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A Change of heart: A phenomenographic study of conversation

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CHANGE OF HEART: A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC STUDY

OF CONVERSATION

by

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ABSTRACT

**Change Of Heart: A Phenomenographic Study
of Conversation**

by

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This study investigated the use of a school-level leadership model intended to explore the institutionalization of principal-teacher conversations as a tool in leading and learning. An elementary principal and two teachers at five elementary schools were selected for the study. Over an eight-week time, the principal and each teacher held a series of at least four conversations. The investigator interviewed each of the fifteen participants prior to any conversations, at the mid-point of the conversations and at the conclusion of all conversations. The purposes of this exploratory study were to document participant perceptions of the usefulness and importance of principal-teacher conversations, conversations as a means of meaning-making, and conversation as a vehicle for discovering and building the will to lead and learn.

Results indicated that participants perceived conversations between principals and teachers as useful, important and, in some cases, transforming. The term Invitational Conversation was coined to express the useful, fluid, welcoming and encouraging conversation explored in this study. Participants wanted humane and human treatment that Invitational Conversation gave them.

- Invitational Conversations allow educators to be treated humanely with respect, dignity and purpose.

- Invitational Conversations allow educators to understand each other at a level that bonds them together in their mission.

- Invitational Conversations allow educators to be valued.

- Invitational Conversations reveal hidden strengths that can reinforce the educational processes, systems and enhance progress.

Further results indicated that participants saw the use of time for Invitational Conversations as needed. They indicated that the time spent in Invitational Conversations was time well spent, purposeful, useful, and served to bond participants to the work, the school and to each other.

Conversation as a means to discover and/or build the will to lead and learn was not confirmed during the course of the study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

time when quality education leaders are more needed. Racial disparity, economic inequality, and gender discrimination are part of the ethical and moral landscape facing educational leaders today. Leaders who are capable of creating new educational paradigms in civil engagement and social justice, multicultural and global issues, technology, visionary and transformative practices and the importance of human endeavors are needed in our world. Students who were fortunate enough to be taught by professors who believe in public and private education and are willing to be at the forefront of change are those who came through UNLV's Educational Leadership Department. Those who became part of educational leadership as faculty, staff or students, learned from each other how to commit, persevere, take risks and go places none of us could have gone alone. To save and strengthen this department is the only moral decision. To provide guidance to those who serve the community, to deliver leaders who are ready to serve and are dedicated to our future is the only ethical response. Thank you for your commitment and support. Your leadership will not be forgotten.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I have often thought that the best way to define a man's character would be to seek out
the particular mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself
most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments there is a voice inside
which speaks and says: "This is the real me!"
– William James

This study explored the relationship between principals and teachers as they

engaged in conversations and what impact those conversations had on leading and

learning. Authentic principal leadership may influence teachers' attitudes, emotions, and

behaviors. Authentic actions, such as conversations, develop and strengthen a teacher's

desire to learn, willingness to go beyond expectations, and resolve in participating in

school improvement (Barnett, 2007; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Peterson & Seligman,

2004). This study was based upon the assertion that when a teacher's will is nurtured, the

desire to learn improves and with it productivity and commitment. Additionally, through

authentic leadership, trust is maintained leading to a more willing learner (Gardner,

2005). As the phenomenon of leading and learning was explored, perception became the

critical factor. Therefore, transformation through the use of phenomenography was used.

A concise definition of will was difficult to find. Schopenhauer described will as

every force in nature (Schopenhauer, 1964) while Barnett (2007) explained will as an

internal drive that defines beingness and for that matter has ontological implications.

Willingness has been described as the extent to which an individual has confidence,

commitment and motivation in the work and words (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson,

2001). Inclination and disposition have been used in connection to willingness. Tallon

(1997) described will as the "executor of the heart" (p.170) leaning on the works of

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Merleau-Ponty. So, taken together, a will to learn and lead might be explained as an internal drive that compels action toward learning and leading. Authenticity is generally defined as self-awareness of one's fundamental purpose: one's core beliefs, values, and ethical practices, all of which are germane to a unique self and which constitute one's moral compass (Sparrowe, 2005; (Cooper, 1998) This study explored the will to lead authentically, invitationally and intentionally.

While educational reform movements have intended to improve public schooling, they have produced instead standardization, accountability, assessment, policies and decades of reorganization and retooling efforts that have shrunk the space within the school day to focus on people—students, teachers and administrators (Palmer, 2007). Transformation of public education has not included the development of interpersonal relationships, but has been consumed with renewing appropriations, restructuring schools and rewriting texts to accommodate state standards.

Barth (1990) posited that school improvement attempts have not produced the desired outcomes. He noted that "insufficient attention has been given to the important relationships among the adults within the school" (p. xiv) and that the key to improving schools resides with the relationships fostered between the principal and teachers (Barth, 1990). Goleman and Boyatzis (2009) forwarded the idea that leading is less about mastering skills and more about fostering positive feelings among people whose cooperation and support is needed. Partners in professional tasks are more often chosen for their likability and optimism than for their skills (Casciaro, 2005). Optimistic individuals are better equipped to handle issues persistently and are more resilient to pressure in job related circumstances (Pajares, 2002). Optimistic individuals are more

likely to stay in an organization and form lasting, professional relationships (Chemers, 2000; Gillam, 2000). Optimism is an underlying belief in teachers who display efficacy and who emphasize academics. Evidence suggested that teachers who find purpose in their work talk with their students regularly and consistently and demonstrate academic optimism Leader actions effect teacher efficiency (Barth, 2001; Bennis, 2003; Hoy, 2006; Jarvis, 2006). Since talking with students regularly and consistently positively effects academic optimism, and since conversation is a powerful tool in building professional relationships, developing trust and efficacy, and in establishing cooperation and support (Azari, 2008; Baker, 2002; Beard, 2009; Black, 2001; Block, 2008a; Chemers, 2000) should be paramount in the work of leaders. If one accepts, that the actions of principals can have a substantial effect on teachers and students, then principals should carefully consider which tasks they spend time on in terms of achieving the goals of the school.

<u>Background of the Study</u>

Society, fixated on educational reform, has engaged in debate over policy, procedures and reform needed in curriculum, teacher quality, recruitment and retention; standardization, assessment and accountability. Closing the achievement gap has taken on a singular meaning—higher test scores. Since the 1957 launch of Sputnik, school reform issues have multiplied and increasingly the question to be answered is what will it take to adequately prepare our students to compete in the marketplace (Barton, 2005). Sputnik ushered in a new era of school reform. Many believed schools were not preparing students adequately in math, science and technology and it was this deficit that was the culprit for our lagging behind in the space race (Dickson, 2001). Each decade since Sputnik has announced new confirmation of failing public schools.

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The tumultuous 1960s issued in civil unrest. From the Civil Rights Act to Woodstock, society's ills were on every front and public education was blamed for it (Bracey, 2007b). The 97 pound orb that encircled Earth for twenty-three days caught America off guard and began the reformation of America's schools first with an overhaul of science and math. The National Education Defense Act of 1958 provided millions of dollars to equip schools in scientific equipment and new math programs and to provide student loans for low income students to attend college.

The 1960's ushered in the civil rights movement and with it schools blamed for civil unrest and urban riots. Francis Keppel, U.S. Commissioner of Education from 1962 to 1965, was instrumental in developing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), the federal government's first general venture into public education. He lacked a graduate degree but that did not stop him or Harvard from appointing him dean of the college of education in 1948 where he remained until he went to Washington in 1962. Keppel summed up the sentiment that seems to be prevalent even today when he said, "Education is too important to be left solely to educators" (Hanna, 2005).

