participants verified that formal professional development can be an ongoing learning process or a onetime experience that the learner attends. This research also indicates that formal professional development can encompass learning to which school leaders naturally gravitate as they continue to reflect and grow over time. Sue, one of the high school principals, had the opportunity to participate in formal professional development when she attended a leadership institute at Harvard University that was focused on urban school leaders. While she explained that this learning had a profound impact on her as leader, she was not sure specifically what she was going to gain prior to her experience. Sophia also had one of these types of experiences when she was invited to participate in the Visioning Institute, where campus leaders were invited to come together and reflect upon and learn more about the future of education and what needs to happen in order for public schools to continue to improve and thrive. This professional development experience lasted roughly a year as the participants came together monthly to talk about their new learning and what they were able to accomplish from the last learning experience. Sophia did not have any preconceived notions of what the learning would be or what she would take away from the experience, yet she shared that it was probably the most powerful learning experience in which she had ever been involved. These experiences are in alignment with the beliefs of Fogarty and Pete (2004) on the critical qualities of professional development; it is sustained, job-embedded, interactive, collegial, and integrated.

The participants appeared to engage more in formal professional development experiences for general leadership development as opposed to a specific learning need. For example, when a principal in the study needed to learn something quickly, he or she

tended to turn to self-directed learning such as reading an article, working with a mentor or engaging in an informal learning experience that was timely and could provide needed information quickly. It is important to mention that even formal professional development can be considered self-directed learning for the campus principal, if the principal initiates the learning, determines the need for the learning and is able to self-assess the learning outcomes

Principals Seeking Knowledge through Informal Learning

The reasons for the principals to engage in informal learning experiences varied, but all participants felt the need for such engagement. Through reflection on the current state of their practice, the school leaders identified needs that were required for their success. The school leaders assessed their current state of affairs and felt a need to gain knowledge around a specific topic. Lauder (2000) tells us that through reflective practice, a leader has an opportunity to improve his or her performance. First the principal must understand that he or she has a need for learning and then must determine how best to learn. While many of the participants were not necessarily familiar with the term *informal learning*, they were definitely participating in informal learning experiences. Not all types of formal professional development seem to meet the needs of the principal as adult learner, or in some cases do not match his or her particular learning styles preferences (Newbie & Cannon, 2013). The process of engaging in reflection on one's knowledge and skills for work and making a decision to learn something was often second nature for the principals in this study. One participant shared that when he had a question about something, he followed a hashtag on the topic through the use of Twitter. This was a form of self-directed learning for him: he has taken the responsibility for the learning,

designed an experience and had the opportunity to assess his own learning (Brookfield, 2004; Schwandt, 2008).

The participants often engaged in the use of electronic resources such as the internet and other forms of social media such as Twitter. Many of the participants talked about how they turned to professional organizations' media, such as journals, to gain new learning and to find answers and solutions. Most participants felt that it was easier to conduct research independently than to attend formal professional development on a topic. Most of the principals in this study also considered themselves avid readers. The participants often turned to articles and books as a resource for learning.

The study revealed that the participants tended to engage more often in learning opportunities that allowed them to interact with others, such as: professional learning communities, critical friends, mentoring and coaching. All of these practices are deeply rooted in reflection, trust and relationships (Zepeda, 2012). These administrators learned a great deal from interactions they had with other leaders. They also sought out learning opportunities that allowed them to interact with others. It appears that these successful school leaders tended to be social learners.

The Principal and the Mentor

Mentors were also found to be important in the lives and professional development of the school leaders in this study. All the participants had very positive experiences with mentors. Most of the administrators had multiple mentors to which they turned for guidance and professional learning. Some of the participants still worked with their mentors, and in other cases the participants no longer worked with their mentors but still kept in close contact with them. This finding echoes research regarding the value of

these relationships. Wasden, (1998) suggests that the mentor provides growth opportunities for others.

