12-1-2012

Leading Transformational Change in a Large Urban School District

Leslie Jean Brinks
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, glthr5@cox.net

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations

Part of the Educational Leadership Commons

Repository Citation
http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations/1709

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers, and Capstones by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
LEADING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

Leslie J. Brinks

Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
1992

Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction
Lesley College
1996

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
December 2012
Copyright by Leslie Brinks, 2012
All Rights Reserved
THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the dissertation prepared under our supervision by
Leslie Brinks
entitled
Transformational Change in a Large Urban School District
be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership
Department of Educational Leadership

Edith Rusch, Ph.D., Committee Chair
Gene Hall, Ph.D., Committee Member
James Crawford, Ph.D., Committee Member
Martha Young, Ph.D., Graduate College Representative
Tom Piechota, Ph.D., Interim Vice President for Research &
Dean of the Graduate College

December 2012
ABSTRACT

This abstract reflects the findings of the understanding of the skills necessary to lead transformative change in a non-affluent neighborhood in a large urban district. Current research and understandings of transformative leadership has been limited to traits and organizational concepts rather than the work associated with transforming schools. Studies seldom addressed if leaders even valued the actions central to transformative work or if they have the capacity and expertise to do the task. The purpose of this study was to understand the kinds of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support what is viewed as transformative leading. Additionally the inquiry probed the supports and barriers to engaging in transformative leading within a bureaucracy of an urban district. This is a qualitative case study of three high achieving elementary schools in non-affluent neighborhoods. The study was conducted to understand the meaning and essence of transformative work from the principals’ and teachers’ prospective. The study contributes to the transformative leadership literature.

Keywords: transforming leaders, transformational leaders, transformative leaders, capacity, five star rating
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I began my doctoral study, I had one thing in mind. I wanted to focus on how my study would affect me as a school leader. I wanted to become capable of leading any school, anywhere, attended by any children to academic success that was both fair and equitable. The following individuals helped me achieve this.

I thank the following administrators that I worked with for providing me guidance and being excellent examples of true leaders in the Clark County School District: David Mendelson, Alan Bowman, Trudy Abel, and Lorraine Blume.

Finally, I want to thank the members of my committee and professors whose experience and wisdom have been a guiding light throughout this process. I extend my appreciation to:

Dr. James Crawford, for being a sounding board as we moved through this process.

Dr. Teresa Jordan, for being a champion of the educational leadership program and fighting for our cohort.

Dr. Gene Hall, for being the devil’s advocate and always stretching my thinking.

Dr. Martha Young, for being an encourager always.

Finally, Dr. Edith Rusch whose patience and guidance are the reason for my finishing this journey. I admire her persistence and passion for school leadership and will be grateful to her always.
DEDICATION

To the principals and teachers of the Clark County School District who work harder than any other group of individuals in any occupation under the sun.

To my three children, Tyler, Harmony, and Ryne, who have benefited from those individuals in CCSD working with them from kindergarten through their high school graduation. All three have become wonderful, educated, contributing members of society, thanks to these principals’ and teachers’ tireless efforts.

To my Heavenly Father, who got me through this process and taught me not to worry.

Most importantly, to my wonderful husband, Gary, who tolerated, supported, encouraged, and loved me through this crazy process.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ ii  

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................... iii  

DEDICATION ............................................................................................................................... iv  

LIST OF FIGURES ......................................................................................................................... viii  

CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 3  

Introduction and Background ...................................................................................................... 3  

Focus Group Experience .............................................................................................................. 6  

Problem Statement ....................................................................................................................... 9  

Purpose of the Study ...................................................................................................................... 12  

Research Questions ...................................................................................................................... 12  

Summary of Research Design and Methodology ........................................................................ 12  

Significance of Study .................................................................................................................... 13  

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations ............................................................................. 14  

Definition of Terms ...................................................................................................................... 14  

Organizations of Study ............................................................................................................... 15  

Summary ..................................................................................................................................... 16  

CHAPTER 2  REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .................................................................................... 17  

Historical Perspectives of Transforming Leaders ......................................................................... 17  

Transforming Leaders in a School Setting .................................................................................. 24  

Support for Leithwood’s Model of Transforming Leadership .................................................... 27  

A New Need for Turning Transforming Leaders into Transformative Leaders – Questions about Leithwood’s Model ................................................................. 29  

Elements of a Leader Who can Transform ................................................................................ 36
Rational for Research........................................................................................................ 45
Summary........................................................................................................................ 48

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................... 50
Research Philosophy................................................................................................... 51
Research Questions ................................................................................................. 52
Design of the Study ................................................................................................. 52
Participation and Site Selection .............................................................................. 55
Data Collection and Interviews ............................................................................. 57
Interview Protocol ................................................................................................... 57
Researcher’s Epoche ............................................................................................... 58
Data Analysis ........................................................................................................... 60
Trustworthiness ....................................................................................................... 62
Limitations ............................................................................................................... 63

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY ................................................................ 64
Participants as Cases ............................................................................................... 67
Principal of School A .............................................................................................. 68
School A ................................................................................................................... 68
Principal of School B .............................................................................................. 76
School B ................................................................................................................... 77
Principal of School C .............................................................................................. 83
School C ................................................................................................................... 84
Principals A, B, and C and the Research Literature ............................................. 90
Emergent Findings ................................................................................................. 96
Summary of Findings .............................................................................................. 97
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Distinctions among three theories of leadership ................................................ 35
Figure 2 Location of three school sites used in the study ............................................... 67
Figure 3 Demographics and Student Information for School A ...................................... 71
Figure 4 School A’s percent at or above proficient in the subject of mathematics .......... 72
Figure 5 School A’s percent at or above proficient in the subject of reading ............... 73
Figure 6 Demographics and Student Information for School B .................................... 77
Figure 7 School B’s percent at or above proficient in the subject of mathematics .......... 78
Figure 8 School B’s percent at or above proficient in the subject of reading ............... 79
Figure 9 Demographics and Student Information for School C .................................... 84
Figure 10 School C’s percent at or above proficient in the subject of mathematics ....... 84
Figure 11 School C’s percent at or above proficient in the subject of reading ............... 85
CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Background

The topic of leadership is hard to ignore. I am an assistant principal in the Clark County School District (CCSD), the fifth largest school district in the United States. I am currently in my fifth year as an administrator and in my 20th year in the field of education; it is my hope to become a principal in the very near future. Therefore, I have a keen interest in understanding the knowledge base and skill set I will need to be a successful leader of a thriving and achieving school.

Leadership is a common topic in organizations of all types, such as business, public agencies, and schools. *Harvard Business Review* and *Educational Administration Quarterly*, two highly regarded scholarly journals in their respective fields, devote much of their space to the study of leadership. Well-known business and management writers such as Jim Collins, Jack Welsh, and Peter Drucker have all stressed the importance of successful organizations. Newspapers write stories almost daily about effective and ineffective leaders suggesting that when organizations fail, society looks to put the blame on leaders. In fact, when books and stories appear that recount ineffective leadership, there is a clarion call for change. In the case of school districts, one doesn’t have to look far to find a story about a superintendent who exits her/his position under a cloud of failed leadership.

The call for the transformation of the K-12 public school system is an essential part of President Barack Obama’s *Race to the Top* program. Speaking to the nation on July 24, 2009, the president challenged those in education to turn around failing schools and narrow the gap between high- and low-performing students. This legislation called
for states to make transformation of low performing schools a priority, and required the use of innovative and evidence-based approaches. Jim Shelton, Assistant Deputy Secretary of the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the Department of Education stated, “Education needs new ideas and inventions that shatter the performance expectations of today’s status quo to make a meaningful impact” (2011). In his view, educators need to improve and transform learning from the cradle to career. In *Vision 2021: Transformations in Leading, Learning, and Community* (2008), the National Association of Elementary School Principals reported that schools no longer need a lone, charismatic leader who can single handedly direct the school. Schools instead needed leaders who could build relationships and empower teachers to carry out the schools' vision.

Nevada’s Clark County School District is particularly unique. Due to extraordinary growth in the past 25 years, sometimes adding between 12,000 to 20,000 students annually, CCSD’s primary focus was constructing school buildings to house students. Between the years of 1986 and 2008, the district added 200,000 students- the current size of the Houston Independent School District in Texas. In addition to this rapid growth, the diversity of the student population grew, complicating the system and student needs (Gibson Report, 2011). This rapid growth declined dramatically, as a result of the recent recession but never completely stopped. Flat funding for students, eventually resulted in Nevada being ranked 47th in the nation’s per pupil spending in 2010. The sudden end to the persistent opening of new schools shifted attention from ever-changing zoning boundaries to the actual performance outcomes of the county’s 300,000 + students.
The brief history above suggests the many challenges of working in a district such as Clark County. In my 20 years in education, I have experienced the pain of overcrowding, low academic achievement, and a rapidly changing population. In the classroom, I have dealt 37 students in a room, students coming to school without any preschool experience, and linguistic diversity. As our district grew, these challenges compounded to create frequent turnover for teachers, principals, and students, more diverse student populations and increasingly high dropout rates.

In Fall 2010, the CCSD Board of Trustees hired a new superintendent. Hope sprang anew. The first sign that a change could be coming was a focus group invitation. Designed to provide the incoming superintendent’s new leadership team with the current employees’ perspectives, this was the first of three studies requested by the new district leader to get know the district and guide his plan of action. The purpose of these studies was to examine the current state of academic achievement, graduation rates, the gap among student subgroups, and dropout prevention initiatives. Quality Leadership Resources, Inc., a professional development organization known for their work to “correct the root causes of system problems rather than focusing on isolated systems”, gathered information from sixty individual, two-hour, face-to-face meetings with approximately 1,000 CCSD administrators resulted in a report entitled, *Study of Barriers to Improved Student Achievement.*

The majority of these interviewees were CCSD building administrators including: principals, assistant principals, deans, and a smaller percentage of central office personnel. Interview participants were asked to identify our perceived view of the district’s current situation of our district, the ideal situation, barriers to the ideal, ways to
overcome those barriers, and finally, achievement outcomes. In addition, every CCSD employee had the opportunity to complete an online survey tailored to unique category in which the employee worked.

**Focus Group Experience**

As a participant in one of these 60 focus group sessions, I received specific, advanced guidelines. Twenty of us were assigned a specific date and time and could not reschedule. As we sat in a round table formation, the leader of the session asked the questions and each of the participants was expected to provide an answer. If a participant did not have a response, the leader would come back to the participant after everyone in the group had a chance to provide input. A facilitator wrote down each of our responses on chart paper. Once all input was recorded, we were handed Post It notes and asked to rank responses by perceived order of importance. This process ensured that every district leader had a voice. The findings identified in the final report resulted from these responses.

The focus group discussion was an enlightening experience. When asked to identify the barriers to student achievement, the building administrators responded that the biggest barrier to student achievement was the lack of autonomy and organizational supports at the school site. The administrators in my group felt there was a need to have systems in place where some decisions could be made at the school level, some at the central office, and some shared governance. The district office representatives felt the biggest barrier was the lack of communication of the school’s vision. They decried a lack of vision at the individual school and district levels.
As I sat with my group and listened to the questions that were raised, I reflected on my own beliefs about what was needed to raise student achievement in the Clark County School District. I knew that change would have to be a collective action and I would need to engage with others to help achieve this change. As a participant in the focus groups and as a leader in this unique district, I reflected about what my personal beliefs were and what type of school I wanted to come to work at every day. I was profoundly impacted by the idea that each participant was expected to contribute to every question asked of them. The reactions from my peers around the table ranged from semi-reluctant to engaged, and finally, to having a sense of hopefulness. The expectations of leadership became clear as I participated in this comprehensive review of CCSD. I believe, the superintendent initiated these studies in order to truly understand the culture and climate of the school district.

Survey results provided additional perspectives. Teachers and administrators alike identified barriers related to individual support and intellectual stimulation. Professional development and mentoring were viewed as having diminished importance as administrators focused on both federal and district compliance. The teachers stressed the importance of professional development that attended to their particular building’s needs rather than district mandates.

The final report identified a need to develop leaders who could operate with increased autonomy, noting that accountability, responsibility, and authority would come with increased autonomy. The authors called for “expanded leadership”, defined in the report as including professional development, effective instruction, curriculum-related training, aligned formative assessment, expanded leadership collaboration, data analysis
and incorporation, and enhanced student achievement. In my view, the new district administrative team expected school leaders to transform school and schooling practices. At the same time, “water cooler” talk and critical news reports contributed to perceptions that site leaders might not necessarily have the capacity to facilitate such a complex task. Past practices, such as inconsistent hiring practices, insufficient professional development, and uneven expectations were possible contributing factors to this current view. The superintendent then ordered a second study that compared CCSD to three peer districts, Broward County Public Schools, Houston Independent School District, and Miami-Dade School District. These districts were chosen because they have faced many of the same issues as CCSD and yet, have dramatically improved student achievement. These districts excel at supporting and providing meaningful and specialized professional development to teachers, making data-driven decisions, and having a consistent, unified message and direction. CCSD’s academic achievement fell below all peer districts, and on seven student performance indicators, CCSD was the lowest performing in five areas among the peer districts (p.9). The report went on to state that this low performance was a result of organizational silos. Multiple departments with many differential sources were duplicating academic programs, interventions, assessments, and professional development. These decisions appeared to lack district-level coordination due to departmental freedom to purchase or select any program of their choosing. Moreover, there was no centralized method to track the effectiveness of these programs overlapping programs (p. 11). The recommendations generated from this report called for the improvement of management practices both at the district and school buildings (p 19). The CCSD Board of Trustees announced that the district must “take dramatic steps to
significantly improve student achievement” (p.29). In other words, transformation of current practices at all levels of the system was now an imperative.

Problem Statement

The Clark County School District has faced extraordinary challenges fueled by rapid population growth. This growth, combined with the economic downturn, high drop out rates, and the increasingly diverse population are serious challenges to student success. However, other districts that have faced similar challenges, such as the peer districts in Jones’ study, are finding success. CCSD’s new superintendent, Dwight Jones, used the results of these two district studies to promote the concept of “expanded leadership”. By definition, the report calls for leaders who can operate with increased autonomy. This includes professional development, effective instruction, curriculum- related training aligned with formative assessment, expanded leadership collaboration, data analysis and use, and student achievement. His goal appears to be the restructuring of leadership teams and leadership development around research-based responsibilities and practices that enhance student achievement. The idea of “expanded leadership”, as noted in the Educational and Operational Efficiency Study appears to share the same characteristics of what defines transformational leadership. Introduced first by Burns (1978) then extended by Bass (1985). Leithwood (1990) continued to define and reshape the work of these pioneering authors. Researching transformative change in schools, Leithwood (1992) found that leaders must: 1. help members to develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; 2. foster teacher development; and 3. help teachers solve problems together more effectively.
Research and writing on transformational change and leadership is extensive (e.g., Avolio, 1995, 1999, 2002, 2011; Bass, 1985, 1990, 1998, 1999; Burns, 1978, 2003; Leithwood, & et. al, 1990 - present; Shields, 2003, 2009, 2011). However, studies have not focused on how leaders gain or sustain the skills and capacity to engage in transformational change. Research suggests that systematic change can occur when the participants in the system have the same focus, are a part of the decision-making process, and have a strong leader to guide the change. The vast majority of principal preparation programs are a combination of management techniques, organizational culture content, and fieldwork. Yet, McCarthy and Forsythe (2009) noted in a Wallace Foundation study that we know little about how to prepare and develop school leaders to guide successful schools. Emergent questions include: What happens when a principal is placed in a failing school or district that needs a transformational change? What happens when a new principal takes the helm of a school that has not made adequate yearly progress for several years in a row? What do CCSD principals need to know in order to successfully engage in expanded leadership? How does a principal attain the skills and sustain the capacity to guide a school towards success?

Leithwood (1992) believes there are seven dimensions of transformational leadership. These are: “building a school vision and establishing goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modeling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000 p. 114). The underlying knowledge, skills and disposition of these actions guide this study of capacity to guide school transformation.
The problem of the principal’s perceived capacity to act as a transformational leader needs further exploration because most current understandings are limited to traits and actions rather than the work associated with transforming schools. When the research of major authors is synthesized, one finds a consistent pattern of references to the central themes identified by Leithwood. However, the reported studies are usually based on leaders who have already achieved some form of transformation of culture, little or no description of the tedious process of achieving transformation. For example, Neal (1991) laid out practices in democratic decision making in various forms as well as an exact blueprint for implementation. Yet, studies seldom address if leaders even value the actions central to transformative work. What is missing from these studies is an assessment of leadership capacity in performing these tasks. Additionally, Hoy & Sweetland (2001) addressed coercive and enabling bureaucracies, an integral factor in transformational change.