In the 1960s public schools struggled under attack for not bringing about expedited racial integration. In the 1970s schools took public heat for being either too liberal or too conservative resulting in anti-war protests, continued racial tension and broader involvement of the federal government in public education. The federal government found need of a Department of Education. Fueled by the 1983 report, A Nation at Risk, marked a rise in essentialism—higher standards, more accountability and rigorous direct teaching, and the urgency to keep up with other countries in the global market (Bracey, 1997; Pulliam, 2007).

The 1990's overregulation of everything from curriculum to length of the school day was a continuation of the increasing trend of federal involvement in public education (Giroux, 2009). Demands were placed on schools at every level from elementaries to universities to improve race relations, prepare students for the marketplace and solve unemployment. Schools were held accountable for reducing drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, and violence not to mention the inclusion of bicycle safety awareness and state-specific celebrations. "Schools were even supposed to ameliorate the long-standing problem of highway deaths. Instead of reducing speed limits and requiring seat belts in the 1960s, many states enacted laws requiring schools to provide driver education courses" (Cohen, 1996). As each decade stacked up more requirements, more ills to cure, more blame and more school accountability, the less time was devoted to human issues (Hoover, 2003). As time went on, the answers to educational issues and society's problems in general became more mechanical. Solutions were to be found in determining the right mixture of curriculum, instruction and assessment, pouring into the stalled engines of poor schooling so the result would be a fine tuned and efficient machine.

The Role of the Principal

The role of principal as the educational leader is essential to improving instructional practices. Improved instructional practices lead to increased student performance. There is little disagreement among educators, parents and others that principals play a critical role in the lives of those in the schoolhouse (Hallinger, 2003). Evidence is mounting that demonstrates the linear, one-way-to success model is ineffective and has caused educators to fall in behind the given conclusion decrying helplessness to return schools to places of learning (Liston, 2001). Zepeda (2007) noted that instructional leaders make

schools effective by focusing their attention, energy, and efforts toward student learning by supporting the work of teachers. What would invite learners back to the schoolhouse—the learning leaders, teachers and students? If it is accepted that the actions of principals can have substantial effects on others, then careful consideration should be given to which efforts are given time and attention. This study investigated principal-teacher conversation as one way to reinvigorate the role of principal and central to learning in schools. Including conversations as an important aspect of everyday leadership changes the everyday practices of principals at no additional cost or need for increased resources such as time or personnel.

Standards, benchmarks, assessments, and curriculum strategies intended to improve learning have become centrally important to education, considered more than needs of learners, teachers or leaders. When responsibilities of providing both management and leadership become unbalanced, teachers can become isolated from principals. When principals focus attention away from instructional leadership, less time is spent directly engaged with teachers and what little engagement there is can fail to enhance, and may even degrade, the overall quality of education (Bass, 1990; Brewster, 2003; Felner, 1997).

While many educators hold discussions with building-level principals, particularly regarding matters of high stakes testing, raising annual progress, the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and other politically pressured issues, little intentionality or intensity has been given to systematically conferring with teachers about themselves, professionally and personally. Principals who engage in instructional improvement with teachers have the potential to improve student performance (Azari, 2008; Baum, 2004;

Begley, 2006). While limits exist to what principals can prioritize due to time and resource constraints, changing how they interact with teachers requires no additional time or resource and has the potential of creating a community of learners in a humane way (Renner, 2009).

Fullan (2003) posited that teacher passion, purpose and capacity cause student engagement and enhanced learning. Collins in Good to Great (2001) described the highest level of leadership as that which "builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will" (p13). With school reform and accountability efforts the current focus, human connections are fundamentally devalued as extraneous to mandatory school performance concerns (Fusarelli, 2004). In this politically and economically driven environment where the focus is outside the individuals in the schoolhouse, the risk is that the humans in education may be depreciated to the point of dissolution (Robeyns, 2006).

The unintended consequence of academic standardization and dismissive human efforts may be disembodied leading and teaching. "The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts; heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self" (Palmer, 2007, p. 11). Connections are not made devoid of human contact. Human contact inspires human compassion, human meaning making and is a necessary ingredient for human learning (Freire, 1970; George, 2007).

Principals as learning leaders must know their teachers as well as teachers know their students. Leaders who spend time talking with teachers may evoke more performance from teachers than teachers even know is there. Leaders who create an invitational

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atmosphere where teachers can talk about teaching, about hopes and fears, about needs and desires can create more than minimal teaching and more than marginal success (Scott, 2009). In the pursuit of content mastery and skill-driven achievement all but the most rudimentary discussions between teachers and administrators seem to have been driven from the schoolhouse. In many ways, the humanity of education has been forced to take a back seat to the drive for world class meritocracy that will give the United States global marketplace advantage. Scharmer (2007) forwarded the idea that it is important to know what leaders do, why and how they do what they do, and, most importantly, what internal force of will causes the action in the first place.

Problem Statement

Leadership must be based on goodwill. Goodwill does not mean posturing and, least of all, pandering to the mob. It means obvious and wholehearted commitment to helping followers.

Admiral James B. Stockdale

This study originated from the writer's desire to bring objective and subjective dimensions of learning together to improve the educational practices of leaders in their work with teachers. Education is a truly human process and achievement in any context, social, political, economic, depends on the human learner. Many studies have been conducted regarding how to improve the skill of teaching; fewer studies exist about how beliefs, values, attitudes and human will act as major determinants of behavior and, therefore, teaching. Still fewer have considered the leader's acknowledgment of these major determinants in teacher improvement (Bandura, 2001; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Combs, 1999).

The importance of attitudes, beliefs, values, intentionality and other dimension of the human spirit have been recognized as critical to learning since Socrates; however, within the last sixty years, little has been done to accept that importance within the educational community. "Principals need the capacity to discriminate actual intentions, within themselves and among others. This is not moral relativism, nor is it value absolutism. It is critical thinking and moral literacy" (Begley, 2006).

Intentions, beliefs and thoughts are inextricably related to actions (Carr, 1986), so authentic leadership and purposeful teaching are guided by each person's unique set of attitudes, values, beliefs, desires, will, and presumptions along with knowledge and skill that produce the actions taken (Begley, 2006; Calderhead, 1993; Kouzes, 2007). Even though inextricable links have been found between emotion and learning and emotion and leading, little integration of emotional meaning and importance has been key in leadership preparation programs or in leading a school (Black, 2001; Block, 2008a; Charan, 2008).

Professional relationships provide the foundation upon which issues can be investigated, researched, studied and solved. Just the opposite has taken place as schools have centered nearly all attention on skill development, academic performance and meeting adequate yearly progress goals. Conversations among teachers and between teachers and the principal are narrow in scope, if they happen at all, leaving little upon which to build healthy, sustainable professional relationships. In Fierce Conversations, Scott (2004) stated that the conversation is the relationship. Teacher and administrator conference time has been relegated to talk about meeting standards, tracking and reporting student progress, the relentless focus on instructional strategies, skillful

teaching, and data. Nothing is inherently wrong with this concentration except that it leaves out the heart of the school—the people who day in and day out need to share ideas, inquire about relevance, apply experiences to extend knowledge, develop rigor and build relationships (Sergiovani, 2005).