Interestingly, many of the principals in this study had mentors that were not in education. For example one of the participants said his dad was his best mentor because of the level of trust that existed between the two of them. Others identified church members, wives, and friends as mentors. All the mentors played an important role in the learning process for these successful principals. If they did not know the business of school, their primary role as mentor was for support and guidance through a situation rather than sharing school-oriented knowledge. In all cases of mentoring, growth happened through the mentor fostering personal reflection on the situation at hand and ideas for acting on that situation (Daresh, 2003).

While most experienced principals in this study did not see their supervisors as their mentors, the more novice administrators believed their supervisors were mentors. Veteran administrators viewed their supervisors as colleagues that they could turn to for job related needs. The veteran administrators had long term relationships with their mentors and had an extraordinary amount of trust in these individuals.

In terms of informal professional learning and development, working with a mentor was by far the most preferred and most consistent practice among the participants. Working with a mentor was one of the primary ways that these participating principals developed. The mentor/mentee relationship seemed to be a powerful learning tool that was respected and appreciated by all the participants. Clutterbuck (1987) suggests that such relationships also help to create greater job satisfaction.

The Principals' Self-Directed Learning

Once the participants determined a need for new learning, self-directed learning was the primary source for participants to gain new knowledge. Most of the learning by the participants in this study was self-directed, meaning that the learning was in the hands of the learner and the decisions about the learning came directly from the participants themselves, a finding which agrees with the work of Brookfield (2004). The participants in this study sought out both formal and informal self-directed learning experiences.

The principals in this study were reflective on their practice and then determined the best way to learn what they needed in order to be successful. In some cases that was in the form of informal learning such as with Maxwell and his use of Twitter in order to gain new knowledge and perspective in a quick and timely manner. In other cases the participants sought out more structured and formal professional development for example when Pops attended a professional learning communities conference that was structured around the topic and lasted three days. Both informal and formal learning experiences can be considered self-directed, because the participants had the choice of responsibility for and the control over the learning experience, including the design, as well as assessment of their learning transfer and practice (Brookfield, 2004; Schwandt, 2008).

The Principals' Impact

All of the participants were able to clearly articulate how their professional learning had an impact on their schools including, students, teachers, and the school community as a whole. Participants agreed that *principals basically have to be all things to all people.* All of the participants articulated how important the work of the

principalship was. They all felt like they had a large job and that the success of the

school weighed on their shoulders with their ability to lead the campus successfully.

All of the principals linked what they learned to their schools. All the participants

agreed that what they learned had a direct impact on those with whom they worked. It

was a common belief among the participants that they sought new knowledge and

brought it back to their schools to share it with their teachers. The principals in this study

believed that the best way to get the new learning or knowledge into practice on the

campus was to focus on the teachers. They provided some type of professional learning

experience for their teachers so that teachers would be able to use the new learning in

their classrooms. Most of the administrators agreed that when they focused on sharing

what they had learned with their teachers, they had an impact on students as well.

Teachers could take the new learning back to their classrooms and implement it with their

students, quickly putting the learning into action. It is important that campus

administrators equip teachers with the tools that they need to implement new learning

successfully. Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) found that

leadership was the second most important element in school success, after the teacher and

effective teaching.

The participants articulated how their learning impacted the school as an

organization. School improvement is an essential element of the job of campus principal.

The school has a life of its own and can take on many shapes. When the principal is

focused on ensuring that the life the school emulates is positive, with a focus on a culture

of learning and student achievement, there can be measurable improvement.

The community was one area that many of the participants had a difficult time expressing how their learning had an impact. They all seemed to believe that what they learned had an impact, but they were not as articulate when it came to the specifics of how they had an impact. One participant was very articulate on this matter and shared how it was not just about the here and now for the community, but that a quality education was about creating citizens for the future who were able to be productive members of the community. The participant agreed with Sergiovanni and Green (2015) that the school must value the hopes and dreams of all the stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students and community. The participants agreed that the learning of the school leader goes beyond a personal need. Such learning has a profound impact on the entire learning community: the school and all of its stakeholders.