Complicating matters, Carolyn M. Shields (2003, 2011) compiled studies on the works of transformative change in the education setting. In her two books, *Good Intentions are not Enough* and *Transformative Leadership: A Reader*, Shields writes that transformational leadership focuses on the collective interests of the group or community. Shields argues that although Leithwood and his colleagues have developed a complete model for transformational leadership in education, this transformation is simply organizational and can occur without any attention to equity or social justice. Shields used the term transformative rather than transformational, stating that leadership requires more than an institutional focus.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how principals of identified transformed schools understand the actual experience of doing transformative work within the bureaucratic structure of an urban district. The goal is to probe the development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that supported the work of achieving a 5-Star rating in schools located in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following questions:

1. How do principals explain the task of transforming a school culture?

2. How do principals understand and critique their knowledge, skills, and disposition for transformative leader work?

3. How do the teachers who join the principals in this work view their role and their principal’s effectiveness?

4. In what ways does a system’s climate and culture enable transformative leader work?

Summary of Research Design and Methodology

Phenomenology will guide the design for this study; this approach will help the researcher understand the “lived experiences” of the principals interviewed (Creswell, 2003, p.15). According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher identifies the “essence” of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by the participants in the
study. Moustakas (1994) said that understanding the “lived experience” makes phenomenology not only a method for research, but a philosophy as well (p. 17). In the present study, the phenomenon is the principal’s perceived capacity to act as a transformational leader. Part of this phenomenological inquiry was to discover, and then understand, the thoughts and actions of three principals viewed as leaders, as well as their impact on transformation and the teachers who work with them.

My reason for choosing this type of research design was my ability to be with these individuals at their own school sites, allowing me to participate in the lived experiences. Phenomenology is my preferred mode of inquiry, as I prefer to be with individuals in their natural environments. As a participant-observer, I visited each campus long enough to get a “full description and deep understanding” (Glesne, 2006, p. 51). Spradley (1979) writes that in this type of research, rather than studying people, you are learning from people (p.3). Although the research questions serve as a structure for this inquiry, casual conversations, along with close reading and analysis of the interview transcripts, supported the development of related findings.

**Significance of the Study**

The study of principals’ capacity to become a transformative leader is relevant for two reasons. First, understanding the principal’s view of his or her own transformational capacity to be this type of leader can help reveal future leaders’ potential to guide successful school change. Second, this study is significant for school districts because they can address the type of transformative leadership required when faced with the need for transformative change.
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The assumption is that the principals selected for inclusion in this study have engaged in transformational work (Leithwood, 1990-present). Two teachers from each site shared their insights of the principals’ work. The principals selected for inclusion were chosen by the CCSD as those placed in schools that needed transformation. The assumption was that the hiring practices were ones that valued leaders’ characteristics and philosophies based on the transformative needs of the school. The limitations of the study are that while looking at the capacity of the principals, some may view themselves as capable of being transformational leaders, while according to the definitions of Leithwood (1992) or Shields (2009) they are not. Two delimitations of the study were that the principals placed at these three schools represent just a small sample of principals who are in one urban school district in the United States.

Definition of Terms

Transforming Leaders- leaders who engage with followers for the common good rather than their self-interest. In addition, these leaders focus on the followers’ needs of esteem, self-fulfillment, and self-actualization as identified in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Burns, 1978, Maslow, 1943 as cited by Saxe, 2011).

Transformational Leaders- leaders who are capable of “building a school vision and establishing goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modeling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures
to foster participation in school decisions” (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p. 114).

Transformative Leaders - leaders who have the potential to provide education in diverse settings that are inclusive, equitable, and excellent and “link education and educational leadership with the wider diverse social context which it is embedded” (Shields, 2009).

Capacity - actual or potential ability to perform, yield, or withstand (dictionary.com)

Five Star Rating – based on CCSD’s School Performance Framework, which rates schools based on academic growth, academic achievement, reduction of academic growth gaps, attendance of students, and parent participation. Highest performing schools receive five stars while the lowest performing schools receive one star (ccsd.net SPF reports)

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 is a presentation of general background information relating to the topic of transformational leadership. It also outlines the purpose of the study, questions to be answered, assumptions, delimitations and a list of definitions, and gives a description of the organizational design. Chapter 2 includes a review of the related literature, consistent with the structure of transformational leadership and organizational systems. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and attendant procedures. Chapter 4 compiles, analyzes, and reports the findings of this study. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings, presents the conclusions, and offers recommendations for further study.
Summary

This study focuses on the concept of transforming leadership (Burns, 1978), transformational leadership (Leithwood, et. al, 1992), and transformative leadership (Shields, 2009), and addresses principals’ self-perceptions of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to engage in transformative work within the bureaucratic structure of an urban district. Specifically, this study extends to the body of knowledge regarding leadership and the capacity required of leaders in order to help a school become more successful. It is assumed that school districts hire principals who encompass some of the characteristics of transformational leaders, but that detailed job requirements do not exist. Chapter 2 addressed literature relevant to this study.
CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Researchers define leadership in many different ways. Indeed, a review of 587 publications unveiled 221 classifications of leadership (Rost, 1993 as cited by Saxe, 2011). A Google search of the word “leadership” yielded 496,000,000 individual returns (DuFour, 2012). Burns (1978) wrote, “leadership is one of the most observed and misunderstood phenomena on earth” (p.2). In public schools in particular, leadership is now a major focus, as it pertains to accountability and restructuring of public schools. Leading and effectively managing schools has become increasingly complex as the demands of schools and society change (Stewart, 2006). The public has become increasingly demanding on the school system to raise standards, improve academic performance, and raise graduation rates.

In addition, transformation of schools is an essential part of President Obama’s Race to the Top program. Speaking to the nation on July 24, 2009, the president challenged those in education to turn around failing schools and narrow the gap between high- and low-performing students. This legislation called for states to make transformation of low performing schools a priority, and required the use of innovative and evidence-based approaches to change. Jim Shelton, Assistant Deputy Secretary of the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the Department of Education, stated: “Education needs new ideas and inventions that shatter the performance expectations of today’s status quo to make a meaningful impact” (2011). In his view, educators need to improve and transform learning from the cradle to career. In Vision 2021:
*Transformations in Leading, Learning, and Community,* the National Association of Elementary School Principals reported that schools no longer needed a lone, charismatic leader who could single handedly direct the school. Schools needed leaders who could build relationships to empower teachers to carry out the schools' visions. (2008).

This chapter is a summary of the literature that defines and shapes what leadership skills are necessary to engage specifically in transforming practices. The chapter begins with a review of the early research and writings on transforming leadership in the political and business worlds. Next, I examined the literature that identified transformational leadership as a way to improve schools. I looked for current views about transforming leadership and searched for ways that school districts supported principals’ capacity to become transformational leaders. Although the topics of transforming, transformational, and transformative leadership in education have been discussed and published many times, researchers and leaders in the field have not yet addressed the development of leaders’ capacity to transform schools, identified the professional development needed to gain these skills, and how this transformation ultimately affects student achievement. Additionally, the research includes little about the educators’ perceptions of their capacity to make transformative change a reality.

While the literature is explicit in the ways transforming, transformational, and transformative leadership are defined, little was written about principal preparation are prepared to take on this task, or what personal qualities and skill sets were necessary. In conducting the review of the literature, I looked at the way leadership as a subject has evolved over time. The influential work of many leaders in the field of transforming leadership, like Burns, Bass, and Avolio, have provided a foundation to examine
leadership in the field of education. For almost thirty years, Leithwood and his colleagues have said that principals can be transformational agents. However, because transforming leadership started in management, politics, and the military, some doubt this model can be successfully applied at the school level (Stewart, 2006).

**Historical Perspective of Transforming Leadership**

The concept of transforming leadership gained prominence in 1978 with the publication of James MacGregor Burns’ *Leadership*. In this influential book, Burns wrote, “…leadership is one of the most observed and misunderstood phenomena on earth” (p. 2). In this seminal work, Burns argued that leadership was about relationships (p. 11). Burns research was focused on political leaders who were considered transforming leaders, and who engaged with followers for the common good rather than self-interest. In addition, these leaders focused on the followers’ needs of esteem, self-fulfillment, and self-actualization as identified in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943 as cited by Saxe, 2011).

In the beginning chapters of the book, Burns focused on leader-follower relationships and set the stage for the evolution of the concept of transformational leadership (Stewart, 2006). In his view, transformation was possible when leaders and followers engaged with one another to raise each other to “higher levels of morality” and their purposes became “fused” (p. 20). Effective leaders would then be judged by their ability to make social changes.

Burns argued that some early political leaders had overemphasized power alone. These individuals viewed power and leadership as intangible objects, rather than
relationships. In Burns’ (1978) view,

this “lies in seeing that most powerful influences consist of deeply human relationships in which two or more persons engage with one another. It lies in a more realistic, a more sophisticated understanding of power, and of the often far more consequential exercise of mutual persuasion, exchange, elevation, and transformation – in short, of leadership” (p.11).

When someone could convince followers to act toward goals that represent values and motivations and could address wants and needs, aspirations, and expectations of both the leader and the follower, Burns argued that it is only then that they can be called a leader. Leaders’ and followers’ purposes must become fused and they must support each other for a common purpose. Burns used the example of Gandhi, who, by elevating the hopes of millions of Indians for a common purpose, enriched all the lives in the process of the transformation. In his view, one could not be a transforming leader without this level of commitment.

Burns looked at political figures as examples of transforming leaders and categorized them in several ways. First were intellectual leaders who were “not detached from their social milieus; typically they seek to change it” (p. 142). This concept of intellectual leaders brought forth the role of conscious purpose, which was drawn from values. Burns wrote that this type of transforming leadership occurred during times of social conflict, citing the example of the eighteenth-century France, when educated men and women explored man’s relationship to God, the legitimacy of custom, and other ideas. Another category of leader was that of the reform leader. Burns researched political figures that were considered to be reform leaders by their ability “to teach and be taught by their followers” (p. 169). A third category was that of the revolutionary leader. The most important quality in being a revolutionary leader was to have “the birth of an idea or
vision” (p.201). Burns explained that the birth of the idea, as well as its adoption by a number of people, is one of the most crucial steps towards transforming. While Burns explored charisma in historical leaders, examining heroes and idols, his position was that leaders were neither simply born nor made. He believed that leaders evolved from the structure of motivation, values, and goals (Stewart, 2006).

In his later work (2003), Burns defined and retooled his understanding of transformational leadership in Transforming Leadership. He first distinguished the difference between the verbs “change” and “transform”. Burns wrote that to change is to substitute one thing for another, and this would be related to his earlier definition of transactional leadership. However, when one was to transform, it caused a metamorphosis in form or structure and a radical change in outward form or inner character, like turning a frog into a prince (p. 24).

Using the ideas from Burns’ work as a theoretical framework, Bernard Bass applied the view of transforming leadership (which Bass termed transformational) to business organizations. With this change in application, Bass revised Burns’ theory in three ways. First, he described the development of follower needs as greater than Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Second, while Burns described the leader as an agent of moral good (Burns, 1978), Bass noted that these leaders could use their powers of charisma to further evil ends (Bass, 1990 as cited O’Shea, 2002). Bass and his colleague, Avolio, labeled this type of leader as “pseudo-transformational” (2002). Finally, where Burns viewed leaders either as transforming or transactional, Bass felt that leaders could have qualities of both typologies. According to Burns, transactional leadership was the exchange between leader and follower, void of any relationship, having determined
objectives that led to rewards for performance. Burns thought a leader could be either transforming or transactional but never both. Bass, on the other hand, felt that most leaders had qualities of both transforming and transactional. In 1998, Bass coined this the expanded or “full range” leadership model (O’Shea, 2002).

Bass developed these thoughts from his view of the changing world of business as the need for leaders to become more transformational. Following twenty years of Burns’ work, leaders were now encouraged to empower their employees and to develop them into individuals and teams that focused on quality, service, cost effectiveness, and quantity of output. Bass believed that transformational leadership was much more powerful than Burns’ assessment, and had the potential to move followers beyond the expected (Stewart, 2006). Bass developed his views as he observed the shift of the work force after the 1950’s. According to Bass, prior to the 1950’s, most jobs were held by skilled laborers, and after this time, educated professionals began to flood the work place. These workers saw themselves as a collection of colleagues rather than the traditional superior-subordinate relationships. Going beyond one’s self-interest for the good of the organization occurred when the individual members aligned their interests with the values of the organization. Transformational leaders were also expected to uplift the morale, and increase the motivation, and morals of their followers (Bass, 1999).

To measure full range leaders within his transformational model, Bass pioneered the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Conger, 1999; Saxe, 2011). This instrument purported to measure various types of leader behavior, and explored the relationships of the particular types of leaders with subordinates’ performance, satisfaction, and commitment (Bass, 1985 as cited by O’Shea, 2002). During most of his
research with colleague Bruce Avolio, Bass looked for a deeper understanding of Burns earlier work. While Burns looked at political leaders, Bass focused his research on military, business, and educational organizations. Since its development, the MLQ has undergone several revisions to better measure the component factors and the psychometric concerns (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1995; Saxe, 2011). The MLQ started in 1985 as a survey of 63 items and was updated in 1997, to a list of 45 items called the MLQ 5X. Many other alternative measures of transformational leadership have been also developed. However, some form of the MLQ is the most frequently used measurement for Bass’ definition of a transformational leader (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalf, 2001; Carless, Wearing, & Mann, 2000, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman & Fetter, 1990 as cited by O’Shea, 2002).

Some researchers have argued that the MLQ is not a perfect instrument (Yukl, 1999) and that the questionnaire did not address influence-orientated and task-structuring behaviors of leaders. Yukl notes that the content of the MLQ has changed over time. He explained that the transformational behaviors that the MLQ describes are vague and that the theoretical rationale for differentiating among the behaviors is not delineated by theory. Yukl added: “The partially overlapping content and the high inter correlation found among the transformational behaviors raise doubts about their construct validity” (Yukl, 1999 as cited by Tejeda, Scandura, & Pillai, 2001). After testing three hierarchical models, Carless (1998 as cited by Muenjohn, 2008) found that the MLQ 5X does not measure separate leadership behaviors. Instead, it appeared to measure a single hierarchical construct of transformational leadership.
Heavy reliance on questionnaires is an argument against the work that Bass and Avolio (Evers & Lakomski, 2000 as cited by Stewart, 2006). They argue that the questionnaires reveal theories but not the cognitive structure of those responding. Evers and Lakomski (2000) state that the instruments used are artifacts of methodology instead of scientific, empirical phenomena.

**Transforming Leadership in the School Setting**

**Leithwood’s Model of Transformational School Leadership**

Beginning in the 1990’s, the challenges of school reform and restructuring brought to the surface the developing ideas of transforming leadership for schools (Leithwood, 1992, 1994). A well-respected scholar, Kenneth Leithwood was considered the leader in transformational leadership in education (he used Bass’ term transformational instead of Burns’ term transforming). He was one of the first researchers to explore how transformational leadership could be applied to school settings. While Leithwood (1992) acknowledged both Burns’ (1978) and Bass’ (1985) early work, he noted the weaknesses of this type of research in understanding transformational leadership in schools. In this manner, Leithwood modified the work of Bass and others to explain the impact of transformational leadership in schools (Stewart, 2006). Finding a potential weakness in the Bass model and the MLQ, Leithwood found that the wide range of dimensions and behaviors of a transformational leader in schools could not simply be measured by this questionnaire (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Saxe, 2011)

In his early work, with his colleagues, Leithwood (1986) developed the Principal
Profile to measure principals’ practices. This tool was developed to help link principal appraisal results to school improvement efforts and measure the principal’s level of effectiveness. Some key ideas of the dimensions of practice used to evaluate the principals’ skills were their development of goals, the factors of influence (inside/outside) and how they dealt with them, the strategies used to achieve school goals, and their decision making abilities. This work seemed to provide the basis for Leithwood’s research about transformational leadership. Working with Doris Janzi, Leithwood (1990) first published his research on transformational leadership applying the work of Burns and Bass to the field of education. Leithwood’s research contributed to a better understanding of how leadership affected schools’ climate and culture (Stewart, 2006).

Leithwood’s other early work focused on school culture as a reflection of a shared meaning and collaboration in contrast to the outdated notion of teachers working in isolation (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Leithwood and Steinbach (1991) continued to develop this view of transformational leadership in their study of how principals worked with teachers to solve problems. Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1994) used the definition of transformational leadership developed by Leithwood and Jantzi in 1990 as follows:

The term ‘transform’ implies major changes in the form, nature, function and/or potential of some phenomenon; applied to leadership, it specifies general ends to be pursued although it is largely mute with respect to means. From this beginning, we consider the central purpose of transformational leadership to be the enhancement of the individual and collective problem-solving capacities of organizational members; such as capacities are exercised in the identification of
goals to be achieved and practices to be used in their achievement (p.7).

Leithwood believed “the former models of transformational leadership neglected to include necessary transactional components which were fundamental to the stability of the organization” (Stewart, 2006 p.7). Leithwood expanded his research to include seven dimensions of transformational leadership. These dimensions were: “building a school vision and establishing school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individual support; modeling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions’ (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood et al., cited in Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000 p. 114). Leithwood’s model assumed a shared leadership between the principal and his teachers. These dimensions were eventually narrowed down to three categories: a mission centered focus on setting directions, a focused set of developing people, and a culture centered on redesigning the organization (Saxe, 2011).