Complex connections have been noted between emotion and learning and between emotion and leading (Blase, 2008; Deal, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2000). Collaboration with other teachers and with leaders is improved through relational trust (Azari, 2008; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Relationships are built through conversations that consider teachers' personal and professional needs. By holding those conversations, leaders can positively influence teachers by offering support (Burmeister, 2004).

In the work of Hall and Hord (2006) one of the elements associated with change facilitators is Concern for People. This element addresses how principals deal with the personal side of change. Concern for People is comprised of two dimensions, the formal-meaningful dimension and the social-informal dimension. Both dimensions address principal-teacher social engagements. Formal-Meaningful interactions include brief, task specific encounters that center on teaching, learning and substantive school related issues. Social-Informal interactions attend to feelings, perceptions, and the acknowledgement of the concerns of those engaged in the interaction.

Between the formal conferences and discussions held between principals and teachers and the purely social interactions comes a blending of the two, a conversation that is inviting, engaging, and may be formal or informal but results in useful and welcoming conversation. This conversation through this study was named Invitational

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Conversation. Figure 1.1 shows the intersection of Hall and Hord's two dimensions and Invitational Conversation.
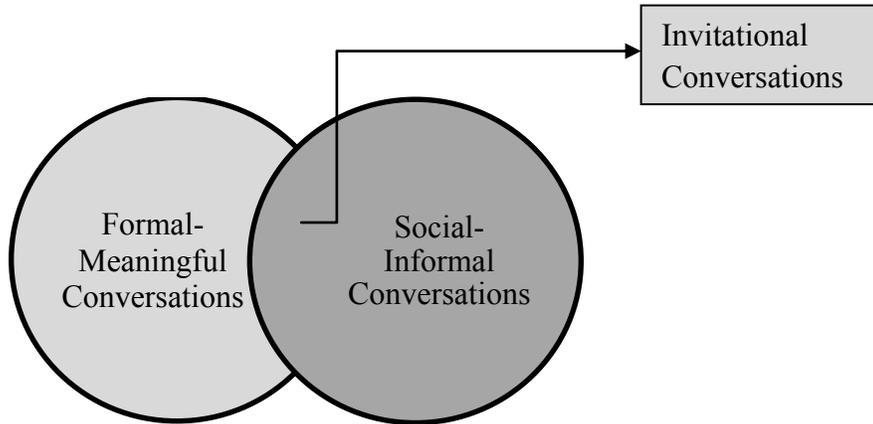
Figure 1.1 Intersection of Formal-Meaningful and Social-Informal Conversations

Despite two decades of research and theories that have emotional components such as collaborative capacity building, effective instructional leadership, transformative school practices and professional reflection, the will to teach and lead has remained an underexplored research focus. In the midst of NCLB, an unfunded, perhaps unsubstantiated mandate, morale has been undermined and the inner working where real leading and learning begins, has been overlooked by those who care more about measurement than meaning.

Purpose of the Study

Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire.
W. B. Yeats

Barnett (2007) stated that 'Will' is the most important concept in education without which nothing else is possible (p.15) and he quotes Schopenhauer (1997) who declared, "...every force in nature should be thought of as will" (p. 19). Education is, therefore, an act of will. By separating 'Will' from skill in learning, leading and teaching we have taken from education the energy, the life-force. Tallon (1997) called Will the executor of the heart, saying that actions taken by anyone are heart centered, emotion laden, perceived and judged internally before enacted externally. This heart-consciousness forms the basis of intentionality (Assagioli, 1974; Barnett, 2007; Merleau-Ponty, 2005).

The purposes of this study are: (1) to explore principal-teacher conversations as a way of discovering the will to learn; (2) to explore principal and teacher perceptions of conversation; and, (3) to explore the structure and essence of the experience of conversation as it is used to understand, discover and develop the will to learn.

Theoretical Framework

As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others.
Bill Gates

Humans construct theories to explain phenomena. Theories make generalizations about observations and sets of ideas that surround phenomena under investigation. Educational research helps deepen knowledge about trends in teaching and learning and about the complexity of the educational process (Calderhead, 1993). For example, through the work of Comenius (1592-1670) and Pestalozzi (1746-1827) a theory

developed that pedagogy should be skill based and that teachers should tend to students'

learning like gardeners tend to well maintained gardens. A natural outcropping of this

theoretical foundation was Froebel's idea of kindergarten, a garden for children (Pulliam,

2007). After the 1900s in Europe's research focused on people's beliefs and how they

influenced their actions. However, the United States shifted toward greater objectivity

particularly after the emergence of behaviorism in the 1930s (Marton, 1986; Pulliam,

2007; Thompson, 1992). Process and product research permeated the 1960s and 1970s

and had law-like outcomes that explained what worked but not why. The mechanical

view of education lacked the relationship of teacher and leader judgment, beliefs, and

intentions to outcomes (Barnard, 1999; Bracey, 1997; Pulliam, 2007; Thompson, 1992).

During the 1970s and 1980s, educational research shifted from a focus on behaviors to an

interest in thinking, problem solving and reflection on professional practices (Clark,

1986; Irez, 2007; Kagan, 1992). Qualitative research approaches including ethnography,

phenomenology and grounded theory, made use of descriptions and observations to

interpret phenomena in education. Marton is credited with the introduction of

phenomenography in 1986 as a qualitative research theoretical framework designed to

study different ways people perceive a phenomena (Ornek, 2008).

Also undergirding this study was Mezirow's transformative learning theory, an

orientation that holds the way learners interpret and reinterpret their experiences is central

to making meaning and learning (Mezirow, 2000). Meaning is understood through

reflection that uncovers beliefs, emotions and perceptions of an experience, object or

person. Some of these beliefs are long-held and take considerable work to change.

Mezirow proposed four ways of learning—refining or elaborating upon meaning,

learning new meaning, transforming meaning, and transforming meaning perspectives.

(Gunnlaugson, 2007).   Bandura's social learning theory (1977) held that a combination

of environmental or social factors and psychological factors influence behavior. He

posited that human behavior can be explained in terms of human interaction and that

human interaction includes cognitive, behavioral and environmental influences (Bandura,

1986).

This study will link the phenomena of conversations to increasing the will to lead

and learn among teachers and principals by studying the perceptions participants have

regarding the experiences surrounding the conversations. The reality of qualitative

research is that reality changes with the changes in people's perceptions (Creswell &

Clark, 2005). Studying perceptions integrity with qualitative research and is the purpose

of a phenomenography since this approach looks for variation in how participants

perceive a phenomenon (Barnard, 1999).

This study seeks to examine the perceptions two educators, one a principal and

the other a teacher in the school, form about each other through conversations and how

those perceptions and interpretations may impact learning. This study is value bound

since human beings attach value to experiences; the experience of open-ended

conversations will have value assessed to it by the participants. The orientation of the

study will be that of discovery from subjective data collected from the ever-changing data

source—humans, under naturalistic conditions (Barnard, 1999). The raw data and the

subsequent analysis and interpretation of that data will result in thick and rich

descriptions which will serve as the foundation for subsequent studies.

In view of the purposes stated above and the recent education legislation that concentrates on skill development to the exclusion of all other facets of education the following questions are posed:

1. What are principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a method of meaning-making?

2. What are the principal/teacher perceptions of the importance of principal-teacher conversations?

3. Were conditions uncovered during the conversations that facilitate a transition from one way of thinking to a qualitatively better perception of reality?

4. What are the principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a way to discover/build the Will to lead and learn?