Summary

The principals in this study perceived many different types of learning as authentic professional development. The most meaningful type of professional learning to them was dependent on what they were seeking to learn and the sense of urgency around the learning experience. All the participants demonstrated, that when one of them had a learning need, he or she sought out their own experience to fill the gap. Sometimes these experiences were through formal professional development and other times through informal experiences, but the majority of the learning experiences for the school leaders were self-directed.

Emergent Theory: The School Leadership Learning Theory

As a grounded theory study, the findings suggest there is a continuous cycle of reflection, learning and learning transfer occurring in the practice of successful school

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leaders. Successful school leaders continuously reflect on their own understanding of their leadership needs. These reflections often are triggered by critical incidents or when their role as school leaders evolve. It is important to note, that the changing role of the school leader may actually be initiated by a critical incident for an administrator in some situations, or could become a critical incident in other situations. Once learning needs are identified, these leaders intentionally seek out or design learning experiences that meets their needs to gain knowledge and skills they need to be successful. Once the school leader acquires this new knowledge, the work to transfer what they learned into practice in their school communities often resulting in an exponential positive effect on the learning community. The diagram below demonstrates the reflective school leader can engage in learning, thus creating the School Leadership Learning Theory.

The School Leadership Learning Theory is a continuous process that is dependent on the leader being reflective in his or her own practice to recognize learning and development needs. The leader must purposefully engage in self-directed learning, by designing or identifying new learning opportunities, and finally he or she must evaluate the learning for its effectiveness and transfer. This is an intentional process that requires principals to have a sound grasp on their own personal knowledge, strengths and weaknesses. Once the leader has designed the learning experience and has gone through the process, successful leaders then work to incorporate their new learning into the learning community of school, thus expanding the impact of the learning on their students, teachers, the school as a learning community and the community at large. In this way, the leader's new learning thus can have an exponential effect on those that the leader serves.
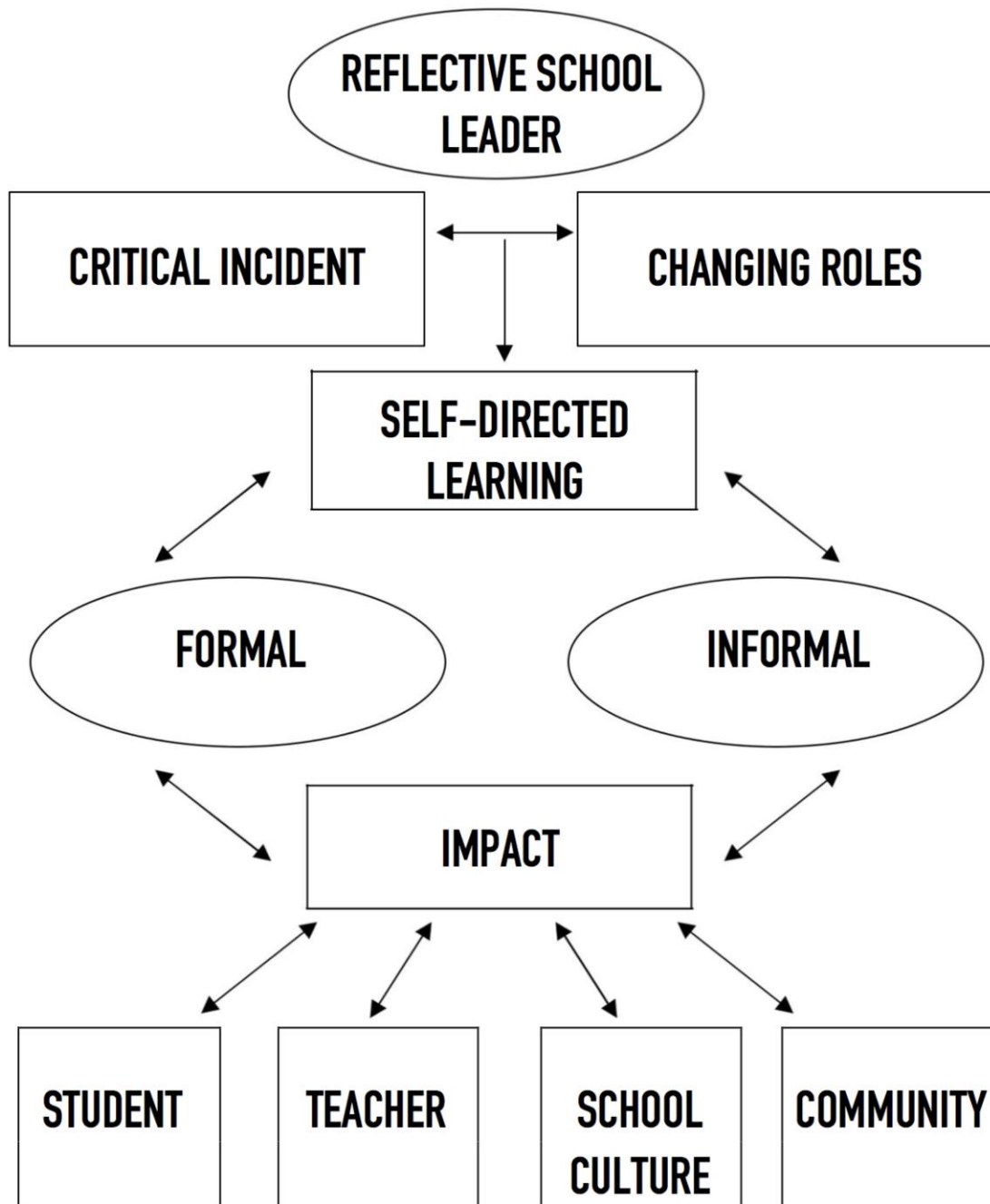
SCHOOL LEADER LEARNING THEORY