Leithwood continued to research transformational leadership in education. In his review of research on how leadership influences student learning, Leithwood et. al revealed that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). In 2006, Leithwood and Jantzi reviewed their research on transformational leadership in schools over the last ten years. This meta-analysis looked at 33 studies, 29 of which looked at the variables believed to have an indirect impact on student achievement. These variables included: school culture (Barnett & McCormick, 2004),
organizational commitment (Yu, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2002), teacher job satisfaction (Bolger, 2001), changed teacher practices (Leithwood et al., 2004), and planning, information collection, and participatory decision-making structures (e.g., Leithwood, Aiken, & Janzi, 2001). The 29 studies revealed that transformational leadership had positive effects on all of the aforementioned issues. According to Leithwood and his colleagues (2004), only classroom instruction ranks higher than leadership among school factors that could increase student achievement.

Expanded his research, Leithwood felt that transformational leaders persuade, inspire, and motivate those they work with to achieve results. He also believed that this did not occur through the offer of rewards (transactional), but by tapping into the intrinsic values of school staff, as consistent with the school’s mission, vision, and values (Lashway, 2006, p. 90). It was here, again, that Leithwood found weaknesses in the Bass model and the MLQ. According to Leithwood and his colleague Doris Jantzi (2006), the MLQ cannot measure the dimensions and behaviors of a school leader (Stewart, 2006).

**Support for Leithwood’s Model of Transformational Leadership**

Other researchers explored their understanding of what was needed for a leader to transform a school and agreed with Leithwood his and colleagues. Hallinger (2003) wrote that transformation could occur when a leader built capacity in teachers by creating a climate of continuous learning, with ample opportunities for shared learning with others. In a study of six principals that were defined as transformational, Chirichello (1997) found that teachers were engaged when a principal was supportive and promoted professional development. This was thought to lead to better instruction in the
classroom. These studies supported Leithwood’s work that stated teachers need intellectual stimulation.

Other researchers supported Leithwood’s model of transformational leaders. Edna Nash’s (1999) research focused on school culture as broadly indicative of successful schools. With a leader who could facilitate and promote positive culture, late 90’s research began to look at principal preparation and qualities that would further promote transformation of schools. Nash found many implications for policy and practice in principal preparation and training programs. Selected principals who were using the Accelerated Schools process, a model for restructuring, in Portland, Oregon found that not only do the behaviors of the leaders need to be present, but also practiced. These practices were viewed as effective, but the major question of this study was to identify the characteristics of transformational leaders. Nash’s second question looked at perceived obstacles or barriers to achieving school reform or transformation. Suggestions for future research identified the need for principals to be trained in transformational practices, as reinforced by support and training from their district. Studies (Lawler, 1998) emerged confirming that a successful principal could be defined as transformational, supporting one of Leithwood’s seven dimensions of transformational leadership.

The literature and research looked at the broad definition of what transformational leadership looked like in the early 90’s. These studies focused on the school climate and the school as a place where the transformation can begin to happen. The definition and the needs of a transformational leader seemed to get more detailed as research continued through the turn of the century and into the present.
Leithwood’s seven dimensions of transformational leadership are seen in the business world as well as in school settings. Moreover, research on transformational leadership has continued to be consistent with early findings. In partnership with Doris Jantzi, he reviewed 64 empirical studies of transformational school leadership. The most significant finding among the studies analyzed was on the effect of transformational leadership: 1. on perception of organizational effectiveness it was significant and large; 2. on objective, independent measures of organization effectiveness it was less documented and less uniform in nature but was positive and significant, although modest in size; 3. on independently measured student outcomes it seemed quite promising though limited in amount; and 4. on student engagement in school, while modest in amount, the effects were uniformly positive (Leithwood & Jantzi 2005).

A New Need for Turning Transforming Leaders into Transformative Leaders – Questions about Leithwood’s Model

In 2003, Carolyn Shields challenged the understanding of Leithwood’s concept of transformational leadership. She argued that although Leithwood and his colleagues had developed a complete model of transformational leadership in education, the transformation of the school was simply organizational. Shields continued to explain that organizational transformation could occur without any attention to equity or social justice issues. Shields used the term transformative rather than transformational, stating that leadership requires more than an institutional focus.

In a follow up to her book, entitled *Good Intentions are not Enough* (2003), Shields stated that transformative leadership had the potential to provide education in diverse settings that was inclusive, equitable, and excellent (2009). She agreed with Burns’ (1978) work that stated that “transcending leadership is leadership engaged”, and
there was more to transactional and transformational leadership. Shields expanded her understanding of transformative leadership to include questions of justice and democracy. Shields’s work “links education and educational leadership with the wider diverse social context which it is embedded” (Shields, 2009) and she continued to clarify the differences between transformative leadership and transformational leadership. While transformational leadership worked well when the organization and the society it is imbedded in were in accord, transformative leadership could work when they were at odds, as is the case in most of our schools today. Transformative leadership held the most promise and potential to meet both the academic and social justice needs of our “complex, diverse, and beleaguered educational systems” (Shields, 2009).

Shields’ model looks through the lens of social justice. Perceiving transformational leadership as a “robust way of thinking about leadership that requires multiple styles and strategies”, Sheilds believed that the style must fit the circumstance (p.385). Her tenets of transformative leadership are: (1) acknowledge power and privilege; (2) articulate both individual and collective purposes (public and private good);(3) deconstruct social-cultural knowledge frameworks that generate inequity and reconstruct them in more equitable ways; (4) balance and critique promise; (5) effect deep and equitable change; (6) work towards transformation-liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, and excellence; and (7) demonstrate moral courage and activism.

During her empirical studies of two school leaders who strove to create inclusive and socially just schools, Shields conceptualized an expanded definition of transformative leadership, based in practice. However, Shields noted the lack of research on ways that transformative leadership could affect changes in school achievement. In
This study, Shields looked at two principals, whose schools had demonstrated a large improvement, based on the Illinois Interactive Report Card. Both schools had a minimum of 25% minority and/or free and reduced lunch populations. Both principals had introduced a significant number of changes at their sites, in order to ensure campus equality and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Shields looked at the principals’ leadership capabilities in balancing critique and promise; effecting deep and equitable change; creating new knowledge and frameworks; acknowledging privilege and power; emphasizing both private and public good; focusing of liberation, democracy, equity, and justice; and demonstrating moral courage and activism. She found that the backgrounds of these principals were similar. Both had grown up with considerable hardship and had developed a “failure is not an option” attitude. Both principals were committed to thinking “outside of the box” for needs that met their own schools’ students. Both developed their teachers’ awareness to the needs of the students’, which contributed to a deeper understanding of what was needed for students to succeed. As a result of this study, Shields concluded that transformative leaders take into account how the inequities of the outside world can affect what occurs internally in schools.

As the inequities of the outside world can affect school learning, leaders needed to be sensitive to their unique student population. Shields went on to explain that today’s school populations today are comprised of many communities of difference. Transformative leaders needed to be aware of and have an appreciation and understanding of those communities. Shields referenced an example of one of those communities of difference when she conducted site visits of schools in New Zealand. An example of the appreciation and understanding of such communities was apparent when
Shields visited a “language nest”. This unique “language nest” was composed of preschool aged students and was established in 1982 to provide support of the Maori language and culture and for the children to develop pride in their home culture (p.32-33). Shields discovered that while acquiring the skills needed to master the standards at grade level is the primary function of a school, holding on to your cultural identity is just as important.

The word “community” has been used to describe a group of people that share the same interest or location (Shields, 2003). Scholars describe educational communities as a collection of people (schools, classroom, and neighborhood) who share similar history, norms, beliefs, values, or goals. Shields points out that communities within a school may not all share these histories, norms, beliefs, values and goals or that there may be several communities under the school community umbrella. If this is the case, leaders must clarify their definition of community as well as ensure academic excellence and social justice for all of their students. Shields explained that we should permit the boundaries of home and school to blur frequently so that “teachers can encourage students to fully understand and incorporate their identities and those of their families into learning experiences.” (p. 37). This is what will create a culture of inclusion, caring, and respect within the school for both students and parents.

Under the definition of Shield’s (2003) community of difference, members of the community must be “grounded in strong personal commitments to dialogue, reflection, critique, and social justice, on the base values of inclusion and respect” (p.46). In addition, members of the community must develop ways to achieve understanding and
ways to address the needs of all members. The members must recognize these
differences and promote respect and understanding.

Within the communities, there must be an understanding of the different cultures. Culture-competence is a term explored by researcher Deneca Winfrey Avant (2011). She writes that transformative leaders value cultural differences and do not see them as shortcomings (Creighton, 1998, Winfrey, 2009). Culture competence occurs when there is an understanding of differences that individuals may identify with such as race, gender, sex, national origin, sexual origin, ability, and religion. Transformative leaders embed this into their professional development and collaborative structures through the lens of equity, in order to make gains for all students (Avant, 2011 p.119).

Shields (2009) stated that transformative leadership had the potential to provide education in diverse settings that was inclusive, equitable, and excellent. She reminds us that a school’s main purpose is the education of students. During her five years at the Marco Polo School in Canada, Shields noticed that even though the school had a number of resources and programs in place, such as English language support and instruction, social welfare activities (meals, food, and clothing banks), pull out programs for remediation, after-school programs, and a one-to-four-adult-student ratio, the school was still not making academic gains. Schools are the only organization charged with providing academic instruction that will prepare students for future employment and to become a contributing member of society. The four responsibilities that educators have for their students are academic preparation, training for the workforce, socialization, and creating a just society (p.59-64). Her findings revealed that Marco Polo School
conceived the goal of education as providing a safe and supportive environment, but did not address any goals related to academic achievement.

Shields (2011) extended this thinking in a collection of research articles in the book *Transformative Leadership: A Reader*. She writes in the introduction of the book that transformative leaders “are explicit about the goals to be achieved and the processes required to attain them. These include the transformative goals of liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, and excellence” (p.9). Shields acknowledged that some leaders are able to effect short-term change by coaching teachers and students to achievement on tests. However, Shields asserted that school leaders “must join forces to renew commitment to transforming education as a fundamental means of transforming our world” (p.12).

Many researchers have defined leadership in terms of traits. Shields acknowledged that Burns’ early work on transforming leadership had paved the way for the study of both transformational and transformative leadership. She argued that her view of transformative leadership holds the most promise for meeting the academic as well as the social needs of our complex and diverse education system (Shields, 2011). Figure 1 shows the differences among the three seminal theories.
**Figure 1. Distinctions among three theories of leadership.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundation</th>
<th>Transforming Leadership</th>
<th>Transformational Leadership</th>
<th>Transformative Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant change in people or organizations</td>
<td>Meet the needs of complex &amp; diverse systems</td>
<td>Critique &amp; promise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis</td>
<td>Looking beyond one’s self, capacity development</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Deep &amp; equitable change in social conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td>Changes and transforms individuals, charismatic or visionary leadership</td>
<td>Understanding of organizational culture; setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program</td>
<td>Deconstruction and reconstruction of social/cultural knowledge frameworks that generate inequity, acknowledgement of power &amp; privilege; dialectic between individual &amp; social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key values</td>
<td>Self-reflection, changing values, commitment</td>
<td>Liberty, justice, equality</td>
<td>Liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Common goal</td>
<td>Organizational change; effectiveness</td>
<td>Individual, organizational and societal transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Inspirational, elevate followers</td>
<td>Inspirational</td>
<td>Positional, hegemonic, tool for oppression as well as for action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Trusted, admired, respected, receives loyalty, can be charismatic</td>
<td>Looks for motive, develops common purpose, focuses on organizational goals</td>
<td>Lives with tension, &amp; challenge; requires moral courage, activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related theories</td>
<td>Charismatic leadership</td>
<td>School effectiveness</td>
<td>Critical theories (race, gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School reform</td>
<td>Cultural and social reproduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Improvement</td>
<td>Leadership for social justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from Burns (1978) and Shields (2009)*
Elements of a Leader who can Transform

As the research has stated, there are certain characteristics or elements that must be present for a leader to transform an organization. Based on the research completed in the past thirty years, some common elements have emerged. A synthesis of these elements appears below.

Sharing a Common Vision

Most schools have a vision statement painted on a wall or written down in a strategic plan. However, teachers not only want to see it but need a transformational leader to articulate it. The founder of Zappos.com was able to articulate a vision to his company, and Zappos grossed over $1 billion in 2009, (Hsieh, 2010). A leader who will make a transformational change needs to establish a vision for the organization, communicate that vision, and make a plan for clearing obstacles to making the vision a reality (Bass, 1998; Leithwood, 1992).

Current leaders like Wendy Kopps, founder of the Teach for America program, believe that the goals and vision of a school and classroom not only create a sense of urgency and shared focus but also can accelerate the process of achieving the vision (Kopps, 2011). Having a clear understanding of a school’s vision can be the guide that leads to transformation. A school’s vision must be widely shared and be the result of much discussion and collective thought (Leithwood, et al., 1992). The shared vision of the school will lead to a sense of staff ownership which in turn leads to extraordinary effort in their job performance (Avolio, 2011).

Furthermore, the vision must arise out of the needs of the entire organization and
must be claimed by those within (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). The transformational leader must communicate a clear vision for the future state of the organization. This vision should be beneficial and create organizational synergies. A compelling vision can urge followers into supporting the organization. When this vision is clear, it is easier for the individuals to learn and to fit into the overall direction of the organization (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). This shared vision also moves people beyond compliance and fosters a commitment; it is up to the leader to articulate the vision to bring those in the organization to this deep understanding (Hatter & Van Bockern, 2005).

Sharing Decision Making and Collaboration

One of the earliest written records of distributed leadership is the Lord’s counsel to Moses: “The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone” from Exodus 18: 17-18 (New International Version). A common trait in the literature of transformational leaders is that they have the ability to empower others (Leithwood, 1992). When this is done correctly, the leader will enhance the individual's and group’s problem-solving capacities. Teachers will also have a sense of ownership and become leaders themselves. Transformational leaders challenge and inspire others, and more importantly, get them to think (Avilio, 2011). A transformational leader knows how and when to empower followers (Bass, 1999). This leads to hope, optimism, energy, and renewal of commitment by teachers. In addition, this shared governance will develop the capacity and commitment of teachers to engage students (Leithwood & Janzi, 1999). The most frequently used model where teachers can discuss, plan, and put into action shared leadership and decision-making is during Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. At these meetings, teachers collaborate with their peers to build strong
learning cultures each grade level. Teachers share their best practices, watch each other teach during educational rounds, and then meet to discuss observed lessons and share ways to improve achievement. This leads teachers to develop their shared vision in their grade level as they grow and learn from each other.

According to a study done by Riemer (2010), principals establish professional learning communities as learning organizations by: 1. ensuring that teachers had input into the curriculum, instruction, and assessment decisions; 2. ensuring that school-building-level systems (committees, staff meeting norms) were involved in decision-making and information dispersion; 3. ensuring that schools had instruction based on research; 4. encouraging grade level collaboration; 5. encouraging teaching peers, co-teaching, and mentoring; and 6. fostering commitment to quality instruction based on research and professional development. When schools are viewed as learning organizations and stakeholders are a part of the decision making, individuals tended to rise to the occasion.

Collective thought and discussion led to collaboration and acceptance in the group. When this collective thought and discussion occurred it led to empowerment and elevation of teachers, which is the ultimate goal of a transformational leader (Burns, 1978; Leithwood, 1992). Transformational leaders have a conscious goal to develop their followers into leaders (Avolio, 2011), which the research defines this as distributed leadership and democracy. Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1992) say that teacher collaboration is essential in developing school success. School leaders who develop this collaborative culture have distributed leadership in their schools and strong teacher-development. This culture is initiated during teacher training, where new teachers build
confidence in their decision making as well as the confidence to confide and discuss openly when they need the help and support of their colleagues. With this collaboration comes the capacity and commitment of teachers, eventually leading to school-wide transformation.

Democratic decision-making in schools is another key to having staff view their school as a learning community. This is supported by Rusch (1998): “To effectively understand democratic practices in schools, I argue that we must look beneath and beyond organizational structures and programs and locate the behaviors of administrators that foster and sustain human interactions in school communities” (p. 217). Rusch (1998) describes this as “effective participatory processes”. Using case study methodology, Rusch interviewed several principals with differing backgrounds. The findings showed that principals believed that shared decision-making occurs if the school is grounded in ‘learning together” (p. 233). The principals in the study valued learning together as a collaborative team where teachers and administrators learned from and with each other during professional development mentoring. If teachers are indeed empowered to lead and are involved in the decision-making of a school, the second, third, or fourth in command could take over the school seamlessly if needed (Avolio, 2011).

Halliger and Murphy (1987) suggested that there were barriers in the way of the principal’s development into a strong leader. They described one barrier as the principal’s capacity to be an instructional leader. Principals were expected to be knowledgeable in curriculum and instruction, but Halliger and Murphy pointed out that this was not an emphasis in some university-based graduate programs. The researchers also pointed out that the disconnect between the role of principal as manger of a school,
who must make sure teachers are compliant with district mandates, and that of a transformational leader who focuses on planning and assessing curriculum, observing lessons, and conferencing with teachers. This instructional leadership expanded to include shared leadership, distributed leadership, democratic leadership, and transformational leadership. These types of leadership emerged due to instructional leadership being viewed as too focused on the principal being the center of expertise, authority, and power (Halliger, 2003).