Significance of the Study

It goes on one at a time, it starts when you care to act,
It starts when you do it again after they said no,
It starts when you say We and know who you mean,
And each day you mean one more
                              Marge Pierce, "The Low Road"

This study promises to add to the literature in education by exploring the importance of 'Will' in learning and leading and exploring a way that principals and teachers may be able to discover the will to learn, teach and lead by talking with each other. "Without a Will in place, no serious effort can be made to acquire a new skill" (Barnett, 2007, p. 26). Additionally, using phenomenography as the research paradigm, this study examines the perceptions of principal and teacher in conversation with each

other and how that dialogue is perceived by the participants. The ultimate purpose is to determine if the reclaiming of 'Will' as fundamental and foundational to learning will have positive effect on student learning, teacher retention, teacher and leader motivation or other topics that could be explored in later studies should this study prove useful. Ontology, that is, the theory of being and beingness, is prior to and essential for epistemology or the theory of knowledge. Beingness forms the frame for knowing. No matter how many skills there are to learn, no matter how pressing the requirement for adequate yearly progress according to NCLB, no matter how important assessment of student achievement may be, no work will be forthcoming unless the participants will it.

Authentic leadership and purposeful learning are guided by each person's unique set of values, beliefs and intentions along with knowledge and skill that produces the actions taken (Begley, 2006; Calderhead, 1993; Kouzes, 2007). Even though these unique sets exist, leading and learning have focused nearly exclusively since the 1930s on skill development, omitting and often discounting the importance of emotional development as part of efficacy. Exploring the relationship among authentic leadership, authentic learning and conversation may form the basis of improved productivity and commitment among leaders and teachers by improving the will to lead and learn.

<u>Research Design Overview</u>

This is a qualitative study designed to explore the perceptions of principals and teachers as they engage in conversations over time and how those perceptions may influence leading and learning. The exploratory format utilizes phenomenography which is an empirical way to study a limited number of qualitatively different ways the

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participants experience, conceptualize and understand the phenomenon of conversations to discover each other's will to learn and lead.

Phenomenography, developed by Marton and colleagues in the 1970's was designed to study qualitatively different ways people can think about, conceptualize and perceive an experience (Marton,1997). In this study the goal is to describe the perceptions of the principals and teachers as they engage in conversation with each other, not to explain the phenomenon of conversation itself (Drew, 2001). Because of the nature of this study, it can best be described as discursive phenomenography since the participants will engage in conversations from which transcriptions will be developed and statements will be compiled for analysis by the researcher and by an independent team. Participants will be interviewed and that data will be analyzed and combined with the original analysis to form concepts (Saijo, 1997).

This study developed the outcome space known as Invitational Conversation. Conversations are different from conferences although the terms are sometimes interchanged. A conversation is a free exchange of thoughts between two people where ideas, opinions and feelings are present. In conversation there is no competition since both participants are willing to talk and hold identical importance in the conversation. A conference as used in education is a more formal meeting where the principal asks questions of the teacher expecting certain responses. While a conference can be relaxed and comfortable for both participants, one (usually the principal) is in charge of the ebb and flow of dialogue.

Participant Overview

Since the nature of this study involved conversations that occurred between principals and teachers, the participants were five teams of elementary principals and teachers from a large, urban school district in the western part of the United States. An area superintendent identified twenty-five elementary school principals who were invited to participate. There are fifty-two elementary schools within the targeted area; however, twenty-seven of the schools were not invited to participate for various reasons detailed by the area superintendent including complexity or number of programs already operating at the school, administrative needs, or irregular organization of time or procedures.

An invitation to participate in the study was sent to the remaining twenty-five elementary schools (Appendix A), inviting principal participation. Of the ten schools willing to participate, five schools were selected by the investigator for the largest degree of difference in principal uniqueness in current positions. The list of five principals was reviewed by the area superintendent. The differences among the five principals included length of time as a principal and length of time as principal at the current site.

The five selected principals chose two teachers each from the current school location. One teacher was selected because the principal knew him and had established a strong work relationship with that teacher. The second teacher was selected because the principal did not know him well or because the principal wanted to establish a better working relationship with that teacher. Only teachers with satisfactory performance assessments were to be considered. Utilizing a semi-structured interview process to explore the nature of the participants' experience and understanding of the conversation, is consistent with phenomenographic method (Barnard, 1999). Martin (2000) improved

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upon his own research approach by adopting a "second-order" method consistent with Kant's idea of a thing as it appeared, that is, studying something from the inside perspective rather than studying the thing itself (Richardson, 1999).

All participants were employed at the elementary school level. Data from the conversations and from subsequent interviews were studied by the researcher and by an external reviewer whose analysis was independent from that of researcher. Phenomenographic research incorporates analysis of the qualitatively different ways people experience, conceptualize, perceive and understand phenomenon, those who analyze the results were considered second level participants (Richardson, 1999).

Collection and Analysis

Data were handled in four phases. Phase one was defined as those initial discussions held with the fifteen participants and was considered the initial interview. Orientation to the study occurred during this first interview. Participants asked for clarification or other information and that became part of the audio-taped record. Phase two included the first two to three conversations held between the principal and each of two teachers. This phase concluded with the mid-point interview that was audio-taped and later transcribed. Phase three involved post- conversation interviews with each participant again audio taped and transcribed. Phase four was the researcher's analysis of the data and review by an external reader.

Participants were encouraged to share their experiences of the conversations through semi-structured questions posed by the researcher to illicit responses giving an external view of the conversation and revealing the participants' beliefs, values, illusions, reality, feelings and experiences of the phenomena (Barnard, 1999). The semi-structured

questions asked about the experience and about any changes that occurred because of the conversations. Interviews were conducted in a sensitive, interpersonal way so they centered on the conversations and the participants' perceptions, based upon shared meaning, presumptionless and resulted in positive experiences for the participants (Kvale, 1996).

Triangulation of information obtained from the directions, conversations and interviews contributed to trustworthiness of this study (Creswell, 2005). Participants were provided a written summary of the interviews and were given opportunity to view, modify, or clarify any of their comments (Marshall, 2006; Rudestam, 2007; Spradley, 1980). This step strengthened and enhanced the trustworthiness of the data (Creswell, 2005; Spradley, 1980). Additionally, an external reader examined the data and provided comments to the investigator for further clarification and description thus increasing trustworthiness (Glesne, 2006).

Data collected from interviews conducted with participants were audio taped, transcribed and analyzed for central meaning. Categories of description were formed from analyses of data (Barnard, 1999). Categories of description have four characteristics. The first, relational, refers to data analyzed in relation to the phenomenon—in this study, conversation. The second characteristic was experiential; any participant experiences related to conversations that emerged during any phase of the study was considered. The third characteristic was content-orientation; data were analyzed for information about how well conversations as a phenomenon are understood by participants. The fourth and final characteristic was evocative in that data along with analysis provides thick and rich accounting of the process (Barnard, 1999). These

category names were initially suggested by the external reviewer and were used in the final category determination. The sorting process included reading, re-reading, determining commonalities and differences, comparing narratives from the interviews, and after a lengthy iterative process, accepting the categories of description. This process allowed categories to emerge, patterns to be revealed and underlying conceptions to be uncovered (Drew, 2001). The final categories were named for the three phenomenographic characteristics above to provide cohesion. This naming was suggested by the outside reviewer after review of the data and accepted by the investigator.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions were related to this study:

- Beingness—The state of existing (where being is something that exists)

- Conference--A detailed discussion with a pre-determined content, a leader and an expected outcome.

- Conversation—An informal exchange of thoughts, opinions and feelings where both participants hold equal importance. There is no pre-determined agenda or expected outcome.