Figure 2. School Leadership Learning Loop.

This process is an ongoing for a reflective leader. For reflective, successful school leaders, there is never a time when there is no need for ongoing learning. The reflective, successful school leader is always learning and evolving to better serve those that they lead.

Conclusions

There are several conclusions which can be drawn from this study. It is clear that more high quality professional development needs to be accessible to school administrators. Many school leaders attend professional organization conferences each year, and these conferences provide a venue for school leaders to come together and learn from one another as well as to gain new knowledge from the various sessions that they attend. While this type of learning is a viable way to gather new ideas, it is still being done in a setting where participants move from one short presentation to another, not really going beyond a superficial level on any one topic. What is lacking for school leaders is an opportunity to attend professional development that provides deep learning, the kind of learning that takes place over several days, weeks, or months with a focus on a specific topic. Providing more of these types of learning experiences will allow for principals to have more opportunities that could result in a lifelong impact on themselves as leaders.

When successful campus leaders are challenged with a need for new learning, they most often turn to self-directed learning experiences. It can be argued that the majority of the learning that a school leader engages in is self-directed; leaders seek out the learning opportunity, either through formal educational offerings or through informal learning experiences, then create their experience, and finally determine how they will

evaluate their own learning. Campus principals must be reflective in their practice in order to determine when new learning needs to take place and to assess their progress in the learning process.

Principals are often in the role of the presenter for professional development. They want to put into action the learning they acquire. One of the interesting things found in this study was that when participants discuss the learning that is being done by their teachers, they often see this learning as their own learning or professional development. They see the knowledge of their teachers as an extension of their own knowledge. They see the presenting of new material to others as a form of professional development for themselves as well. When the leader sees his or her learning community as a complex organization, he or she tends to take ownership of all forms of learning on the campus. A reflective leader can create change and is instrumental in school improvement. When the leader learns, the learning system in which they lead learns as well.

When the participants were in need of new learning in a timely manner, it appears that they turned more often to self-directed learning. Additionally, most of the participants utilized the kinds of professional learning that included interactions with others such as mentoring, critical friends, and coaching. Each of these experiences allowed for participants to have human contact. Through these types of experiences, there was an opportunity for the campus leader to gain knowledge quickly and to have a meaningful interaction with someone that they trust.