Hallinger (2003) describes transformational leadership as focusing on developing the organization’s capacity to innovate. Not only does a school need to focus on the shared vision, it must also have a shared commitment to school change. The transformational model assumes that the principal alone will not solely provide the leadership needed for change. This bottom-up, rather than top-down, leadership creates a climate where teachers engage in continued learning, and share this learning with others. Hallinger believes that this creates the conditions in which teachers are committed and self-motivated to work towards the improvement of the school without top-down directives.

**Growing as a Professional**

As researchers agree (Bass, 1998; Leithwood, 1995), teachers need and want intellectual stimulation. This is a critical point in transformational leadership. The ultimate goal of leaders is to develop followers into leaders, through professional development. One way to describe schools that are learning, making decisions about their campuses, and continuing to grow professionally is as learning organizations. Learning
organizations, as defined by Senge (1990), are successful schools. Leaders who fully participate in the learning process at their schools can ultimately lead their staffs and communities to become learning organizations. “Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs” (Senge, 1990, p. 139). Professional development, along with collaboration and input into the decision-making process at the school, can lead to the transformation of a school. If, as Bennis and Nanus (1985) state, the organization is committed to learning and relearning, there must be a leader in place who places a constant emphasis on education.

In addition to teachers needing and wanting professional development and collaboration, principals benefit from this as well. Professional development and collaboration are a part of what links school districts and schools. Johnson & Chispeels (2012) recount results of a study of the successes of schools in a small California school district that used collaboration, coaching, and professional development. The success of principals at Reading First Schools prompted the superintendent to divide the district into regions and hire retired principals to serve as coaches for newer principals, leading to increased collaboration and networking.

**Leadership Self Efficacy**

The ability to model expected behavior and having high expectations are other qualities of a transformational leader. Bass (1998) describes this as being a “moral agent” for the school. Moreover, Avolio (2011) describes this as “looking in a lot of mirrors” (p. 213). When a transformational leader is the role model, he or she must walk
the walk, not just talk the talk. Those who work with this leader expect to see him or her engage in professional development and collaboration and have high values and expectations of the school, staff, and community. People want to work with a transformational leader if he or she can empower and elevate workers and produce comprehensive and long-lasting change (Bass, 1998).

To become a transformational leader, a principal needs the support of the school district. Meredith I. Honig of the Wallace Foundation, reported the importance of a school district’s central office role in transformation that will lead to teaching and learning improvement. Findings included the importance of having a learning-centered partnership with school principals, having a central office unit to support teacher learning and improvement, and evidence that the central office will support continuous improvement of work practice. Support for principals could come in the form of differentiated or personalized training.

In his doctoral dissertation, Ibarra (2008) maintains that principals achieve transformation at a school by exhibiting inspirational leadership behaviors. Ibarra looked at schools that had been designated Program Improvement (PI) schools under No Child Left Behind. PI was the designation for those schools that failed to demonstrate academic proficiency in core subject areas for two consecutive years. His case study identified several major strategies that improved academic achievement in schools with a high percentage of minority and economically disadvantaged students. Ibarra concluded that transformational principals achieve academic goals by establishing positive relationships with the staff and getting the staff to look beyond themselves to the greater good.
Engaging in the Change or Transformation

Hall and Hord (2006) added to the research base when they described the principles of change or transformation in an organization. Although Hall and Hord (2006) used the term change instead of Burn’s (2003) term transform, their research of organizational change found the meaning to be similar. Burns wrote that to change is to substitute one thing for another, and this would be related to his earlier definition of transactional leadership. When one was to transform, it caused a metamorphosis in form or structure and a radical change in outward form or inner character. Hall and Hord wrote about this metamorphosis in the structure of an organization.

Furthermore, Hall and Hord outlined 12 different principles that occur when people and organizations engage in the process of change, explaining that the process is “highly complex, multivariate, and dynamic” (p.4). For principals leading schools that are in the midst of change, the authors state that the following principles should be acknowledged:

1. Change is a process, not an event. It will be tactical in nature, will allow for 3-5 years of implementation, and data should be collected along the way to assess along the way.

2. There are significant differences in what is entailed in development and implementation of an innovation. Development is the creation of the innovation, while the implementation is the action itself.

3. An organization does not change until the individuals within it change. Individuals changing are key to the organization’s change.
4. Innovations come in different sizes. In the context of public schools, some schools need complete overhauls while others need small innovations.

5. Interventions are the actions and events that are key to the success of the change process. Here it is explained that some interventions might be small but it is the quality of the interventions instead of the quantity.

6. There will be no change in outcomes until new practices are implemented. Support is needed to implement change. Hall and Hord (2006) describe the “implementation bridge” (p. 10) as a key to moving from current practices to changes in practice.

7. Administrator leadership is essential to long-term success. A strong principal can make all the difference in the transformation.

8. Mandates can work. Here, Hall and Hord explain that a mandate is an expectation of a leader and is not necessarily a top-down approach to leadership.

9. The school is the primary unit for change. The individuals inside the four walls of the school building are ultimately responsible for making or breaking any change effort.

10. Facilitating change is a team effort. The principal as the leader of the school has a crucial role in leading this effort but cannot do it without the help of the other staff members.
11. Appropriate interventions reduce resistance to change. Leaders must constantly monitor the change process for either sabotaging the effort or resistance.

12. The context of the school influences the change process. The two dimensions that could affect either individual or organizational change efforts are the physical features of the building and beliefs, attitudes, and values of the individuals within the organization.

(Hall & Hord, p. 4-15, 2006)

Hall and Hord maintain that if a leader is aware of the way to facilitate the change process, leaders can reduce or avoid altogether the apprehension associated with change, leading to successful outcomes.

**Rationale for the Research**

Reform efforts are needed to move schools closer to academic success and equality for every student. The success or failure of a school and its students depends on the leadership at that school. Leadership has become a focus of achievement and those leaders have a moral obligation to pursue social justice for all students. Leading scholars who discovered characteristics and actions needed to make transforming change in schools approach this topic through conflicting lenses. Even though researchers disagree about the importance of certain qualities, measurement tools, or the primary focus of transforming schools, the bottom line is to impact student learning in a positive way.
The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) updated their own standards for administrators in 2008 (Saxe, 2011; Wilhoit, 2008) to suggest the type of leaders need to guide our schools. This update was the result of America’s need to define the characteristics of good leadership, the principal’s increasing role in student achievement, and finding the best practices for increasing the pool of effective and qualified leaders (Saxe, 2011). The revised Education Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 are as follows:

1. Setting a widely shared vision for learning;
2. Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff development;
3. Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment;
4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;
5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner;
6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts.

When reading the ISLLC standards, one notices many words and phrases that are found in the research about transforming a school. Terms include: shared vision, student learning and staff development, effective learning environment, collaboration with community resources, diverse community interests and needs, and responding to needs in cultural contexts.
Much has been written during the past thirty years about being a transformational and transformative leader. Traits have been established. Best practices have been researched. However, little has been written on the principal’s self-reported capacity to be this type of a leader, or what leaders can do about the outside influences that can affect their schools’ achievements. Leithwood (2010) states that even though much has been written and researched about effective school leadership, it is still somewhat of a “black box”.

Shields work focuses on the social justice of transformational change - a principal cannot go into an urban setting without knowing the community’s needs and embracing the strengths of the community he/she serves. In Shields’s anthology, Steve Rayner acknowledged the urgency of the “so-called evidence-led, researched-based management –dealing in constantly expanding sets of school-generated information, evaluation protocols, and accountability procedure(s)”, but argues that this is just the managerial portion of leadership. In the PricewaterhouseCoopers report (2007) commissioned by the British government, educational leaders were found to need a mixed combination of managerial, entrepreneurial, and transformational practices.

Today, there is still a wide interest in the transforming of public schools. However, the focus of this transforming is on the leader. In CCSD, many schools are in need of a leader who can make a transformation. In 2010-2011, over half (54.2%) of the schools not making adequate yearly progress (www.nevadareportcard.com); the newly hired superintendent knew that a change was needed. Principals have been hired to lead empowerment schools (schools granted autonomy) as a well as five turn-around schools for the current year. While the research cannot tie student achievement to transformation,
having a transformational culture will lead to better student engagement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Another part of that transformational culture includes meeting the needs of the students as well as the teachers and community. Part of the transformational culture of a school includes the subcultures of the students and teachers. The entire school culture must embrace transformation to move towards a collaborative culture (Leithwood, & Jantzi, 1990). In other words, a transformational leader has to juggle the needs of the entire school culture. Unfortunately, the self-reported capacity of these leaders has not been widely addressed in the literature.

To complicate matters, Leithwood and Sun (2012) recently conducted a study using meta-analytic review techniques that synthesized the results of seventy-nine unpublished studies about transformational school leadership (TSL). Their study suggested that TSL had small effects on student achievement as a whole and had moderate, positive effects on school conditions. However, TSL had a strong and positive effect on teacher behaviors. This seems to suggest that specific leadership practices, rather than leadership models, can effect student achievement.

**Summary**

This chapter summarized the literature related to transforming schools and the challenges involved in doing so. Answers are still unclear as to how leaders of today’s schools are being selected and supported to become transformational leaders. Do Five Star Gold school principals in these urban settings have the qualities outlined by Burns, Bass, Leithwood, or Shields? Do these leaders fit a model or do they have key leadership practices that lead to student achievement? Do they possess qualities that the current
research has not addressed? How are the Five Star Gold Schools achieving academic success and are they addressing the social justice component that Shields researched?

The new superintendent of CCSD, Dwight Jones, has outlined the state of our district in the *Educational and Operational Efficiency Study of the Clark County School District* (2011). It is clear that there is much work to be done. What is CCSD doing to equip leaders to become the change agents needed? Both, University of Nevada, Las Vegas and University of Nevada, Reno have recently eliminated their Educational Leadership departments due to a lack of funding. Provided with these caveats, who will develop the leaders needed to transform some of the country’s lowest performing schools?

In this study, I interviewed leaders in CCSD who promoted transforming change as defined by the research. The leaders of the Five Star Gold Schools were deemed successful by their scores on the School Performance Framework, compiled by CCSD in February 2012. Researchers write about leaders embodying hope, optimism, energy, commitment, support, and empathy (Avolio, 2011; Leithwood, 1992). Transforming leaders can make change in schools while leading from the back of the band, (Leithwood, 1992) or next to and with, instead of ahead of, teachers (Avolio, 2011). Are they embracing the strengths of the community their serves? This study will focus on not only the qualities of these principals, their own self-reported capacity to be this type of leader, and their perceptions of support by their academic managers and the district.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

A transformational leader, as defined in the literature, is one who is capable of building a school vision and establishing goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modeling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood et al., cited in Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000 p. 114).

Shields’ model looks through the lens of social justice, as a “robust way of thinking about leadership that requires multiple styles and strategies” (p.385). All told, the style must fit the circumstance. Her tenets of transformative leadership are: acknowledge power and privilege; articulate both individual and collective purposes (public and private good); deconstruct social-cultural knowledge frameworks that generate inequity and reconstruct them in more equitable ways; balance and critique promise; effect deep and equitable change; work towards transformation-liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, and excellence; and demonstrate moral courage and activism.

This qualitative study describes and analyzes the ways leaders in a high-poverty area of an urban school district can effect transforming change in a school. In particular, it documents and explores the particular practices, perceptions, and lived experiences of principals who have achieved a 5-Star Gold rating from their school district. The intent of the study was to provide a deeper understanding of how individuals gained the skills
and support network necessary for leading transformative change. This chapter provides an overview of the qualitative research design that was used to conduct this study as well as a rational for using a phenomenological approach for data collection and analysis.

**Research Philosophy**

As with many qualitative researchers, I adhered to a constructivist paradigm when conducting this study. As Marshall and Rossman (2011) note, human beings do construct their perception of the world and those perceptions are viewed as neither right or more real than another. The authors cite Crabtree and Miller’s (1992) cycle of inquiry, as a way the researcher will “look critically at the experience and the larger forces that shape it” (p.60). This cycle of inquiry included: question posing, as well as, design, data collection and discovery, analysis, and interpretation. Social constructivists have stated there is the assumption that individuals seek understanding of their world. This understanding is constructed as they engage in the world they are interpreting and make sense of it based on both their historical and social perspective (Creswell, 2003). I always looked at principals who were successful at turning around low performing schools and wondered how they gained the skills to achieve this end. Why did some fail and some succeed? What experiences and larger forces were at play in guiding transformative work?

In line with my constructivist beliefs, a phenomenological approach guided the interview phase of this study. Van Manen (1990) describes the aim of phenomenology as “gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 9). As this data collection focused on probing the principals’ and teachers’
understanding of transformative work, and their sense of their own personal capacity to engage in that work. Capturing those lived experiences required a research approach that allowed the principals and teachers to tell stories of transformation at their schools.

**Research Questions**

Current research on transformation identified the qualities and tools principals needed to effectuate complex change. However, little is known about how individuals developed the capacity to engage in transformative work. This study sought to remedy this gap by answering the following questions:

1. How do principals understand and critique their knowledge, skills, and disposition for transformative leader work?

2. How do principals explain the task of transforming a school’s culture?

3. How do the teachers who join the principals in this work view their role? How do they view their principal’s effectiveness?

4. In what ways does a system’s climate and culture support transformative leader work?

**Design of the Study**

This qualitative research study sought to understand the lived experience of principals, how they understood their capacity to transform schools, and how the teachers that worked with these principals viewed that capacity. Key methods of a qualitative researcher are to observe, ask questions, and interact with the research participants. This study was guided by following five general hallmarks identified by Marshall and
Rossman (2011). First, the research took place in a naturalistic setting. Each principal and all of the teachers were interviewed on their own campuses. The principals were interviewed in their offices and the teachers were in their classrooms. All data was gathered at the school site during those interviews. The research drew on multiple methods that were interactive and humanistic. The research took place during those interviews and informal school visits prior to the formal interviews. The research focused on context. The context focused on the principals’ and teachers’ lived experience and their historical and social perspective. The research was emergent and evolved rather than being tightly prefigured. Interview questions were open-ended and provided the participants with opportunities for expansive monologues and dialogues. The research was fundamentally interpretative. I interpreted the field notes and transcribed interviews for my data analysis but sent the individual, transcribed interviews to each of the participants member checking.

I chose qualitative research for this study because little was known about how principals and teachers experience transformative work in schools. Many studies identified characteristics of the leaders, practices that should be in place, and descriptors of institutions that transformed learning for students. A qualitative research approach supported looking beyond characteristics of individuals and descriptors of institutions to focus on how individuals actually experience the work of transforming an underachieving environment.

Phenomenology guided the inquiry into the “lived experiences” of principals selected for this study (Creswell, 2003). The phenomenon I sought to understand was the principals’ perceived capacity to act in transformative ways, how their perceptions
compare to the current literature, and how teachers viewed the principal’s capacity. Van Manen (1990) suggested that this lived experience is “both the starting point and the ending point of phenomenology” (p.36). The assumption in this study was that there would be an essence to the experience shared among the principals and teachers selected for the study. These experiences were analyzed as unique expressions and then compared to identify this essence.

I used my chart (Figure 1) entitled, *Distinctions among the Three Theories of Leadership*, as a guide when analyzing the data. Following data collection, I compared and organized my field notes and transcriptions. Analyzing them side by side using this chart, I located the essence of the participants’ shared experiences.

In years past, the selection of CCSD principals had been very traditional. Administrators worked their way up from the position of dean or assistant principal to the position of principal. Positions were posted on our website when vacancies occurred, and applicants called to have their name placed on a list. Considerations about the “fit” to the applicant and the school’s needs were looked at by the human resource department. The fact that some of those placed in a leadership position could succeed and others could not was a phenomenon and could only be understood by sharing the lived experiences of those who had succeeded. This could only be accomplished by using narrative methods as a strategy of inquiry. This study examined those qualities and capacities of leaders who demonstrated success in turning around an underperforming school. With this research, I hoped to gain personal insights as well as understand the perspective of leaders in the central office of large urban school districts.
Participant and Site Selection

During my experiences as a school leader in a large urban district, I have had the opportunity to work with many other leaders. My fifteen years of teaching and five years of administrator experience has given me tremendous insight into the unique qualities both of our school district and those placed in the position as principal. I have seen some principals have great success and others not. I had always questioned not the hiring practices of my district, but the fit of the school to the individual. As someone who hoped to move into the position from assistant principal to principal, I naturally wanted to make my appointed school a success. So, with this aim, came the question, what does it take to make a school a success? Could I transform a school from low performing to high achieving? Is there a silver bullet that makes this happen or some magic formula for success? These are questions that I had developed as progressed in my career as an educational leader.