- Knowledge—Knowledge is the sum or range of what has been perceived, discovered or learned.

- Leading—providing direction, support, and connection with others so that people can turn potential into possibilities and possibilities into performance

- Learning—Learning is "a combination of processes whereby the whole person— body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills,

attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses): experiences a social

situation, the perceived content of which is then transformed

cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and

integrated into the person's individual biography resulting in a

changed (or more experienced) person (Jarvis, 2006).

- Will—The will is a specific power which rises up within each of us to give the

  individual inner energy to learn (Assogioli, 1973). The will to learn comes before

  and is foundational to the skill to learn. The executor of the heart (Tallon, 1997).

- Will to learn—The will to learn is the degree to which the learner (in this study,

  the principal and the teacher in each of four pairs) invests in the learning process

  (Johnston, 1996). It is intentionality, that is, the intentional willingness to engage

  in learning.

Limitations

The narrative nature of qualitative research gained meaning from the accounts of

the participants as they engaged in conversation with others. The quality of the data

collection was highly dependent on the skills of the investigator and upon the

interpersonal exchanges of the respondents. The skill of analysis may have influenced

how well the data were organized into themes that offer insight for future studies.

Delimitations

What we see educators do is only a fraction of what is actually done. Those

actions that can be seen emanate from very complex and highly developed processes

(Bullough, 1995). This study resulted from a desire to understand the unseen dimensions

of educators that drive actions toward improved practice. Kagan (1992) discussed a

personal cohesive pedagogical system that teachers create comprised of their own experiences and beliefs, a roadmap to navigate uncertainty and ambiguity (p.65). To examine beliefs, values, and assumptions through which educators organize their actions and experiences, the convenience sample is limited to five principals and ten teachers in teams from five separate elementary schools. Since this was an exploratory study, limiting the number of participants allows the researcher to focus on the perceptions of a small, representative group of educators for the advancement of understanding of the phenomena of learning. This study was limited to elementary principals and teachers in a large, urban, metropolitan school district.

<p style="text-align:center">Assumptions</p>

One assumption was that there is a direct link between thoughts and actions. Thoughts guide actions; behind the thoughts and before the actions is the will to learn. This study investigated the will to learn. This intentionality is intrinsically linked to learning and yet is neither explicitly nor clearly understood (Barnett, 2007). Learners are people who are body and mind, thoughts and actions, material and mental, so personhood is at the heart of the study (Jarvis, 2006).

Another assumption was that by more fully understanding learning in a contextual manner, through dialogue, discourse, conversation and other relational means, the context of learning may take on renewed importance and participation with another human being may become the cornerstone of educational relationships (Freire, 1970; Tallon, 1997).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Sometimes questions are more important than answers.
Nancy Williard
Sputnik: The Blame Game

The bottom had fallen out of a seemingly indestructible economy. Americans
were living high and spending higher. Optimism about the future began to falter as the
Dow dropped 21% between July and September. A bull market that had been in place for
three years was over and a recession had taken its place. Personal and business incomes
were falling while unemployment was on the rise. The year was 1957; Russia had
launched Sputnik shaking U.S. confidence in her military. President Eisenhower signed
the 1958 National Defense Education Act calling for $900 million to strengthen what
many saw as lagging math, science, technology and foreign-language study in U.S.
schools and the reason Russia beat us into space. The first civil rights' legislation since
1875 was signed into law sparking school violence and social unrest. Schools entered a
period of federal activity where the purpose of education was less about the education of
the child and more about strengthening the nation (Dickerson, 2007; Schrag, 2007).
While schools had been the center of controversy prior to Sputnik, the upshot of the
Russian dominance in the space race was that American public schools were now blamed
for America's shortcomings and held responsible for its inadequacies. This culpability
remains as strong today as it was just after the October 4, 1957 launch of the 97 pound
orb. Bracey (2007) stated, "The schools never recovered from Sputnik. Sputnik wounded
their reputation and, as the scab formed, something else always came along to reopen the
lesion."

The Kerner report first released February 1968, criticized the federal and state governments for failed policies resulting in a lack of economic opportunity for non-white Americans. Among the policies found lacking were America's education policies. The report also blamed the media's lack of a diverse perspective for the resulting civil unrest (Meranto, 1970). This failure to adequately cover and educate the public on African-American life spilled into the schools and soon the media shifted the blame to schools' failure to provide adequate diversity education (Bracey, 1997). Federal dollars were spent in the education arena as never before to make up for differences in economic support of the states and with these dollars came federal measures to unify education. The threat of funds being withheld as an instrument for enforcing plans for racing integration caused increased bureaucracy but a reduced national support for federal spending and heightened public concern for the national education policies (Pulliam, 2007).

With Sputnik still looming, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was enacted to provide funds to ensure children from low income family's access to adequate education. Even though debates ensued regarding the loss of humanistic teaching and learning, ESEA focused on core curriculum, materials and assessment. This focus became even stronger when ESEA was retooled as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the second Bush administration (Robelen, 2005).

The 1970s found schools responsible for educating students with vast array of disabilities within the regular school setting while upholding standards in math, science and technology. This decade ushered in the back-to-basics movement and with that, in 1975, Newsweek ran an article blaming schools for students' inability to write (Sheils,

1975). By the 1980s, fueled by A Nation at Risk, public sentiment charged that schools had not adequately prepared students to take their places in the international workforce and some declared that America would slip as a world power. The 1990s set the stage for greater accountability, higher standards and more federal control of what was considered a system leaving too many students behind (Bracey, 1997). Innovations abounded including school uniforms, assistive technology, looping, rubrics, programmed learning, nongraded schools, increased computer usage and various scheduling systems; that is, education was about plans and programs but had little to do with the learners.

A myriad of social ills and America's failure to be first into space drew endless reforms to education from Sputnik forward. New curricula included increased courses in the sciences and mathematics, foreign languages, and the addition of social sciences. There was increased federal funding in public education for compensatory education, disadvantaged pre-schoolers and for the addition of magnet schools. Computers and other technology became school necessities along with specialized learning objectives and classes for gifted and talented students to help us compete in the world market. A shift was made from literacy and humanistic emphasis to scientific inquiry and research. While the years that directly followed Sputnik saw a rise in homework, bilingual education and the notion of merit pay, eventually these became subjects of great controversy within the educational arena (Dickson, 2001; Tyack, 1995). Bracey (2007) in his 17th report on the condition of public education declared, "Sputnik set a nasty precedent that has become a persistent tendency: when a social crisis—real, imagined, or manufactured—appears, schools are the scapegoat of choice; when the crisis is resolved, they receive no credit" (Bracey, 2007a). Post Sputnik, schools were blamed for the

inattention to gifted students and, when riots broke out in 1969, Senate blamed schools for their negligence to disadvantaged youth and for their continued inattention to science and math yet when Armstrong landed on the moon, education received no credit (Bracey, 2007b).

In 1983, Regan commissioned A Nation at Risk to support his education agenda of school vouchers and school prayer. It did not accomplish this agenda nor did it support his desire to abolish the Department of Education. It did usher in more than fifty years of school criticism for crisis after crisis that has troubled this nation (Bracey, p.123). Each criticism brought additional reform efforts, blame and disputes over how to improve America's schools and who should control those efforts.