Professional development should be structured to meet learners where they are in the learning spectrum, and it should also meet the needs of the positions and

responsibilities that they fulfill in the school. While it is important that the principal understands new curriculum teaching and assessment strategies that the teacher is expected to use; it is also important for leaders to understand how best to support teacher development and growth through ongoing change across many levels.

Principals need more opportunities to come together both in a formal and informal setting to work together and learn from one another. It has been said that the role of the principal is one of the loneliest jobs. There are few other people that the principal can turn to for help or even understanding. If one has not been in the role of a principal it is hard to understand the needs of the principalship. Principals need more opportunities to work with other principals in order to learn and grow from one another.

The learning that leaders do has an impact that is widespread. When leaders learn, teachers benefit, students benefit, the school as whole benefits and ultimately the community benefits. There is a ripple effect from the leader's learning. Principal learning can truly move the school forward, and the lack of on-going learning can undeniably limit the school's progress and success. It is imperative that principals learn and grow in order for their schools to move forward and continue to thrive.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Principals

A principal has a profound impact on the school he or she serves. The impact can last for many years, even long after the principal has left the school. It is imperative that the campus administrators be life-long learners, and that they engage in learning opportunities that are meaningful and meet their learning needs and learning styles. Professional development is an essential element in the success of a school leader. As the

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job continues to change, it is vital that the leader changes with it. As new challenges arise, it is necessary for the principal to be in the role of a learner and discover new ways to meet the challenges of modern school leadership.

One recommendation is that all school leaders seek out formal, high quality learning experiences that will challenge their thinking and give them opportunities to reflect on and continue to grow over time. These experiences could be learning institutes or other structured continuous learning experiences. Such experiences would give school leaders opportunities to learn and grow as well as network with other school leaders.

The school leader should create a close network of other administrators that he or she can turn to when needed to learn and grow. This network should be balanced with different types of leaders with various years of experience and in multiple school settings. Building a network is critical when personal interaction is needed to ask questions, to be challenged and even to share feelings and frustrations.

It is recommended that the principal seek at least one primary mentor that can be his or her go-to person at all times. It is also suggested that a school leader have additional mentors that he or she can turn to. All the participants spoke about the value of the mentors with whom they work. Mentors can be a way for the principal to have a trusting relationship with someone who understands the challenges of the principalship.

Finally, it is imperative that principals share their knowledge with upcoming leaders. One responsibility of principals is grooming the next generation of campus leaders. In this work, it is recommended that the principal model how to reflect on practice, and demonstrate how to find new learning opportunities to meet new learning needs. This is one way that the next generation of school leaders will be ready to learn

and grow as the ever evolving role of the principal continues to morph into new forms of school leadership.

Recommendations for Central Office Administration

Providing professional development for school administrators is an important role of central office administration. When the central office pulls administrators together, the time should be used to present new learning that will have the most impact on the campus. It is also recommended that the learning process be considered so that the learning is engaging to those attending. This time should be valued and respected; "sit and get" should not be the instructional model for the learning.

When designing professional learning for campus leaders it is important to consider administrators' knowledge levels as well as the types of schools that they serve. In many cases when central office provides learning opportunities a one-size-fits-all approach is taken. While there are times and places for this type of learning, such as for compliance, for the most part if the learning is not designed for the learner's needs the opportunity for growth is lost. This means that there must be more effort put into the planning process for professional development of school leaders.

Something else to consider is the reluctant, or non-reflective, school leader. While there are many campus leaders that are extremely reflective in their practice and have a clear understanding of the importance of always being in the role of a learner, there are also school leaders that do not understand nor see the value of continuous growth. In order to offer an opportunity for all leaders to learn and grow, it is recommended that a system exists at the district level to provide these leaders support and to help create practices or habits for these reluctant leaders to be more reflective. One

approach could be to use a learning styles inventory to help campus leaders learn more about their own learning style. With this information, the district leader could then demonstrate how to take the information and apply it to a personal growth plan that could be co-constructed by the principal and the district representative in charge of professional development. By teaching school leaders who are not normally reflective in their practice how to be reflective, the district leader can assist the school leader to develop new understanding of his or her learning needs, new learning experiences, and develop new habits of practice.