Ibarra (2008) maintained in his dissertation that principals achieved transformation at a school by exhibiting inspirational leadership behaviors. Ibarra looked at schools that had been designated Program Improvement (PI) schools under NCLB. PI was the designation for those schools that failed to demonstrate academic proficiency in core subject areas for two consecutive years. His case study identified several major strategies that improved academic achievement in schools with a high percentage of minority and economically disadvantaged students. Ibarra’s findings concluded that transformational principals achieve change by getting the staff to look beyond themselves to the greater good. Ibarra suggests that some experienced principals intuitively know how to play the accountability game based on contingent awards and recognition.

Ibarra’s study informed my thinking about participants and site selection. Therefore, study participants were selected from a group of principals at high poverty schools who recently earned CCSD’s highest recognition of 5 star gold schools as measured by the CCSD’s School Performance Framework (SPF). Schools were given points by making AYP or Safe Harbor (designation of growth without meeting AYP), showing academic growth, closing growth gaps, having daily attendance over 92%, having student climate surveys above 80%, having a parent engagement plan, having at least 40% of fifth graders move to accelerated classes in middle school, and having at least 56% of their special education students in the general education classroom. Only 17.29% of elementary schools in CCSD earned this rating. Eleven of thirty-seven elementary school principals achieved this ranking despite their schools being located in urban areas, having a high English Language Learner (ELL) population, and having a high Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) population. Specifically, these elementary schools have student populations participating in FRL at a rate of at least 65%.

This study was be limited to three principals of elementary schools with similar student demographics and urban location in the city, along with two teachers from each of those schools. Schools that had magnet programs were not be considered for this study. I used the CCSD School Accountability Reports to determine the demographic match. Next, I looked for longevity at the site. Those top three with the most longevity at their site were contacted first. A letter was sent to the five potential participants. Of the five, three responded. The three principals had been at their sites from six years to
twelve years as an administrator. In addition, two of the three had spent some of their time as the assistant principal at that site prior to becoming the principal.

**Data Collection/Interviews**

Marshall and Rossman (2011) recommend four primary methods for gathering information: participating in the setting, observing directly, interviewing in-depth, and analyzing the documents and material culture. Once the study had been approved by UNLV’s and CCSD’s institutional review boards, I scheduled times for an in depth interview with each participating principal and teachers. The principal gave me the names of the teachers to interview. I had asked for one teacher that had been with them for an extended period and one that had been with them a shorter time. As noted earlier, phenomenology guided the interviews in a way that “explores the general topics to help uncover the participant’s views but otherwise respects the way the participant structures the responses (Patton as cited by Marshall and Rossman, 2011 p. 145). Questions were open-ended to include flexibility for responding (Creswell, 2003). All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcriptions for accuracy. The proposed interview protocol (See Appendix A) was piloted with a principal of a 5-Star Gold school. Results of the pilot interview were used to critique the interview protocol and procedures.

**Interview Protocol**

Phenomenological perspectives informed the development of the interview protocol (Appendix A). Phenomenology originated from the German approaches of long, in-depth interviews with individuals who have experienced a phenomenon of interest. My
plan was to develop a “conversational relationship” with the participants, drawing out information through open-ended questions about a topic of mutual interest, in hopes of revealing the essence of the experience (Van Manen, p. 66-68, 97-98). This conversational relationship with the participants provided me with a deeper understanding of the phenomenon present at each of the individual school sites.

**Epoche Process**

Prior to conducting the interviews, I completed an epoche process. Moustakas notes this process will not eliminate every thought I had on the subject, but will bracket my “natural attitude, the biases of everyday knowledge, as a basis for truth and reality (p. 85). I knew as an administrator at a 5-Star Gold school, this was very important. Prior to the interviews, I answered the interview questions myself and wrote down my own thoughts and beliefs. I bracketed this set of answers and notes, and used them as I began to analyze the data, and explicate my findings.

**Researcher’s Epoche**

The school I am currently assigned to is a 5-Star Gold school, but is located in the center of one of our city’s nicest suburbs. Our FRL population is 15.5%, compared to the district’s 56.6%. Our white student population is 62.2%, compared to the district’s 30.2%. Our Limited English Proficient (LEP) population is 5.2%, compared to the district’s 17.6%. The school is nine years old and opened with a principal that had previously opened a professional development school next to our state university. Many of the teachers from the professional development school came to this school and opened it. The vision that guided that first year has not changed. Our vision is to develop
teacher leaders, use best practices, and continue a cycle of continuous data driven improvement. Democratic practices are in place. Teachers are driven to succeed. They seek professional development on their own as well as opportunities provided by the district. Our community supports our efforts and a wonderful parent leadership team contributes to our budget. Recently, this team of parents contributed $28,000 through fund-raising efforts, and purchased thirty-seven lap top computers for a new computer lab. The current principal has vast knowledge in instruction and best practices and taught teacher training in the district for many years before she became an administrator. The school shows and continues to show achievement year after year. The experience of working there has been thought provoking, inspiring, intellectually stimulating, and constantly evolving.

Working at a school like this is not without its challenges. We do have students that do not perform at grade level. We do have students in special education that are not achieving. We do have the “helicopter” parents that like to be involved in every aspect of their child’s schooling. However, we do expect our students to succeed. When students are not achieving, we collaborate to create interventions to make the student succeed. Most students have supportive parents that feed their children, make sure they do their homework, and get them to school on time. They take pride in the school and want to come to the school to help in their students’ classrooms. Most parents are professionals and can advocate for their child and the school if needed. They are connected to the power brokers in our community. They are the ones that contribute to our silent auctions, who donate school supplies, and who work with our classroom teachers to tutor students.
or make copies. There are few barriers to our achievement. We should be succeeding. The goal of our school is to have every student work to their fullest potential.

**Data Collection/Site Visits**

Phenomenology focuses on the wholeness of the experience rather than on objects or parts. Moustakas (1994) recommends searching for the meaning through interviewing experiences and informal conversations. As a researcher, I gathered data and looked at the climate and culture of the school by spending time with each participant. The site visit was scheduled on a day of the participants’ choosing. All of the interviews and informal prior meetings were done towards the end of the day or dismissal time. It was a wonderful way to see the parents of the community walking through the neighborhoods to pick up their children and then the dismissal procedures after the bell had rung. During these visits, I maintained a field journal as well as collected any artifacts that described the context of the school’s community.

**Data Analysis**

Prior to data analysis, I used bracketing or epoche to identify my own biases and conceptualizations of the phenomenon. Researchers state that this is the first step and should occur prior to any data collection. The phenomenological practice of epoche views data with “disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994, p.148). I put aside my own prejudgments, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of participants’ meanings. Working as an assistant principal in a high achieving school no doubt fostered prejudgements, and when I reviewed the data I wrote field notes. There were practices that I felt contributed
to a school’s high achievements. This bracketing was used throughout the analysis of the data.

After I completed the bracketing, I began the data analysis. Using the phenomenological method, I employed the following techniques:

**Verbatim Transcriptions:** All data was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. I read the raw data to get a general sense of the interview.

**Reviewing the Data:** I read the data and broke it into parts that provided some meaning to the experience or phenomenon. I put the transcribed words into third person and kept the language consistent.

**Locating Emergent Themes:** I transformed the participant’s words into my own, and organized those words according to topics. Statements were judged for inclusion and those not containing essential descriptions were excluded.

**Writing Participants’ Experiences:** In the second transformation of the data, I fashioned the concrete data into psychological language expressing the emphasis of the experience being investigated.

**Structuring the Experiences:** I combined and synthesized the experiences to form descriptive narratives that reflected and summarized the data into meanings.

**General Descriptions:** In the final step of analyzing the research, the experiences were viewed and described in general terms.

**Essential Descriptions:** I provided representations of the key findings.

Polkinghorne (1989)
In locating themes, categories were generated. As these themes emerged, I began to “tell the story”. As Van Manen (1990) points out, themes are never easy to identify and the “essence of a phenomenon is never simple or one-dimensional” (p.78). The story told of the essential descriptions (Polkinghorn, 1989), and was the final step of my data analysis.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness of my study and to confirm credibility of the findings I employed several rigorous standards. Creswell (1998) suggests extended time with the interviewee, clarification of research bias, thick and rich description of data, and member checking.

For extended time with the interviewee, I conducted an in depth interview with each participant, and had an informal, initial face-to-face meeting.

For clarification of research bias, I completed bracketing of my own epoche prior to beginning my research to declare both any biases and assumptions. I then maintained bracketed notes during the data collection and analysis phase of the research, as described the Epoche Process section of this chapter.

Thick and rich descriptions were employed during data analysis, and I used field notes from the school site visits. I kept detailed field notes that contained my observations, dates, times, descriptions, and reflections of the site visits. These field notes were recorded in a journal that was with me at all times during these visits. All notes of the day were expanded upon later in the day, when I remembered details and looked for emerging themes (Glesene, 2006).
Member checks were done by giving the participants the opportunity to review the transcriptions and my interpretations for accuracy (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I ensured that all transcriptions and interpretations were given to the participants for review, and incorporated changes they requested.

**Limitations**

Limitations of this study included a small sample size of urban elementary principals. The findings may not apply to secondary schools or non-urban settings. Another limitation was the selection of participants from high poverty schools. This study rests on the assumption that there was both a structure and an essence to these shared experiences that could be narrated (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A third limitation was that the teacher participants were selected by the principals to be interviewed. A fourth limitation of this study was finding the time allowed to interview and shadow participants during their busy and demanding work schedules. Finally, individual understandings, including that of the researcher, of transformation or transformative work must be considered a limitation of the study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate how principals of identified transformed schools understood the actual experience of doing transformative work within the bureaucratic structure of an urban district. The goal was to probe the development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that supported the work of achieving a 5-Star rating in schools located in high-poverty neighborhoods.

The results to this study are divided into three parts. The first is an individual description of each of the three school sites, based on collected CCSD data and artifacts. The second is the sharing of interview data and observations to look for emergent themes among the three schools. The third part is a cross-case analysis that will employ the literature’s view of a leader who has the capacity to transform a low performing school into a high performing school, despite location in a high poverty, urban area. This research study began in June 2012 with the identification of schools that achieved a 5-Star Gold school rating, and had a student population of at least 65% FRL / a high minority population. I established a goal of having three principals and two teachers from each of these sites was established. A second goal was that the selection of a long-serving principal. Although length of employment was not an established goal, all three of these principals have been at their schools for at least six full years. Recruitment of these five principals occurred through physical mailings, multiple emails, and telephone calls, requesting a face-to-face interview with the principal at their school site. In addition, I requested that they choose two teachers at their site for additional interviews. The interview questions used were identical except that they addressed either the
principal’s or the teachers’ views of leadership. By the beginning of October 2012, three principals and six teachers were identified and interviewed. I based my findings on the nine interviews, field notes from observations, and supporting documentation.

Using the data analysis procedures outlined in Chapter 3, I found emergent themes that showed how the principals experienced transformative work within the bureaucratic structure of an urban district. The data analysis of the interviews allowed me probe the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that supported the work of both principals and teachers engaged in a school’s transformation. I found the following six common themes among the three studied schools: a common vision that was understood and accepted by the entire staff, a shared decision-making system that allowed for sharing of new ideas and revisiting and reshaping old ideas, emphasis on participating in a professional learning community, a high value on professional development, high expectations, and advocacy for their schools’ needs. Subthemes included qualities of perseverance, commitment, dedication, determination, an attitude of no excuses, and a consistent term of employment at the building.

Reviewing the actions and characteristics of the principals at the three schools and gaining insight from their teachers illuminated the successful outcomes of these 5-Star schools. The Clark County School District defines a successful school through the School Performance Framework. In this framework, a score is given to indicate the performance level of each elementary school. The overall score is primarily based on three performance indicators: academic growth, academic achievement, and academic growth gaps. In addition, the overall score takes into account other performance indicators such as attendance and the creation of a parent engagement plan. The score is
based on 100 possible points. Academics comprise 88% of possible points and school climate makes up 12% of possible points. Breaking down academics, the total score of a school can be up to 44 points for growth; 22 points for math growth and 22 points for reading growth. The status function of academics is worth 22 points and is broken down to five points each for proficiency in the subjects of math and reading. Furthermore, three points are available for each student attaining proficiency in the subjects of math and reading, and three points each for students moving towards proficiency in the same subjects. Moreover, there are three points available for students maintaining in the subjects of math and reading. The final 22 points in the area of academics are awarded for closing the gaps within academic subgroups, with an additional 12 points awarded based on school climate. This break down is based on the following: average daily attendance (two possible points); gains in the assessment given to the Limited English Proficient population (two possible points); having at least 56% of the school’s IEP population in the general education classroom (two points); increased rigor based on the number of fifth grade students moving to accelerated classes the following year (two points); results of a student climate survey (one point); and a created parent engagement plan (three points). Schools that received a minimum score of 80 points and made AYP or Safe Harbor were considered a 5-Star Gold school.
Participants as Cases

The participants of this study were principals and teachers serving in traditional neighborhood, public elementary schools with high poverty populations that achieved a 5-Star Gold rating in 2011-2012. All three school sites were located in the urban part of the Clark County School District, and had student populations with over 65% Free and Reduced Lunch and over 76% minority. All three principals were white females and due to this, gender references were not included in this study.

*Figure 2.* Location of three school sites used in the study as well as other 5-Star schools. *Source CCSD.net*
Teachers interviewed had been at the school site at least three years. Of the six teachers interviewed, two were kindergarten teachers, two were third grade teachers, one was a learning strategist that coached teachers in mathematics and reading, and the other was a science and technology teacher. The longest a teacher had been with a principal was ten and a half years. The shortest time a teacher had been with a principal was three years. Two of the teachers were at the school site when the principal began their appointment. Four of them had been hired by the principal.

Student populations at all school sites were close to six hundred and most of the students that attended walked to school. Two of the principals were currently working without an assistant principal due to the district funding calculations, which allocate an assistant principal to schools with populations greater than six hundred-fifty students. However, the school sites without the assistant principals had preschool students enrolled, funded by Title 1 monies, which made their total populations greater than six hundred-fifty students. The district does not recognize those students into the funding for an assistant principal.

Principal of School A

Driving to this school site was like a trip down memory lane. I had grown up in this neighborhood. Forty years ago, this part of town would be considered rural, located on the outskirts of northwest Las Vegas. Surrounding the school were neighborhoods with track houses and ranch style homes that had seen better days. Parents pushed their babies in strollers and held on to their toddlers’ hands on the way to pick up their older children. The school building itself was new, less than 15 years old, and the parking lot
immaculate. Several middle and high school students sat inside the cool, front office building, waiting to pick up their siblings when the bell rang. A young Hispanic couple spoke to an office staff member in Spanish as they registered their child. A large banner declaring the school a CCSD 5-Gold Star school hung in the office entry way. The principal greeted me in the front office and invited me back to her office. She sat face to face with me in front of her desk as we began our interview.

Of the three principals, Principal A had been at her school the shortest amount of time. She had served as an administrator for 13 years, but was only starting her seventh year as principal of this school. Principal A told me that on the night before her interview principal, she had stood in the parking lot and just tried to feel if the school was a fit. She thought it might sound a little funny and it was hard to explain, but she had just known from that moment that she should be there. She had a prior offer to be the principal at affluent school, and she had done the same thing: she stood in the parking lot the night before the interview, did not feel right about the position, and so she turned the offer down.

During the initial interview with the principal, and throughout subsequent meetings with the teachers, there seemed to be a genuine show of love and devotion for the school. The teachers confirmed that dedication and devotion in their principal. They offered evidenced of emails answered at 1:00 a.m., making copies for teachers, the principal’s painting of the front office and lounge to make the school more homey, and the fact that she is never in her office because she is out learning with the students, side by side. The principal spoke of her school and her leadership using language that suggested humility and compassion.
She also talked about the pressure of being a 5-Star Gold school during the first year of the rating, and she felt their journey to that recognition was not always a smooth one. Principal A described the journey to high growth rates as smooth and then rocky then back to smooth. The school would go from high achieving to low achieving and then back to high achieving. With all this back and forth, the school needed to remain focused, and continuously committed to their vision.

School A

Even though School A was housed in a newer building; the surrounding neighborhood homes were not. The student population was 76% minority and 69% of the students participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. The Hispanic population represented nearly 50% of their entire student body (see Figure 3.). Despite these challenges, School A scored 82.02 points on the School Performance Framework for 2011-2012.
Demographics and Student Information

Data are provided by the Nevada Department of Education from the state Student Information system. Gender, race/ethnicity, and special student populations are reported as of count day. Student Average Daily Attendance (ADA) is the percentage of school enrollment in attendance on an "average school day" as of the 100th day of school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment #</th>
<th>Enrollment %</th>
<th>Avg Daily Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School</td>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>336,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>156,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>140,666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>132,733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>37,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>63,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Race</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>31,852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEP</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>54,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>174,372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IEP = Students with Disabilities
LEP = Students with Limited English Proficiency
FRL = Students qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch
** indicates data not presented for groups fewer than 10.
"%" indicates a population of zero
"N/A" indicates data are not available.