<div align="center">Colonial America</div>

Long before Sputnik, as far back as the founding fathers, there debates abounded about who should manage and regulate schooling. Churches and families controlled the education of children in colonial America and later philanthropic societies and local communities took up that effort. Some citizens feared that uneven local control would unravel the fledgling democracy. In Puritan settlements, children were taught to read using the Bible and, to a lesser extent, were taught numeracy, usually at home or in small village schools. Colonists argued about the best way to educate children. Those with strong evangelical beliefs agreed it was the will of God that ruled and that evil had to be driven from children while those with more moderate beliefs held that children had free will that would yield to nurturing, guidance and parental understanding. These counter beliefs produced different views of curriculum, instruction and how education should be organized (Greven, 1977).

America's educational heritage, and hence the debate, was rooted in very old philosophical foundations. Plato (427-347 BC, credited with the notion that reality is based on mind, reason and spirit, posited the rational soul, or mind, was the thinking portion that made rational decisions and allowed each person to live life properly. The spirit or will was an active portion of the universal mind that dictated reason and did what the intellect determined as the best course of action. The soul or emotion was that part which wanted or felt many things, but which must postpone desires so reason could lead to the wisest path. The universal mind is permanent and the truth is eternal. Therefore, education is the process of bringing latent knowledge to the surface (Pulliam, 1994). Later followers of Idealism, such as Kant, Hegel, Emerson, and Thoreau influenced John Dewey and J. Donald Butler who were prominent voices in American education.

Later Friedrich Froebel, founder of kindergarten, followed idealism as did Mortimer Adler (Power, 1996). In Idealism, the will of the learner is a major part of human existence. Dewey advocated learner reflection and enriching the human existence. In early America, education arguments following Plato's thinking took the form of organized schools where universal "truths" were taught by teachers and practiced by students to produce educated citizens who would forge a strong republic.

Realism, on the other hand, rejected the existence of ideas in favor of the object itself. Aristotle (384-322 BC) was interested in examining objects in a standard way giving rise to empirical proof taken up by John Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi and much later it made its way into Back to Basics movements and NCLB. Just as St. Augustine adapted the ideas of Plato's idealism in Christian doctrine, St. Thomas Aquinas held that God was pure reason and for there to be any truth whatsoever, man needs divine help

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(Cahn, 2007). This gave way to church-controlled schools and church-influenced curriculum. Realists saw the value in formalized teaching, inquiry, specific lessons and inductive reasoning. Those who subscribed to this way of educating were not as concerned about where children were housed for the schooling as the methods and the level of teacher competence These differences continued as greater emphasis was placed on formalized schooling in the colonies (Spring, 2008).

Although there were differences influencing American educational philosophy, it was still slow to develop since the early schools had plain curriculum and simple organizational structures. The ordinary citizen was less concerned with intellectual and social issues than with a better standard of living. Most were satisfied with the three R's and subscribed to common values. Many saw the beginnings of the emerging social stratification, from hard working farmers to wealthy landowners, from rural ranchers to shopkeepers, the demand for formal education increased.

Apprenticeships became popular as a way for parents to secure their children's futures through learning crafts to become highly skilled in various professions. As had other local schooling practices, apprenticeships took on many looks depending upon the colonial culture. Influences from religion, politics and economics contributed to decisions about curriculum, educational philosophy teaching methods and outcomes. As ideas of a republic and democracy grew and as colonists became increasingly dissatisfied with conditions in Europe, the idea of a public school system began to emerge. The middle class was strengthening and with it the notion of autonomous economic enterprise. By 1776 the intellectual climate had changed and with the more prosperous population, more schools were provided, at least for students who could pay (Pulliam,

2007). As the theoretical foundation for public education grew, John Locke supported the notion of children learning together and practicing civil engagement, but did not believe, as did William Penn, that children's thoughts and actions should be controlled and molded. Thomas Jefferson looked toward humanistic and scientific trends to understand the universe without divine revelation. Freedom of religion, press, equality and ideas such as liberty, patriotism and resistance to tyranny called attention to the need for schools amidst debates regarding privately controlled vs. publically controlled curriculum, empiricism vs. nativism, and religious vs. secular leanings for schools (Buckey, 1989).

Many men aided in the push for a national school system from Patrick Henry to Benjamin Franklin, from Thomas Jefferson to Noah Webster, fought for schools where American children could learn liberty, just laws, morality, the ethics of hard work and patriotism. Through the debate there were central themes such as equality of opportunity for all children and efforts to improve schools on local and state levels. However, as can happen when arguments wear on, the issues became more about control, funding, taxation, and the separation of church and state. The question of who will be educated took a back seat to what institution would control education and who would provide financial support (Power, 1996; Pulliam, 1994; Pulliam, 2007; Ravitch, 1995). Nonetheless, even with center stage giving way to issues, leaders and citizens continued to be concerned with values, ethics, and with children's will to learn (Bandura, 1986). This earlier education was guided by philosophies of learning where the focus was on people, the learners. Now, in the age of federal control, characterized by accountability,

conformity, one-size fits all and reportable data, the focus is on the system. The beginning was the notion of a National system of education.

<center>National System of Education and Beyond</center>

The founding fathers, even with considerable debate and several plans were unable to establish a national education system. By default, the power to create, maintain and govern schools fell to the states with the passage of the tenth amendment to the United States Constitution on December 15, 1791. The amendment did not give the power of school governance to the states as much as it restated the principle of federalism; those powers not granted to the national government or prohibited to the states by the Constitution are reserved by the people (Thomas, 2008). This spelled uneven growth in curriculum, teacher training, funding and public school acceptance.

By the time the Civil War began, however, over 300 high schools had emerged feeding state and private universities. At the same time more students were being educated more school-age children worked fifty to seventy hours a week in factories and at other hard labor. These children, some as young as six, were from mostly poor families who could be hired cheaply and were thought of as expendable (Mofford, 1970). So while influences from Europe continued to influence the American education arena, the Industrial Revolution was having devastating effect on families and children.

From 1812 to 1865, American education was influenced by European notions of early childhood education (Pulliam, 2007). Rousseau, the French philosopher (1712-1768) who believed education ought to be based upon emotional, intellectual and educational freedom, proclaimed children should learn through experience and physical activity. Pestalozzi and Froebel believed in the natural growth of children and in their

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human nature. Pestalozzi spoke of educating the hand and heart as well as the head and Froebel, who followed Pestalozzi's lead, looked upon children as the realization of God's will in human nature. His notion that children should be free to express themselves and to build relationships with others gave rise to kindergarten and greatly influenced Maria Montessori and John Dewey (Saracho, 1995).

William Harris and Francis Parker, both idealists, came at the preparation of children differently. Harris believed in a traditional approach stressing right and wrong, order and harmony while establishing the proper training for an industrial nation. Parker, following Dewey's lead, believed it best to use an interrelated curriculum that centered on individual creativity, geography, history and experimentation. Even contrasting views, including Herbart who was credited with developing a very rigid educational program, kept child welfare as the educational center.

Compulsory school attendance laws were enacted in the late 1800's in part to prevent excessive child labor from keeping children out of school and away from mental stimulation and creative endeavors (Hindman, 2002). However, the Industrial Revolution changed family structure in America since children worked in factories often far away from home. More money was earned by youth than by women so families struggling against economic changes sent children to work rather than to school.