Another recommendation is to create opportunities for school leaders to come together and work together to problem solve and learn from one another. It is not suggested that central office control the conversation or even provide the topics. Inviting school leaders to come together to create the agenda and select the ideas to focus on gives them the power to create the best learning experience for the group. Central office administration should create the space for campus administrators to come together and learn together; the participants can decide how best to address and solve the problems they are experiencing. This space could come in various forms such as a professional learning community, critical friends protocol, peer coaching, action research or even project-based learning.

The school district superintendent should lead efforts to provide campus administrators opportunities to learn and grow together. One option would be to establish a principal mentoring program. Such a program benefits the mentor as well as the principal, as mentoring has shown to be mutually beneficial (Clutterbuck, 1987). The

superintendent should also ensure that professional development in the district is designed to provide all principals opportunities to come together and work together.

Recommendations for Principal Preparation Programs

One recommendation is for universities to create post-graduation support structures to provide support for in-service administrators. Once an administrator completes his or her principal preparation program, there are few learning opportunities that are offered for them to come together as learners without agendas, where there can be open conversations in which they can share information and learn from one another. Providing this type of learning opportunity, were the leaders are in control of the agenda and the conversation, could be instrumental in reflection and learning. The university could serve as the host for the program and charge a participation fee to cover the program's costs.

This type of learning would provide opportunities for school leaders to come together without a pre-constructed agendas, work together and learn from one another. In order to keep costs down for such events, graduate students could help to facilitate learning experience by providing the structure and coordinating the event. Another option would be to have graduates of the program help to facilitate the learning group while also having the opportunity to participate. The point of these experiences would be, not to have an "expert" imparting information, but to have a group of leaders come together to problem solve and learn from one another. Because many principal preparation programs have students matriculate through the program in cohorts, these cohorts could be a way to create groups of leaders to work together. This work could be continued through social media or other electronic options.

Such a program would present several benefits for principals. It would give them an opportunity to try various types of learning experiences such as learning community, action research, critical friends, coaching, project based learning and /or mentoring. This structure could be a safe place for leaders to come together to engage in professional learning through shared knowledge and shared experiences in a supportive setting. A university sponsored group would provide opportunities for school leaders to be encouraged to be completely vulnerable and open to learning with no repercussions. This type of learning support would also be beneficial to the university in that it would be better informed about what those in the field struggle with, which in turn would assist the continuous development of the university's principal preparation program.

A second recommendation for principal preparation programs is to include instruction on how to seek new learning and/or new information in a timely manner. More emphasis could be placed on self-directed learning, including various modes of self-directed learning that a leader can utilize. It is important for future leaders to know that they will not have to have all the answers, and to develop the skills to learn how to find information when needed. Graduates should leave principal preparation programs with a commitment to continue to learn and grow professionally, in both formal and informal ways.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is still a great deal of research needed around the professional learning needs of school administrators. It is interesting to note that there has been a great deal of research on teacher professional development; however, there has been little research on done around principals' professional learning. One recommendation is to find principals

that have participated in intensive learning experiences such as the Harvard Summer

Institute to investigate if they view professional development differently, or if they take

on a more active role in their own professional growth as a result of such an experience

Another area that would be of interest for research would be to examine specific

professional learning experiences for school leaders and identify specific benefits that

they believe they reap from such experiences. For example, principals working through

the formal process of a PLC over an extended amount of time could then be interviewed

to see what they believe are the benefits of the learning experience, if any.

The participants in this research all valued their mentors. Research that followed

a few administrators and their mentors over a period of time, documenting the growth of

each leader as well as what each leader gained from particular interactions with the

mentor would be particularly meaningful. Mentoring is said to be a mutually beneficial

experience, thus research investigating the benefits (and challenges) for both parties is

also recommended.

It is worth exploring the idea that the school administrator is a social learner.

Future research might explore what principals see as the benefit of learning from one

another, investigating the preferred methods of learning socially and how participants

implement what they learn.