Figure 3. Demographics and Student Information for School A. This includes the number of students attending School A by major demographic groups and in comparison to CCSD. Source CCSD.net School Accountability Reports, 2012

In 2011, School A had 70% of their 3rd-5th grade students score at or above proficient in math and were in the median growth percentile of 57% as compared to other students in the state. The students had a score of 61% at above or proficient in reading and were in the 63% median growth percentile.
Figure 4. School A’s percent at or above proficient and median growth percentile in the subject of mathematics compared to other 3rd – 5th grade students in Clark County. Source ccsd.net SPF reports, 2012

Figure 5. School A’s percent at or above proficient and median growth percentile in the subject of reading compared to other 3rd – 5th grade students in Clark County. Source ccsd.net SPF reports, 2012
School A Leadership Themes

Principal A exhibited all of the six emergent themes: a common vision that was understood and accepted by the entire staff, a shared decision-making system that allowed for sharing of new ideas and revisiting and reshaping old ideas, the importance of participating in a professional learning community, and an emphasis on professional development, high expectations, and advocacy for their schools’ needs. The first five themes were similar in each of the schools, however, individual principals each had passionate advocacy.

Common Vision - Every morning the students and staff at School A recited their vision statement: “Excellence plus one”. That statement was mentioned by each of the school’s narrators. The teachers explained to me that this meant that every student and staff member, regardless of level of expertise, could always do his/her best plus a little more every day. The principal explained that the preservation of this vision is what sustains her work and keeps her focused. She added that the Professional Learning Communities drove the school’s vision, reinforcing the school’s mission. Principal A stated, “Our PLCs drove the vision, which drove our mission, which is what our staff believes.”

Shared Decision-Making - One of the newest, members of School A used the phrase “highly collaborative”, when asked descriptors of the school’s journey to high growth rates. Democracy, open door meetings, and making teachers feel valued were the result of shared-decision making at this site. Teacher A1 was surprised to find that school improvement plans were discussed and ideas were heard. She added, “[When there was democracy in decision making], parental involvement increased.”
**Professional Learning Communities** – The first step in transforming School A was putting the pillars of a true professional learning community in place. The school had been using data, but not effectively. Peer-to-peer comparison was not “just looking at numbers, but looking at kids”, as Teacher A2 explained. The support of the professional learning communities is critical as new mandates are rolled out to the staff. “My first step was getting the pillars of great PLCs in place. The school had PLCs but they were not being used effectively”, noted Principal A.

**Professional Development** – Professional development is seen as critical and is valued more when it can “stay in the building”. With the budget constraints of CCSD, many teachers were moved to other schools due to the “Reduction in Force”. These decisions were made based on seniority. When teachers are forced to relocate, they take the professional development with them. All three schools voiced concerns over this policy. School A not only valued training their teachers in current and best practices, but trained their instructional aides to assist with student learning. One teacher stated that even their office clerk did learning interventions with students. All told, every staff member was involved in teaching and learning.

**High Expectations** – One major theme that stood out strongly in the coded data was the idea of high expectations for all students. Not one principal or teacher during the interview referred to their school as “at risk” or “high needs”. Not one person made excuses, or talked about barriers, to student success. Principal A told her staff that the parents of the community “are sending their best children to school” and that mindset is reflected in the interviews. Even though their minority and Free and Reduced Lunch populations are higher than the district average, the students are successful. “We had to
have high expectations for students. Students will always rise to the level you expect them to”, declared Principal A. Teacher A1 recalled the day she came into the school for her interview,

“When I came to interview for the job, there was just a feeling in the air of this school. I couldn’t describe it, but everyone seemed professional. Even the office staff. I mean even our clerk does interventions with students. Everyone on the staff is involved with student learning. High expectations were there for kids and staff. There was a friendly atmosphere with the students, the staff was positive and professional.”

Advocacy – Principal A’s and the teachers’ coded data shaped the principal as an advocate for inclusive practices for special education and limited English proficient students. As mentioned earlier, all the encoded data collected fit neatly together and was similar in nature, including the role of an advocate. However, advocate had a different focus. Principal A felt strongly that if students that had traditionally been sent to a small group to learn skills could remain in the classroom and receive strong instruction, they would succeed. Shields (2003) defended this emphasis on social justice schooling and the creation of an inclusive community as ways to enhance learning outcomes. Shields (2003) believed that improving the environment in which students learn is critical to improving learning outcomes. Principal A cited the Student Support Service Division of the school district as a department that supported the journey toward inclusive practice. This department provided extra instructional aides and gave increased hours and resources for existing instructional aides. Moreover, area superintendents provided professional development for the school’s teachers. The bottom line was summed up by Principal A when she said, “Principals need to have a devotion to the community and school.”
Principal of School B

Driving to this school, which was in the heart of Las Vegas, was an interesting experience. Billboards in Spanish and Mexican supermarkets lined the streets. Venturing into the neighborhood of small track homes and winding apartment complexes was a completely opposing atmosphere from the suburban school I had left a half hour ago. As I gazed out the car window, I recognized chain link fences instead of neat blocked walls. Pawnshops supplanted Starbucks. Close, busy streets replaced wide, perfectly manicured medians. There in the center of the neighborhood stood one of the oldest school buildings in Las Vegas. Mothers and fathers walked hand in hand with younger siblings, on the way to pick up their children.

It was near dismissal and I saw teachers walking with their students in neat, straight, quiet lines. All students were dressed neatly in uniforms consisting of red or navy blue shirts and khaki or navy blue skirts or pants. Students were well groomed and if I were anywhere else besides the heart of Las Vegas, I would have mistaken the campus for an elite private school. Most of the students appeared to be Hispanic. As I entered the office, I saw many crisp, new-looking banners hanging around the perimeter. There was a CCSD 5-Star Gold school banner, a National Title I Distinguished School 2011 banner, a National Title I School of the Year banner, and a banner that read Area Service Center 2 Academic Excellence High Achieving for 2011-2012. Across a beam on the back wall were five large gold stars, emblazed with the words “Academic Excellence”.

The principal welcomed me in the front office and led me to a small table in her office. Principal B had been at the school for 10.5 years. She spent two and a half of
those ten years as the assistant principal prior to becoming the principal. Principal B had worked with the English Language Learner (ELL) division of the district prior to becoming a building administrator. She had also been an English language learner. She knew that the key to educating this population was not to water down the curriculum.

During the initial meeting, the interview, and the interviews with the teachers at the school, there was a genuine show of determination to succeed and devotion for the school. The teachers confirmed that determined attitude and devotion in their principal. Teachers interviewed stated the overall belief that all of the students belonged to all of the staff. They spoke of the necessity to get 100% buy-in for anything they tried. The change from the time the principal was hired in the last 10 years was “massive”, declared one of the teachers. She said that during her first year at the school 12 years ago, only one 4th grade student passed the Nevada Writing Proficiency Test and that test scores for 3rd – 5th graders at the proficient level were in the single digits.

School B

School B was located in the center of the urban city of Las Vegas. The student population was 96.9% minority. They had 100% of the students participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program, while the district had an overall participation rate of 56.6%. The Hispanic population was 87.4% while their White population was 3.1%.

61.6% of the students were labeled Limited English Proficient (see Figure 6). Despite these challenges, School B scored 93.83 points on the School Performance Framework for 2011-2012.
Figure 6. Demographics and Student Information for School B. This included the number of students attending School A by major demographic groups and in comparison to CCSD. Source ccsd.net School Accountability Reports, 2012

In 2011, School B had 89% of their 3rd-5th grade students score at or above proficient in math and were in the median growth percentile of 74% as compared to other students in the state. The students had a score of 79% at above or proficient in reading and were 89% proficient in math. School B’s percent at or above proficient and median growth percentile in the subject of reading compared to other 3rd – 5th grade students in the same county.
Figure 7. School B’s percent at or above proficient and median growth percentile in the subject of math compared to other 3rd – 5th grade students in the same Clark County. *Source* ccsd.net SPF reports, 2012

Figure 8. School B’s percent at or above proficient and median growth percentile in the subject of reading compared to other 3rd – 5th grade students in the same Clark County. *Source* ccsd.net SPF reports, 2012
School B Leadership Themes

Principal B possessed all six emergent themes: a common vision that was understood and accepted by the entire staff, a shared decision-making system that allowed for sharing of new ideas and revisiting and reshaping old ideas, the importance of participating in a professional learning community, and an emphasis on professional development, high expectations, and advocacy for their schools’ needs. Again, Principal B had a passionate cause.

Common Vision – When Principal B came to the school 10.5 years ago, the school was separated into three groups. There were the bilingual teachers, the English teachers, and the special education teachers. There were no goals, there was no direction, and there was no communication. They were three groups that were not working together. As she describes it, “There was a true division, no, a great division. There was a true separation. They just closed their classroom doors and did their own thing”. She worked to build a common vision for her staff by first eliminating the bilingual program. Now, her staff has a common vision. As she stated, “We all expect our students not only to be productive members of the community, but to be the leaders of this community”. She expected her students to be the doctors and lawyers in the city:

“We want all of them to go to college and have opportunities. We want them not just to graduate from high school, that was never our purpose. We want them to finish college. We wanted them not just “Ready by Exit” (CCSD’s current slogan), but to go beyond that in whatever they want to pursue. Whether it is college or a trade, something, they can achieve because what they have accomplished here, they are going to do what they want to do.”

Shared Decision Making – Principal B stressed the importance of articulating to the staff the rational behind district or school decisions. She shared that many leaders forget to tell the staff the why and when that happens, a wall usually goes up. She said
that she treats her staff as a Professional Learning Community. When decisions have to be made, she brings them together and lays out the problem. She tells the staff that she needs their help. When problems are solved or decisions are made, they become the staff’s non-negotiables. Then, the staff works together to overcome the obstacle, as a result of shared decision-making. This, as the teachers confirmed, resulted in 100% buy-in by the staff. Principal B explains, “I told my staff that I would work with them through the school’s improvement plan...If something is not working, we will meet and change it real quick.” The staff also has the opportunity to bring new ideas to the principal. If the ideas align with their vision, the teachers have the autonomy to go ahead with their plan with the principal’s blessings.

**Professional Learning Communities** – Encoded data from the interviews showed that sharing best practices and data was very important to this staff. The entire staff looks at data together and makes decisions as a whole. The staff members called their data “transparent” and said that it is shared not only with their assigned grade levels, but with grade levels above and below them. Teacher B1 described it as “laying all your cards on the table”. Data was meant to be shared and discussed in order to modify or confirm if practices or programs were effective. Principal B stated that, “PLCs are critical at the school; however, it took three years for them to become fully functional.” She boasts that her teachers are “masters of data-driven interventions.” She adds that, “When teachers develop that mastery of PLCs, they will develop their own norms and non-negotiables.”

**Professional Development** – When Principal B came to the school, one of the first things she wanted to see was quality instruction for the students. With the division of
the staff into bilingual, English, and special education teachers, she knew it was necessary to provide them with common professional development. She went to the bilingual teachers and told them that bilingual education was now out and that she would provide professional development so they would become good reading teachers. The principal provided the teachers with intense professional development so they could become proficient teachers and teach reading in English.

**High Expectations** – Principal B came to the school when it was a divided institution. She had been an English-as-a-second-language student herself and she knew that the way to learn was not by watering down the curriculum. She felt that “the minute her feet hit the campus, things needed to change”. She observed teachers going through the motions of teaching, and realized that they did not know what good teaching was. She explained that they didn’t even know what good teaching looked like, but were eager for guidance. The teachers were assured that she would not just gain experience and move on, but that she would be there for the long haul. Her vision was really to “flip the school” and knew how much potential for growth her students had. She explained, “I promised that we were going to be on the map someday, number one in the district. I wanted to show them that it didn’t matter where your kids come from.” Her non-negotiable was discipline and order for the students. She said that when she arrived the students were out of control. When I visited the campus on two occasions, I witnessed this order and expectation of model behavior. A teacher’s second grade son attends the school, and she stresses that she would have him at no other school.

**Advocacy** – As Principal A had her cause of inclusive practices on her campus, Principal B also had her cause. Again, Shields (2003) defended this emphasis on social
justice for schooling and the creation of an inclusive community as ways to enhance learning outcomes, Principal B fought to have her campus transformed from a bilingual campus to an all-English campus. The community “did not embrace the idea what so ever”. However, she had to convince them otherwise. At the time of the decision, she recalled that her staff was unhappy, the community was unhappy, and the students were unhappy. The students were unhappy because their families were unhappy, so her challenge was to show improvement quickly. When she looked at achievement scores in the single digits, she knew something had to change. She knew the students had the capability, but there was no goals, alignment, or expectations. This inhibited dialogue. Teachers just closed their doors and did their own thing. The students were moving up to middle school, not one or two years behind, but four or five years behind. She knew it had to stop. She knew the students had intelligence and a lot of capability. Principal B went to her area superintendent and stated that if he wanted to see results, he would have to support her efforts to eliminate bilingual education and to convert her campus into an all-English campus. She was previously an administrator at the ELL office, so she had had a chance to view the problems associated with bilingual education. She did receive some support in announcing her decision to the community with regional superintendent. However, for the most part, she was on her own.

Principal of School C

School C was near the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) and in a highly populated area. It is five minutes from the Las Vegas strip, one of the most famous streets in the United States. As I pulled into the neighborhood, much like the other two schools, scores of parents and younger siblings were walking to pick up their students.
The neighborhood was filled with older homes with crumbling stucco and peeling paint and outdated apartment complexes. Many students from the nearby middle school were also walking home. The office staff was friendly and invited me to sit in the office as they called the principal on the radio to let her know I was here. As she entered the front office and led me back to her office where we would talk, several teachers stopped and spoke to her. I was impressed by her interactions and it appeared that relationships with her teachers were important.

She shared with me her background of becoming the assistant principal of the school and never intending to become a principal. She was content with being the assistant principal for 10 years. However, when the principal decided to retire, she felt the need to continue the school’s vision, so she applied for the position. She got the job and had been the principal for the past 2-years.

During the initial meeting, the interview, and the interviews with the teachers at the school, there was a genuine show of determination to succeed and devotion for the school and the community. The teachers confirmed the determined attitude and devotion of their principal.

**School C**

School C was also located in the center of the urban city of Las Vegas. The student population was 93.7% minority. They had 86.2% of the students participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program, while the district had an overall participation of 56.6%. The Hispanic population was 87.4%, while their White population was 6.3%. 56.8% of the students were labeled Limited English Proficient (see Figure 8.). Despite
these challenges, School C scored 80.53 points on the School Performance Framework for 2011-2012.

**Demographics and Student Information**

Data are provided by the Nevada Department of Education from the state student information system. Gender, race/ethnicity, and special student populations are reported as of count day. Student Average Daily Attendance (ADA) is the percentage of school enrollment in attendance on an “average school day” as of the 100th day of school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>Enrollment %</th>
<th>Avg Daily Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>055</td>
<td>306,237</td>
<td>100.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>155,671</td>
<td>52.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>149,666</td>
<td>47.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,079</td>
<td>0.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20,450</td>
<td>2.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>53,793</td>
<td>7.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>37,940</td>
<td>12.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>93,634</td>
<td>6.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>1.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Race</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17,910</td>
<td>4.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>31,892</td>
<td>10.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEP</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>64,100</td>
<td>56.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIL</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>174,372</td>
<td>86.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*IEP = Students with Disabilities, LEP = Students with Limited English Proficiency, RIL = Students qualifying for Free/reduced Lunch

**Figure 9.** Demographics and Student Information for School C. This included the number of students attending School A by major demographic groups and in comparison to CCSD. Source ccsd.net School Accountability Reports, 2012

In 2011, School C had 69% of their 3rd-5th grade students score at or above proficient in math, and were in the median growth percentile of 59% as compared to other students in the state. The students had a score of 56% at above or proficient in
reading and were in the 58% median growth percentile.

**Figure 10.** School C’s percent at or above proficient and median growth percentile in the subject of math compared to other 3rd – 5th grade students in the Clark County. *Source* ccsd.net SPF reports, 2012

**Figure 12.** School C’s percent at or above proficient and median growth percentile in the subject of reading compared to other 3rd – 5th grade students in Clark County. *Source* ccsd.net SPF reports, 2012
School C Leadership Themes

Principal C possessed six emergent themes: a common vision that was understood and accepted by the entire staff, a shared decision making system that allowed for sharing of new ideas and revisiting and reshaping old ideas, the importance of participating in a professional learning community, and an emphasis on professional development, high expectations, and advocacy for their schools’ needs.