Sending children to work, often far away from their homes changed the close family structure of the agrarian society (Olson, 2001). By the end of the 19th century there was state organization for schools, school tax, and cities were beginning to take on the look of present-day cities with some of the same issues budding. Federal spending on education increased and there was greater urgency among wealthy industrialists to

standardize curriculum, instruction, funding and such common matters as the length of the school day, time spent in coursework and graduation requirements. Standardizing associations developed to push for standards defining the function and purpose of schooling. Charles Skinner, New York State Superintendent of Schools, warned the assembly at the 1897 National Education Association convention that it would be the children of plain people who would rule the country making it necessary to produce an educated workforce capable of competing in ever-expanding trade markets (Nasaw, 1981). The locus of discussions shifted from the child, from the social aspects of schooling to a production model seen as integral to maintaining the American way of life. All this standardization of thought and action came at the expense of students' interest and desire to learn (Tyack, 1995). As the arguments became more and more suffused with contradictions of American society and what was best for children, learners were again disregarded. If learning is the creation of memories that last for the learner and interest is crucial to that learning, disregarding student interest is counterproductive (Freire, 1970; Rogers, 1994).

The notion of creating memory, at least as The Committee of Ten defined it in 1892, had to do with mental discipline. In order to strengthen students' intellectual powers, reasoning, expression and memory, all general education classes held the same value. Subjects recommended by this committee that was formed to standardize high school curriculum included Latin, Greek, English, mathematics, physical sciences, biological sciences, history and geography. The Committee of Ten was criticized for leaving out vocational studies but its recommendations influenced college entrance requirements and later the work of the Carnegie Foundation (Pulliam, 2007).

In 1918, NEA appointed yet another committee that reorganized high schools for social education and values integration naming health, citizenship, worthy use of leisure time and ethical character among the most prominent principals of high school curriculum (Willis, 1992). American schools had to maintain the illusion of democracy in a society where demands for industrial efficiency reigned. Differentiated schooling, for example, might increase industrial efficiency but at the cost of social harmony so the balance was how to maintain the appearance of democracy and the pretense of unlimited upward mobility (Nasaw, 1981).

As the expansion of public institutions continued opportunities for students to receive the type of education they sought decreased. "Public schools are social institutions dedicated not to meeting the self-perceived needs of their students but to preserving social peace and prosperity within the context of private property and the governmental structures that safeguard it" (Nasaw, 1981, p. 241-42). Even the Department of Education established in 1867 has a bifurcated mission, "…to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access." (U.S. Department of Education, retrieved 2/15/2009).

By the 1920s and 1930s high schools became less selective both socially and academically and became more part of mass public education. Because the Great Depression had eliminated many job opportunities for youth, more teenagers went to school. School became a custodial institution and many Americans believed all students should graduate. Moreover, because schools were housing students and because of the diverse needs of students, there was a return to the student being the central focus of

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education. To meet diverse needs, American high schools became diverse, that is, comprehensive, with many subjects and programs taught during the year. With a less than selective student body, lines between vocational and academic subjects were blurred and more extracurricular offerings, such as an expanded sports program, were included. The social nature of school was just as important as the academics; the school was often the hub of activity for students in smaller communities with many clubs such as Future Teachers of America, French Club, and Student Government and after school activities that ranged from music, drama and of course sports, to sock hops.

Parents and policymakers alike were both pleased and concerned by the expanding array of courses, programs and activities. The focused attention on academically oriented students served those who were college bound while other students found vocational offerings under the same roof. All students found social activities that were sponsored by the school and within community standards; however, many found that tax dollars spent on non-academic events a weakening of high school's purpose. Others found the expanding number of high school graduates a way to identify success for students and for the high school program (Ravitch, 1995; Tyack, 1995). The basic discussion centered on whether to educated the whole child or whether intellectual excellence should have priority. Nonetheless, the argument had the child at its axis (Pulliam, 1994).

<center>Less Talk; More Testing</center>

No Child Left Behind is the primary statute governing the federal government's role in education. First known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act during the Johnson administration, it was rebranded in 2001 and the focus became the use of standardized tests to judge schools' success or failure (McColl, 2005). In ancient Greece,

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Socrates tested his students through conversation and their answers were not judged as right or wrong but led to more dialogue (Saran, 2004). This allowed teachers to assess student learning through ongoing exchange of ideas. Others followed believing that learning is a social process and is, by and large, a conversation (Block, 2008b; Freire, 1970; Zaffron, 2007).

However, by the early 1900s, the advent of standardized tests to determine individual intelligence and to sort out which students were more likely to succeed in school meant that more time was spent on tested skills and less time was afforded conversation. In World War I the army used standardized tests to establish officer worthiness. Colleges eventually used the same tests to determine which students to admit to college or to particular college majors. The tests required little time and the answers required little thought. The results imposed no need for explanation, hence no need for conversation between student and college admittance personnel (Haladyna, 1998).

By the end of World War I, there was greater emphasis placed on vocational-technical training to get America working. This provided the impetus for expanding federal aid to education and with it federal involvement in what is chiefly a matter of state and local responsibility. With increased federal dollars came expanded influence and federal control. By 1944 with the G.I. bill, Congress passed the biggest federal aid to education package in history (Nasaw, 1981). While the money to cover tuition, books and supplies was popular among local higher education administrators, after World War II, civic sentiment turned sour fearing federal control and over-involvement in public schools. Dwight Eisenhower, from his post as president of Columbia University in 1949, wrote in response to the hearings on the Public School Assistance Act of 1949,

"… unless we are careful, even the great and necessary educational processes in our country will become yet another vehicle by which the believers in paternalism, if not outright socialism, will gain still additional power for the central government" (Eisenhower, 1949).

Paradoxically, Eisenhower's presidency saw the most rapid expansion of federal aid to education to date and marked the beginning of ever increasing federal intrusion into public education. Money reframed the debate as one of power and control. Political debates centered on social equity, employability, attendance, teacher training, and building capacity to educate the disabled (Backman, 2006; Bolman, 2003). By 1957, the federal role in education had already expanded and rhetoric had shifted to money and power, but Sputnik changed the landscape of education for all time to come.

Overnight the shift to competing with the Russians in math, science and technology replaced recent concern for disabled students and the money followed the discourse. Students were constituents during the Kennedy years of desegregation and compensatory education, of the War on Poverty and equal opportunity during the Johnson years and then during Nixon's administration, students became the subjects of federal supervision.

The notion of linking student performance to federal funding, while not new, was now tied to standardized test scores through a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Backman, 2006; Bracey, 2007a, , 2007b; Dickson, 2001; Nasaw, 1981; Pulliam, 2007). These students-turned- constituents became test takers and the data they produced was used to justify spending federal dollars in the schools of America. The more dollars that flowed toward schools, the more skill driven became the demands and the less input was required or desired from leaders and learners.

Without invitational conversation and dialogue, a crisis of confidence occurs among educators (Routman, 2002). The magnification of federal influence in education raised new issues concerning the relationship of money, power and educational aims and with it the voices of educators became more silent. As the phrase "improving America's schools" increasingly meant spending money on programs, practices and evaluation measures, the public demanded concrete, visible proof that every dollar spent was yielding a dollar's worth of performance even though exact measurement was unclear.

By the 1970s American education had entered the assessment and accountability era accompanied by state standards, decreasing public support for education, increasing personal and professional attack on educators (Backman, 2006; Bracey 2007a; Pulliam, 1994). Because of the negative social impact associated with schools not achieving high academic success, educators tended to find ways to meet the requirements without offering solutions or suggestions. Reluctance to speak up and give information to policymakers and decision makers became a norm. Silence about educational issues still exists today and has led to, among other outcomes, apathy, fear, distrust and uncertainty about how to respond to ever changing discordant landscape (Argyris, 1993; Morrison, 2000; Pinder, 2001).