A final recommendation for additional research is to conduct a similar study to

this one, with the main focus the impact of the learning of the school leader on the

teachers, students, the learning community and the community at large. While all the

participants in this study perceived a direct impact of their learning on those they serve, a

follow up study documenting the specific effects of different types of principals' professional development is recommended.

Concluding Comments

As a practicing principal, I have been inspired by the participants in my study. I was blessed to work with some incredible school leaders who are doing amazing work in the field. The job of the principal can be extremely lonely, stressful and even frustrating. I found comfort in knowing that there are others that understand and actively address the extraordinary demands of being a school leader. Being a principal is truly one of the most rewarding jobs. Through this study I have been afforded the opportunity to reflect deeply on the work of the school leader. I have always known that the principal is a key element to the success of the school. I also understood that professional development and continuous learning are extremely important. What I now believe through this experience is that there is a great deal of power in adult learning for school leaders.

The knowledge that a campus leader gains and brings to his or her school can have an impact that is beyond what one could possibly imagine. When a school leader enhances the practice of teachers, he or she changes learning for the students, the culture of the school and ultimately the well-being of the community. I tell teachers and students daily to go out and change the world. But what I know now is that I too have a great deal of responsibility to do that as well. My leadership and my learning can have a much greater impacts than simply my own personal growth. I have the ability to make a difference in the lives of many and change the world around me through my own learning, and enacting positive change as a result. This is a great responsibility, but one worthy of the challenge.

APPENDIX SECTION

Detailed Interview Guide

First Interview

Part I: Demographic Information

      -Teaching experience
      -Administration certifications
      -Administrative positions

Part 2: Career History:

      -Tell me about yourself as school leader.
      -Tell me about your journey to this point with a focus on your experiences and
       positions that you have held along the way.
      -Tell me about some of the experiences you have had in these roles.

Part 3: Professional Needs

      -How have the changing roles of the principal affected your career?
      -How do you determine when you need more development in a particular area?
      -Where and how are you learning about the changing roles of the principal?
      -Have you ever experienced a critical incident that lead you to learn more?

Part 4: Types of Structured Professional Development

      -Here is a list of professional development activities, could you share what
       activities you have engaged in and tell me about the experience
            -Training
            -Critical friends
            -Professional learning communities (PLCs)
            -Portfolios
            -Coaching
            -On-line learning
            -Action Research
            -Project Based Learning
            -Other types of structured Professional Development

Part 5: Principal as the Adult Learner- (I will define self-directed learning as it issued in this research project for the participants prior to this question)

      -What would you consider self-directed professional learning?

-Are you currently or have you ever participated in this type of learning?
-Can you describe/share some of these experiences?

Part 6: Involving others

-Here is a list of significant people in a school leader's life, can you explain or
 describe from whom you seek support in your professional development?

-Mentors
-Supervisors
-Colleagues

-What kinds of support to do seek from these people?
-Are there others that you seek support from for your professional development
that are not on this list?

Part 7: Impact of Professional Development

-How does what you continue to learn impact your teachers?
-How does what you continue to learn impact your school?
-How does what you continue to learn impact your community?
-How does what you continue to learn impact your students?

Part 8: Closing Questions

-Based on what we have discussed so far today is there anything that you would
 like to clarify for me or anything else that you would like add to your responses
 or share with me?

Before closing the in interview I will explain to each participant the purpose of the
second interview. I will explain the member check. I will explain why I may ask
clarifying questions or follow up questions to an initial response and finally I will ask that
the leaders collect some artifacts of their professional learning to share with me at the
next interview. I will give them some ideas and samples.

APPENDIX B

Second Interview

I.   Follow-up questions will emerge from analysis of the first interview.

II.   Artifact discussion (prior to the interview, I will ask each participant to think about one or more artifacts that they can share that represents their professional learning and its impact. I will take pictures of the artifacts for additional review. I will analyze the data that are presented by each participant as he/she tells his/her own story about personal learning using the artifacts.)

III.   Do you have anything that you would like to share with me that you think would benefit the research that I am working on?

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