Common Vision – The vision was a collaborative effort of the staff, based on the district’s mission of having each child “ready by exit” (of their current grade). The staff of School C knew that it would be difficult, but if they embedded a notion of students and staff working to “their fullest potential, it would be a way towards success”, said Teacher C1. She felt that this was a way to make all students understand that this hard work would be an intrinsic motivator for a successful future. Teacher C2 put it this way: “We want to raise our expectations [of the students] and then get them there!” Principal C added, “The teachers truly believe that every student can learn and that they would never leave a student out.” She added, “We all have to be advocates for children.” Before our interview began, she spoke to a teacher outside her office that she said was an example of that philosophy. The teacher had questioned why one student had supports withdrawn and how he/she could get them back. She also noted that the vision had begun to take shape 12 years ago, and since that time, the school had hired teachers that shared that vision. Principal C explained, “We do not dilute our vision. We make it clear and do not get distracted. Our mission is not a mission of one. Growing and empowering teacher leaders are the keys. If I did not do this, I would have a nervous breakdown.”
Shared Decision Making - Principal C noted that with all the changes and expectations of the district, decision-making had to be done together. She noted that her staff “takes a bite into these changes together, rather than hearing about it in a meeting and then going back to the individual classrooms to digest it”. The decisions are made together, with what is best for their community and students in mind. Teachers shared that the administration trusts their ability in all facets of decision-making. As Teacher C1 put it,

“The administration provides enough trust and respect with the teachers in regards to trying to meet district expectations. Teachers in turn trust and respect the administration when extra support is needed. The teachers in the school have also built a good relationship with the students and parents from the community. The culture is understood and this understanding has helped when instruction must be differentiated.”

Professional Learning Communities – Grade levels meet to analyze data, discuss instructional pacing, grading, and grade level expectations from the grade levels above and below monthly. In addition, school-wide meetings are held to compare data across grade levels every trimester. This is done to get everyone on the same page with the school’s programs, grading, and calendar of academic events. Students as well as teachers are responsible for tracking goals and progress. Teacher C1 explains, “Schools can’t accomplish mush if there is no collaboration. If teachers just stay in their own rooms and shut the door, how can you learn anything? You learn the best things from the teacher next door.”

Professional Development – Professional development was key to School C’s success. As Principal C put it, “Change [in our district] is coming at the speed of light every day”. In order to keep up with that change and provide the school’s students with
what they needed, teachers needed professional development. That coupled with mentoring and opportunities to improve their practices and incorporate school-wide research based programs, drove the success of School C.

**High Expectations** – When she first became assistant principal at the school, Principal C said, “It was a school of good feelings, disjointed learning, and very little data was looked at or used”. The math and reading programs the school used did not fit the needs of the students. There was no student work on walls. Together, the former principal and Principal C, as the assistant principal, began to turn things around, envisioning each child work to their fullest potential, they began to turn things around. Principal C continues to have high expectations for her students as well as her staff. She provides pedagogical resources, professional development, and mentoring to help those teachers achieve success. As Teacher C2 puts it, “You have to raise your expectations of the students’ achievement and then get them there! You need to have them up there and beyond!”

**Advocacy** – Principal C is an advocate for Pre-K education. She felt that it is critical for second language students to get English education before they are enrolled in kindergarten. She has funded six, half-day Pre-K sessions with her Title I money. She felt that if eighty plus students did not have this opportunity to “jump start” their education, they would have a much harder time when they entered kindergarten. She and her staff did an action research project with those students who had attended their Pre-K program, and followed their achievement through 5th grade. The Pre-K students were paired with a peer that did not attend the Pre-K program. The paired students had the same language coding given to them by the school district, based on their English
language ability. Principal C was thrilled to find that the students who had Pre-K experience were “light years ahead” of those students who did not attend. The school’s action research confirmed that all of the prior Pre-K students passed the Nevada Criterion Reference Test (CRT) at the end of their third grade year. In addition, even though there were only five remaining Pre-K graduates who still attended the school by the fifth grade, every one of them passed the CRT given at the end of their school year. Principal C has advocated for Pre-K education to be a part of all the surrounding elementary schools too. She has approached her region superintendents and others in the school district to implement this successful model. Principal C had even looked into the possibility of purchasing a commercial preschool building in the neighborhood to be used by the surrounding community to educate all of the preschoolers. However, she could not get the district’s support to accomplish this objective.

**Principals A, B, and C and the Research Literature**

The three principals of these schools are not extraordinary. They seemed to be humble women who have schools that are succeeding despite the neighborhood their schools are located in, and the challenges of an ever-changing school district. They did, and are continuing to, experience student success and they have a staff that is driven and motivated to accomplish their goals. The students are happy, the staff is happy, the community is happy, and the superintendent is happy with their academic achievements. Many schools in the district in much better socioeconomic neighborhoods are not achieving this level of success. What is the key to their success?

At the beginning of the chapter, I wrote about the six key themes that emerged from the data and visits to the campus. These were: a common vision that was
understood and accepted by the entire staff, a shared decision making system that allowed for sharing of new ideas and revisiting and reshaping old ideas, the importance of participating in a professional learning community, and professional development, high expectations, and advocacy for their schools’ needs.

As declared in the problem statement of this research paper, prior work on the subject of transforming culture focused on characteristics or traits of the leader or organization. Based on my research, I would agree that the leaders interviewed led the changes or transformation of their schools for a common good rather than a self-interest, and raised their followers to “higher levels of morality” while fusing their purposes together (Burns, 1978, p. 20). As Leithwood, Begley, Cousins, Steinbach, and Janzi (1990, 1991, 1994, 2000) have stated these principals did transform their schools by using shared collaboration, building the school vision together, proving the teachers with intellectual stimulation, providing individual support, creating a productive school culture, and developing the structures to foster participation in school decisions. All of the principals interviewed confirmed Hall and Hord’s (2006) findings that facilitating change is a team effort. The principal as the leader of the school has a crucial role in leading this effort but cannot do it without the help of the other staff members. However, these are the characteristics of the organization itself and do confirm the best practices of these schools, but are not the sole key to their transformation.

As Carolyn Shields (2003) noted in her work, Leithwood and colleagues’ definition was purely organizational. The schools did have the organizational qualities researched by Leithwood, but all three of the principals aligned with Shields’ work as well. The equity and social justice issues she wrote about were present in all the school
campuses that I visited. Shields (2009) stated that this transformative leadership had the potential to provide education in a diverse setting that was inclusive, equitable, and educational. School A championed the cause of having inclusive classrooms with special education students spending most of the time in general education classes. This brought the school greater test scores and as Shields put it, “links education and leadership with the wider diverse social context which it is embedded” (2009, p.67). Here, Principal A had the promise and potential to meet both the academic needs and social justice needs of the educational system.

Principal B championed the cause of converting her campus from bilingual to all-English institution. She was met with opposition from her teachers, students, and community. She received little support for her cause. However, she knew that this deep and equitable change was necessary for her students’ success. Although she faced opposition, she was able to use the process in transformative leadership to (see Figure 1) deconstruct and reconstruct of the socio-culture knowledge and frameworks that generated this inequity, resulting in equity for all students.

Again, Principal C provided education in diverse settings that was inclusive, equitable, and excellent (Shields, 2009), by providing Pre-K education using her Title I funds. Principal C, along with the other principals, confirmed Shields’ work by noting that schools were the only organizations that are intended to provide academic instruction, and that would provide students with the tools necessary to achieve future success. Principal C found that providing the students with the Pre-K English education made them ready for kindergarten. She found that with this boost, they were fully prepared to begin their formal education. They obtained the necessary readiness through
instruction and knew enough English to hit the ground running on the first day of kindergarten.

As Hall and Hord (2006) point out in their research, this process is “highly complex, multivariate, and dynamic” (p.4). The characteristics of a good leader as noted by Burns, Bass, and Avolio, (1978, 1985, 2003) should be present. The qualities of an organization that can transform are critical. (Leithwood, Begley, Cousins, Steinbach, and Janzi (1990,1991,1994,2000). Shields (2009) pointed out that transformative leadership had the potential to provide education in a diverse setting that was inclusive, equitable, and educational.

As researched by Hall and Hord (2006), one of the first principles in implementing a school’s transformation recognizes that change is a process, not an event. Change is tactical in nature, will require three-five years for implementation, and assessment data should be collected along the way. The change or transformation of each of these schools was tactical in nature. The principals had a focused vision that was supported by the staff. They had a prescriptive means of collecting the data to shape their academic decisions. In addition, the principals and teachers stated that this data was transparent to the entire staff, and that the students were involved by knowing and tracking their progress.

Each of the principals noted that one of the keys to their school’s success was the continuing leadership and the staff. Principal A had been has been at her school six years, Principal B at her school for 10.5 years (two and half as the assistant principal), and Principal C was at her school for 12 years (10 of those as the assistant principal). In
Clark County School District, where moving principals after a couple years is the norm, this was a key finding. These principals had been allowed to stay at their buildings for an extended period. Both Principal B and Principal C thought this was a factor in the success of all schools, and identified it as a barrier to success when it does not occur. Principal B noted that very few principals get to see the results of their leadership, she described it as a principal that can master their craft. She added that results did not matter to past principals, as they knew they were just going to be moved in a few years. She described achievement as a journey where you gain momentum as you go. As Hall and Hord (2006) put it, “administrator leadership is essential to long-term success. A strong principal can make all the difference in the transformation” (p.16). In addition, Hall and Hord maintain that if a leader is aware of the way to facilitate the change process, leaders can reduce or avoid altogether the apprehension associated with change.

Principal C agreed with Principal B not only on the importance of stable leadership, but coupled this with the stability of the schools’ teachers. Principal C said teachers as well as consistent leadership, aligned with the vision of the school, were keys to student achievement. These individuals were committed to the cause. In a district where reduction in force is often implemented and teachers are removed from or placed in buildings based on seniority, this could be a challenge. The frustration of “pouring your heart and soul” into the teachers as well as your resources and then having them become a victim of reduction in force was something voiced by all principals. In addition, based on seniority teachers are placed in the building that do not have the same vision of the school and perhaps have had disciplinary problems in the past. Therefore, if change is a process and takes 3-5 years of implementation, this is challenging for our school
As Hall and Hord (2006) point out, an organization does not change until the individuals within it change. Individual change is key to the organization’s change. This is a challenge for not only the three schools in this research paper, but other schools in the district as well.

Principal B agreed with Hall and Hord’s (2006) research when she said that a school’s problem could not be fixed with a one size fits all approach. She called this a “cookie cutter approach”. Hall and Hord point out that innovations come in different sizes. In the context of public schools, some schools need complete overhauls while others need small innovations. Interventions are the actions and events are key to the success of the change process. Some interventions might be small, but it is the quality of the interventions rather than the quantity.

Two of the three principals interviewed stated that the innovations were done without much support from the district. Principal A did receive support in the form of educational materials and professional development from the district when she sought to have more inclusive practices on her campus by helping special education students into general education classrooms. Principal B was on her own, with the exception of one associate superintendent who helped her announce to her community that her campus was going to convert from a bi-lingual campus to an all-English campus. Principal C noted that although the district officials have finally begun to add Pre-K education classes to other campuses in her neighborhood, it was a slow process and because of this, she had to reduce some of her Pre-K sessions. She also was disappointed in the district’s decision to not to purchase the vacant daycare building near her campus to turn it into a Pre-K school and community resource. Therefore, as confirmed by Hall and Hord(2006), the school is
the primary unit for change. The individuals inside the four walls of the school building are ultimately responsible for making or breaking any change effort.

**Emergent Findings**

The emergent findings in this research were the clearly visible sight of parent involvement and their pride in their child’s school. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, each school had hundreds of parents converging on the campus to pick up their children. Parents were pushing strollers and walking hand in hand with toddlers from blocks away. All of the principals noted that none of this was present during their first years at the school. The principals, despite knowing no Spanish, had communicated to the parents that they had high expectations for their children to achieve academic success. They communicated that it would be a team effort. As a result, they received the support of the parents.

Two of the three the campuses had a school uniform policy for the students. When I asked the two principals if that was an effort of the staff to raise student expectations, both principals said the uniform policy was entirely the parents’ idea. Once the parents had the principal’s approval to proceed, they headed up the process of surveying the community and going through the necessary channels required by the district to make it happen. Due to leadership continuity, the parents trusted the principals enough to approach them and to gain that support. The community’s and staff’s trust in school leadership was mentioned in all of the interviews.

The other emergent finding, not mentioned in any of the research, was the importance of this trust in the leader. This is evidenced by the findings, that suggest that
the reason for this trust is having continuity of leadership. The shortest time the interviewed principals had been in their school was six years. Two of the principals had been assistant principals at the same building before becoming the principal. One of those principals had been at the same school for 10.5 years and the other for 12 years. This allowed them to build on the work that had been motion without even missing a beat. There was no “getting to know you period”, an establishment of a new direction, or a needs assessment. The principals just focused on continuing their vision. The staff, students, and community knew the expectations and trusted the leader enough to follow their lead. In our school district, this was not the norm.

**Summary of the Findings**

The findings of this study offer insights into the school leaders that can achieve student academic success in high-poverty neighborhoods. First, as Carolyn Shields (2009) notes, they all have a “failure is not an option” attitude. They have high expectations for their staff and students. They go against the grain and think outside of the box for ways for their students to achieve success. They are advocates for their students and community. They are humble and possess qualities of good leadership. Second, they practice best practices of a school as an organization, as researchers such as Leithwood & et. al (1990-present) outline in their studies. They not only employ these practices, but embrace them. Third, the principals achieved this success with little outside support. The findings show that the teachers and staff are a critical part of the school’s achievements, but that there is limited support from the Clark County School District.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study ends during a growth period for the Clark County School District. This is not a growth period of adding thousands of students to the enrollment numbers, but one of academic accountability. As in the case of many large, urban school districts, our leaders are trying to make education fair and equitable to those families that chose to stay in the city rather than moving to the suburbs.

At the start of my doctoral program, I was very interested in schools that succeeded despite having challenging student demographics. As 14 of my 21 years in education were spent at middle class or upper middle class public schools, I understood the hard work and best practices that were put in place to have students from middle class families achieve academically. When the School Performance Framework came out in our district, my attention was drawn to those schools located in high poverty areas of the city that earned a score higher than the suburban elementary school located in a beautiful master planned community where I had been an administrator for the past six years. I wanted to see, to feel, to experience the schools. I wanted to speak to the principals and teachers of those schools and find the key to their success. What I found was nothing short of amazing, and these insights will guide my views not only on school transformation, but will shape the way I lead schools in the future.

For this final chapter, I have prepared my conclusions, self-reflections, study limitations, and suggestions for future research. Following a brief summary of the research findings, I turn to the research questions of my study.
Summary of the Research Study

In this multiple case study, I studied the principals of three schools, as well as two teachers at each of their sites, who serve public, elementary schools that have achieved academic success despite being located in a high poverty area of a large urban school district. I concentrated on the best practices of educators and the principals’ perceived capacity in making this transformation. Leadership capacity for achieving transformational change was the unit of analysis for the data collected from the principals and teachers.

In previous studies, best practices coupled with leadership characteristics were keys to transformational change. All three principals employed best practices identified by Leithwood and colleagues (1999, 2000, 2002, 2008, 2009). Best practices included having a common vision that was understood and accepted by the entire staff; a shared decision making system that allowed for sharing of new ideas and revisiting and reshaping old ideas; participation in a professional learning community; professional development, high expectations; and advocacy for their schools’ needs.

Additionally, I explored each of the three schools’ unique social justice philosophies. Shields (2003) defended this emphasis on schools for social justice and the creation of an inclusive community as ways to enhance learning outcomes. Shields believed that improving the environment in which students learn is critical to improving those outcomes. Each of the school leaders had a laser-like focus on an idea that could bring about social justice for their school site. Finally, I looked for strategies that were supported in this work by their school district as well as how they supported others (their
staff and community) in bringing about this transformational change.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study provide insight into a principal’s capacity to lead transformational change in a school. The data gathered strongly suggests several important findings. First, best practices of schools are employed to include a common vision that was understood and accepted by the entire staff, a shared-decision making system that allowed for sharing of new ideas and revisiting and reshaping old ideas, participation in a professional learning community, professional development, high expectations, and advocacy for their schools’ needs. Second, these transformational leaders must know that change is a process and is not an overnight occurrence. Thus, the continuity of leadership is important. This stability and transparency ultimately builds staff and community trust in the leader. With this trust comes respect and admiration, as the leader becomes an advocate for the students and to think outside the box. Third, transformational schools can be in any neighborhood. All of these leaders had high expectations for their staff and students. Not in any of the interviews or conversations that I held with the participants were words used such as disadvantaged, poor, underprivileged, or limited English proficient. To all of the participants in the study, the neighborhood students they served were just kids. To explore these and other findings, I will now review my initial research questions.

This section reviews responses gathered from the three schools. The initial coding phase involved reading and rereading the transcripts to identify possible common themes, and comparing and evaluating those themes to research on transformational leaders. In
terms of initial thematic analysis, I employed research from Burns (1978, 2003), Bass and Avolio (1985-current), Leithwood, et al. (1989-present), Shields (2009, 2011), and Hall and Hord (2006). The second coding phase involved recoding those qualitative responses from the principals and teachers relevant to and in support of answering my research questions. Coding the interviews into specific themes and then tying them to a specific research question was at times difficult, as responses often overlapped. Question three’s responses from the teachers regarding the principal’s effectiveness overlapped with question four’s responses about effective culture and climate of a transformational school. Finally, I recoded the participants’ categorized quotes and matched them to the research. The next section presents the data on how principals and staff perceive this task.

**Research Question #1: How do principals explain the task of transforming a school culture?**

Using my interview protocol, I asked principals to name three adjectives that described their school’s journey to high growth rates. The adjectives used were bumpy, difficult, emotional, long, challenging, rewarding, jerky, hard, and committed.

Burns (1978) suggests that the leaders’ and followers’ purpose must become fused and they must support each other for the common purpose. Early work of Leithwood et al. (1990) supports a school culture that has shared meaning and collaboration in comparison to the outdated notion of teachers working in isolation. The interviews conducted at the schools revealed that this sharing of a vision and collaboration were keys to student achievement.
Bass (1999) states that transformational leaders are expected to uplift the morale, motivation, and morals of their followers. The principals’ responses did correlate with some of Bass’ work. All of the principals seemed to motivate their teachers to a higher moral calling and the moral was high at all three school sites. Principal B motivated her staff by this statement, “I promised that we were going to be on the map someday, number one in the district. I wanted to show them that it didn’t matter where your kids came from.”

Shields (2009, 2011) reveals that transforming a school cannot just be organizational and equity and social justice issues cannot be ignored. The style must fit the circumstance and with the social justice piece as a “robust way of thinking about leadership” requiring “multiple styles and strategies” (Shields, 2009, p. 385). Principal C put it this way when she first came to her campus, “The biggest thing that I though we needed to change was the programs that they had in place. They did not match the community’s needs. Both the reading and the math program did not address the needs of the school.”

Hall and Hord (2011) state that facilitating change is a team effort and that the organization will not change until the individuals change within it. Hall and Hord also note in their research that appropriate interventions reduce the resistance to change, and that leaders must constantly monitor the change process for either sabotage or resistance. The Principal B acknowledged this research through her response:

“I knew we had to change, when I saw our scores, and they were all in single digits, and not even close to the ten. I knew the kids had the capability, but there were no goals, no alignment, no expectations. There was nothing. Teachers just closed their doors and did their own thing. So I knew this had to change. Our kids were moving up to the middle schools with being not just one or two years behind, but four or five years behind in reading. So this had to stop. It was
horrible. I knew the kids had a lot of intelligence, a lot of capability. We were just not addressing it correctly.”

Research Question #2: How do principals understand and critique their knowledge, skills, and disposition for transformative leader work?

Another task I asked the principals to do was to list three adjectives that described their personal experience of engaging in the effort to transform a school. Words they used to describe themselves were: persistent, difficult, enlightening, demanding, understanding, preserving, collaborative. During the campus visits and interviews, I was struck by the humble nature of the principals and their teachers’ admiration. As stated in my rationale for research, I believe that the success or failure of a school and its students depends on the leadership. Best practices have been established and traits have been researched. In none of the instances was the Clark County School District given credit for the training of these individuals to become the leaders that they are. The principals’ responses seem to imply that there was a good common sense approach with the support of the teachers at the school. “You must have perseverance! If you are a strong leader, when you say something you must follow through. You cannot have people intimidate you or encourage you to back down. If you back down, you will never go forward – ever”, explained Principal B.

Research Question #3: How do the teachers who join the principals in this work view their role and their principal’s effectiveness?

Although this research looks at leaders that can effectuate change, there were many references in the research about how leadership is not a lone effort (Hall & Hord, 2011, Leithwood et al., 1989-present). Therefore, midway my research and with the help
of my committee and following my proposal defense, I decided that the teachers’ view of this transformational journey would add value to this body of work. In this manner, several major themes emerged when coding the interview transcripts. First, the teachers felt that their principals truly trusted them and came to them for their opinions. They felt free to share ideas and they were provided an arena to disagree. They all had a true belief in the leader and the vision of the school. They also felt valued and with that could rise to the occasion of making their school a 5-Star Gold school. Teacher participants supported researchers by stating that principals “empower us as teachers to make decisions that are best for our grade level and/or school. Things are not dictated to us. That is why we have buy in what we do and everything is done with fidelity.” Teacher B2 puts it this way, “Teams could come up with ideas and present them to their grade level or staff. Once it is agreed upon, and there had to be 100% buy-in, we could move forward.” Teacher C2 explains, “[Our principal is] open, easy to talk to, she gives us autonomy, she has never made me feel that she is above me. She always has the teacher’s back.”

**Research Question #4: In what ways does a system’s climate and culture enable transformative leader work?**

In all of the data collected, the school’s climate and culture were keys to the school’s success. Within that system of a school, as Hall and Hord state (2011), “The context of the school influences the change process. The two dimensions that could affect either individual or organizational change are the physical features of the building and the beliefs, attitudes, and values within the organization” (p.14) The theme of this positive, trusting, supportive, culture of a community of learners emerged in all of the
transcripts. In addition, one of the emergent findings suggested in Chapter 4 was that the parents became part of the school’s system and climate, which helped support the transformative leader work. Teacher B1 explains it like this, “We do everything together as a community. It is not your kid and my kid. We see everything as a whole. We all look at the data as a whole. All of our data is transparent. Whether it is the grade level’s data or cross grade level’s, we all look at each other’s data.” Teacher A2 describes her school’s culture in this response,

“Teachers feel valued and that comes from the leader. A good leader is just like a good teacher. They make you feel smart no matter what your level. It is what you needed your first year as a teacher, but you still need it. I have never worked with a principal that is so caring. The principal takes the strengths of the teachers and plays them up. She genuinely feels that teachers are important. She knows the names of every student and is never in her office. She is side by side with the kids, she is learning what they are doing.”

When looking at the Clark County School District as a broader system and the climate and culture used to enable transformative work within that district, there was not as much support. The enabling of the transformative work involved at each school suggests that without the leadership of the school focusing on democracy, equity, and justice (Shields, 2009), student achievement might not have occurred at such a high rate. As Principal B stated, “I don’t believe in the ‘cookie cutter’ approach and that one formula for success fits all schools.” Each principal uncovered the specific needs at their schools and then developed a plan to fill those gaps. Principal A felt that her school needed to incorporate a model of inclusion for special education students. Principal B felt that her school, with an 87.4% Hispanic student population, needed to get rid of bilingual education. Principal C felt that Pre-K education for non- or limited English speaking students was the key to their future success. Divisions within the district
offered support, but for the most part, the principal forged the way with the help and support of the staff.

**Critique of Methodology**

A major challenge of this research was time. The amount of time spent finding three school building principals who were at 5-Star Gold schools in high poverty areas of Clark County at the beginning of a busy school year was the biggest challenge. Once the principals agreed to be participants and chose the teachers in their buildings, the rest was just a matter of getting papers signed and appointments made. All of the participants were willing and eager to share the accomplishments, challenges, and practices at the school site. Although the principals selected the teachers to participate, all three of them revealed that I could have chosen any teacher in the building to interview. They all said they literally asked some of the first teachers they saw that day to participate in this study. Even through these challenges of selecting participants, interviewing them, and then writing up the results were present, the results of this research was enlightening.

Next, as a novice researcher, I kept referring back to the previous research of identifying certain character traits of transformational principals. During the interviews and transcription of data, I wanted to come up with a magic formula for becoming a successful leader. I looked for best practices rather than looking at the whole picture of school transformation. When I found myself doing this, I referred back to the work of Shields (2009) that “links education and educational leadership with the wider diverse social context in which it is imbedded” (p. 16). As themes emerged, I recognized that the
work done at these schools I visited was not just a transformation of the campus, but a transformation of the broader community.

**Implications for Practice and Avenues for Future Research**

The results of this study inform educational leaders of important implications for practice. First, principals and teachers must work together to develop a clear, focused vision for the accomplishment of student achievement. District leadership should examine principal leadership practices in using this collaborative approach when hiring or appointing principals to a campus. Second, principals at the schools should be able to determine the unique needs at their individual sites. Each of the three schools I visited had identified different needs at their campus. Although data was used to identify these unique needs, other tools were used. Principals listened to their teachers, conducted their own action research, approached their superiors, and sought the best solutions for their particular student population. Their decisions were not made from mandates, scripted programs, or “cookie cutter approaches.” Third, a key finding in this study was that there was stability of the leadership and teachers at the school. Transformation did not happen over night on these campuses. Principal B noted that it took three years just to get their PLCs functioning. The stability of the leadership allowed the teachers and community to trust that leader and the decisions they made on behalf of the school.

The results of the study imply several future research possibilities. One recommendation would be to conduct research in other high achieving school districts described in Chapter 1 that have demographics similar to the Clark County School District. Using the same qualitative interviewing technique and using the same number
of participants, this approach could provide researchers with additional data to support or reject the findings of this study. For example, when used in other school districts, do those participants reveal similar findings?

A second area for future research consideration is in the area of hiring practices and the consistency of principal leadership. A recommendation would be to conduct research, again in other similar school districts, to determine what specific hiring practices are in place when districts look for a transformational principal. Are the records of accomplishment of those applicants looked at alone? Are there certain qualities that human resource divisions look at when searching for that leader? How much are individuals matched with the needs of the schools and are those needs properly identified by districts? Once the hiring occurs, how much time does the principal receive to accomplish academic achievement? Are there guarantees they can stay at the school site to build trust with the staff and the community?

**Unanswered Questions**

As this body of research is concluded and initial research questions answered, there is still some unfinished business. The principal and teacher participants have articulated what it takes to make transformational change at a school. What is missing from my research is the way to develop these leaders. Principals A, B, and C noted that they did not learn what to do to make changes in any university course or professional development class. The successes of the school leaders were gained from mentoring experiences and on the job training. Principal B suggested that the award and recognition of being a 5-Star school were nice. However, as she put it, “We applaud and acknowledge successful schools, but do nothing after that.” She suggests PLCs for
principals that would entail visiting successful school campuses to learn what they are doing. She added that, “[School districts] do not utilize what they know.” In other words, our school district has successful schools, but their best practices are not shared. There is no formal mentoring in place. Principal C stated, “None of my formal education contributed to the work I have done at this school. Most of what I know comes from great mentors and experience.” In addition, a key to the participants’ successes was their knowledge of the specific needs of their schools. When the needs were identified, they needed to be advocates for their community and fight, sometimes alone, for their students’ identified needs.

In order to develop leaders who can lead transformational change, our school district should adopt some practices. I would suggest that a mentoring plan needs to be in place for those principals assigned to schools that will need transformation. This mentorship would go beyond meeting once a month for coffee or being available for phone calls. The mentorship would include shadowing, team building, and identifying needs specific to the school site.

The second suggestion I would make, would be that there needs to be a path of study in principal preparation courses, either at the university or district level, to help identify specific needs at a school. All three of the schools that participated in the study had similar student populations, yet had different needs. Principal C stated that the “cookie cutter approach” or one-size-fits-all philosophy does not work. These principals had the good fortune of being at their schools for a long time so they could identify specific needs. Most principals do not have that luxury. Once the need is identified, how do the principals advocate for their schools? The three principals show that they were on
their own, without district support, to advocate for those needs. How does one get the
training to become an advocate? These questions remain unanswered.

**Conclusion**

As a long time educator, I have had the opportunity to work with many different
types of school leaders. I have worked in low SES neighborhoods, middle class
neighborhoods, and high SES neighborhoods in my 21 years in education. I can honestly
say that every principal that I have worked with was dedicated to educating the student
population. I felt that every decision that they made as a leader guided that direction.
Most of those principals were engaged in similar effective practices of the three principal
participants in this study.

However, the principal participants in this study had something that I can only
call a drive or high motivation to make the students at their school succeed. I did have
the opportunity to interview them at the culmination of their hard work and dedication.
Their success was recognized district and statewide when they achieved the 5-Star Gold
status. However, they had been moving toward that goal since they stepped foot on
campus six to twelve years ago. They had a “no excuses, failure is not an option” attitude
shared by their staff.

I have been honored, humbled, and educated by these participants. I have come
away with a bigger picture of what it takes for every child to achieve academic success.
While I wish there was a formula for that success that could be replicated, there is not.
Every school population is different, even in the same city or school district. These
principals and teachers have taught me that the entire staff of a school has to advocate for
their students. They also taught me that it is not the job of the school district or the leader alone to find the solution. It takes a committed staff that knows the needs of the students to work together for solutions. I am ready to rise to that challenge.
Appendix A

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Name __________________ School __________ Date ________

Years as an Educator _____ Years as an administrator _______

Interviewed by __________________________

As you know, these are challenging times for educators. However, according to CCSD’s new Performance Framework, your school achieved some of the highest achievement growth rates last year. I am interested in understanding the actual work that led to that accomplishment in this particular school community.

Note: Questions in italics will be asked as follow-ups if interviewee does not address topic in narrative response.

1. List 3-4 adjectives that would describe this school’s journey to high growth rates.

2. Now give me 3-4 adjectives that describe your personal experience of leading/engaging in this effort.

3. What is the vision of this school community?
   
   Tell me the story of how that vision came about?

   What are some specific things that got people to support the vision?

4. How long have you been at this school? Describe your impressions of the school—the community, your peers, your students—when you first arrived.

5. When you were first appointed to this school, how did you go about identifying what worked and what needed to change?

   What were the most important things to you—your non-negotiables?

6. Now tell me the story about this school’s journey to its high achievement growth rates.

   What were the most critical events and actions?

   What sustained the work? What sustained you?

   What kind of barriers did you encounter and how they were overcome?

   Tell me about various people or district divisions that played a crucial role in this school’s achievements.
7. I am interested in how your personal background contributes to this work. Tell me a little about your professional history.

*Where did you complete your degrees?*

*Where did you complete your degrees?*

*What part of your formal education most contributed to the work you have done in this school?*

*What about professional development—what kinds of things really prepared you for the work you just described?*

*What do you wish you had known more about before you came to this school?*

8. Why are so few schools achieving what (school’s name) has accomplished?

9. What particular qualities and/or skills do principals need to lead schools that have and sustain high growth rates, particularly in high poverty neighborhoods?

10. If you could magically change 2-3 things in this district’s structure that would better support the work you have described, what might those be?

11. Let me remind you of the adjectives you gave me early on in this interview. Are they still an adequate description of the efforts at this school and your personal experience?

12. Is there anything else you want to add?
Appendix B

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Name ___________________ School _____________ Date ______

Years as an Educator _____ Interviewed by _________________________

As you know, these are challenging times for educators. However, according to CCSD’s new Performance Framework, your school achieved some of the highest achievement growth rates last year. I am interested in understanding the actual work that led to that accomplishment in this particular school community.

Note: Questions in italics will be asked as follow-ups if interviewee does not address topic in narrative response.

1. List 3-4 adjectives that would describe this school’s journey to high growth rates.

2. Now give me 3-4 adjectives that describe your personal experience of leading/engaging in this effort.

3. What is the vision of this school community? 

   *Tell me the story of how that vision came about?*

   *What are some specific things that got people to support the vision?*

4. How long have you been at this school? Describe your impressions of the school—the community, your peers, your students—when you first arrived.

5. When (name) was appointed as principal, how did you become aware of (principal’s) impression of the school?

   *Tell me what and how things began to change?*

   *How were you and your colleagues involved in those changes?*

6. Now tell me the story about this school’s journey to its high achievement growth rates.

   *What were the most critical events and actions?*

   *What sustained the work? What sustained you?*

   *What kind of barriers did you encounter and how they were overcome?*

   *Tell me about various people or district divisions that played a crucial role in this school’s achievements.*
7. I am interested in how your personal background contributes to this work. Tell me a little about your professional history.

   Where did you complete your degrees?

   What part of your formal education most contributed to the work you have done in this school?

   What about professional development—what kinds of things really prepared you for the work you just described?

   What do you wish you had known more about before you came to this school?

8. Why are so few schools achieving what (school’s name) has accomplished?

9. What particular qualities and/or skills do principals need to lead schools that have and sustain high growth rates, particularly in high poverty neighborhoods?

10. If you could magically change 2-3 things in this district’s structure that would better support the work you have described, what might those be?

11. Let me remind you of the adjectives you gave me early on in this interview. Are they still an adequate description of the efforts at this school and your personal experience?

12. Is there anything else you want to add?
References


Miller, T. N., ed. (2006). [Reform of educational leadership preparation programs in the United States]. *Educational Considerations, 33*(2), 3-62. Retrieved from http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b179e21c3ad2aa015c03a0a1bc45e985832c83eddba1a45649fb681282f5a7eb08f55&fmt=C


Quality Leaders Research, Inc. systems, [http://weimproveschools.com](http://weimproveschools.com)


DOI: 1052-6846/98/03 0214-37.


VITA

HOME:
Leslie Brinks, Assistant Principal
2572 Hidden Forest
Henderson, NV 89075
702-897-4235
glthr5@cox.net

WORK:
Judy and John Goolsby Elementary
11175 W. Desert Inn Road
Las Vegas, NV 89135
702-799-2525
ljbrinks@interact.ccsd.net

EDUCATION:
Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education with a minor in English from University of Nevada, Las Vegas, in August 1992.

Master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Lesley University in April, 1996.

Administrative endorsement from University of Nevada, Las Vegas, in April 2006.

Doctorate in Educational Leadership from University of Nevada, Las Vegas, in December, 2012.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:
2007-present Assistant principal, Judy and John Goolsby Elementary School
2002-2007 5th grade teacher, J.Marlan Walker International School
1999-2002 3rd grade teacher, Lorna J. Kesterson Elementary School