<div align="center">Conversations: Reaching Understanding</div>

Right before our eyes, all that the education sector has controlled, dismissed, manipulated, validated, embellished, fictionalized, and ranked within an aura of tradition and ritual may be accessed by point-and click. We need to stop chasing exponentially expanding content. Inquiry, problem recognition and solution, creativity, knowing one's strengths and weaknesses, communication and relationships are what students must be prepared for.

Vincent Hawkins, Director of Curriculum
Instruction, and Assessment, Springfield School District (Olson, 2009)

Today, public issues of standards, testing, accountability and achievement run counter to education theorists calling for social and cultural dialogue around race and gender and epistemology, among other topics. This divergence, manipulated by emotional political rhetoric, has painted a picture of schools with lax academic and behavioral principles. Exploiting this picture are various professional and governmental groups who then call for tighter control, greater accountability, more technology, skills, facts and assessment (Purpel, 1989).

According to President Obama in a March 2010 update, more federal dollars than ever before, upwards of 77 billion dollars, will be allocated to strengthen the elementary and secondary schools act, currently known as No Child Left Behind; to enlarge early learning programs and expand leadership in higher education for greater teacher preparation; to increase and reform assessment and accountability; and to add more rigorous science and mathematics instruction for amplified global competitiveness (www.whitehouse.gov). These steps are necessary to "…end what has become a race to the bottom in our schools…" (President Barrack Obama, Remarks to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, March 10, 2009).

A year after his remarks, at a meeting with governors, President Obama said he wanted a change in law allowing states to receive federal aid for poor students only if they adopt academic standards that are deemed to truly prepare children for college or careers out of high school. By March 10, 2010, national standards for English and mathematics were announced with 48 of the 50 state governors endorsing them (Blackburn, 2010). Even though political rhetoric and public opportunists would steer thinking in the direction of known solutions, there are no easy answers and quick fixes,

however, opening dialogue with a broader audience, including educators may allow new solutions to be discovered.

Terrel Bell, former Secretary of Education, wrote in his book, The Thirteenth Man (1988) that rigorous standards were not getting us to excellence:

> If we are frank with ourselves, we must acknowledge that for most Americans…neither diligence in learning nor rigorous standards of performance prevail. How do we once again become a nation of learners, in which attitudes toward intellectual pursuit and quality of work have excellence as their core? (p. 113-14)

If it is accepted that a primary purpose for public education is social development, then it is reasonable to expect schools to afford some level of human and social accountability. Concepts, facts, and skills are learned in social and cultural contexts, a construct understood by educators and legislators; parents and the public at large. However, academic achievement continues to be systematically isolated from the human will (Combs, 1999; Maslow, 1987; Mayo, 2003; Whang, 2001). A humanistic foundation needs to occupy a central position in educational policy and practice so that, as Combs (1978) suggested, education is, "the production of self propelled, autonomous, creative, problem-solving, humane, caring citizens" (p. 3).

Habermas referred to learning as communicative understanding and to social action as an ultimate human achievement (Kolak, 2006). Morrow and Torres (2002) described dialogic methods like those espoused by Habermas (1981/1987) and Freire (2003) as necessary constructive forces in human development with consciousness growing out of mutual recognition.

It may be, then, that genuine conversation is critical to reaching true understanding of the others and of subject matter. By conversing, there is a meeting of minds, a mutual

understanding created between the partners in this creation. Leaders master the conversational environment so there is a co-creation of the organization. This co-creation in turn develops a sense of belonging and ownership, acknowledgement and responsibility necessary for excellence (Deetz, 2000; Gadamer, 1979; Zaffron, 2007).

In conversation, knowledge is not a fixed commodity. Gadamer (1979) described conversation as the process of people converging by opening their "horizons of understanding" to each other and thereby developing new viewpoints" (p.143). To open communication, however, is to risk having those in power use what is said against the speakers. Freire (1970) posited that "dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not want this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them" (p. 89). To overcome organizational hegemony or the appearance of it, trust and regard must be established and maintained (Burbules, 1993; Hoy, 2006). Conversation is a personal intention to connect to the power of others and in that connection, meaning is made. Conversations shift the focus from mandates to possibilities and acknowledge the views of others. Conversations take time, humility, trust, and genuine care for the person in the conversation (Block, 2008a; Freire, 1970).

Meaning making is about making sense of complexity and finding new understanding and solutions in the convergence of complicated issues. Making meaning must be done in relationship with others (Liston, 2001) and convergence does not happen in isolation. The biggest threat to leading and learning may be the over reliance on data, skills and reproducible measures for reporting and accountability purposes that drive out human interaction, the building of relationships and, therefore, conversation itself.

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Many of the things people want are attainable through social interdependence (Bandura, 2001). Before people can work together effectively relationships are formed that are based on trust and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Hoy, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2000). Trust and efficacy are developed in relationship with others. When a warm, friendly relationship exists among teachers and administrators there is more likely an exchange of necessary information, school resources, and improved perception of student ability (Ubben, 2006; Willie, 2000; Wolk, 2010). Warm and friendly relationships are built through getting to know each other, personally investing time in others.

Leading effectively is less about mastering skills than in fostering positive and genuine feelings for people (Goleman, 2009). Genuine feelings are developed through social interactions. Leaders who engage teachers in conversations that develop interpersonal connections are more likely to inspire others to be effective (Goleman, 2002; Hogg, 2005). Von Goethe observed, "Every man has enough power left to carry out that of which he is convinced." By inspiring others, there is renewed organizational energy. Leaders can use conversations to shift the focus from what isn't working to what may be possible (Buch, 2009). For example, Robyens (2006) claimed that creativity, imagination and critical thinking are minimized by the stark reality of standardized education. Conversation can rekindle creativity and offer a foundation for critical discourse (Brown, 2004; Robeyns, 2006). These principal-teacher interactions affect student outcomes.

Figure 2.1 illustrates how principal-teacher interactions affect teacher and student performance. Note the directionality of the influence of principal-teacher interactions on teacher instructional practices, which in turn affect student performance.

conversations • conferences • discussions • reflection of professional decisions	• perceptions of quality instructional practices • principal's understanding and perceptions of quality instructional practices • teacher efficacy	• Action research and time to share results • Reflections about results with students
Principal-Teacher Interactions	Teacher Instructional Practices	teacher to teacher conversations about teaching and schooling

Figure 2.1: The effects of Principal-Teacher Interactions on Teacher Instructional

Practices and on Student Performance

Principal-teacher conversations motivate and inspire so that school life becomes more meaningful and more authentic for both principal and teacher (Sergiovani, 1991). Ingredients of meaning and authenticity are trust and hope. Trust is the foundation for effective communication. Effective communication leads to respect, dignity and empowerment (Blase, 2008; Bryk, 2003; Combs, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

Communication is one of the central forces in education. It is the means by which differences are negotiated, experiences are shared and understood and meaning is shared. As the demands of accountability grew heavier for leaders and teachers, time spent simply conversing with one another became an infrequent luxury within the schoolhouse. Conversations were relegated to after-school social events. However, before a principal and teacher can have a meaningful, authentic discussion of instructional practices or student progress, the two must form a relational bond. Pask (1976) described conversation as the process of becoming informed about each other so that future activity would have meaning and worth. The educational theorist John Dewey claimed:

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Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative. To be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience. One shares in what another has thought and felt and in so far, meagerly or amply, has his own attitude modified. Nor is the one who communicates left unaffected. … Except in dealing with commonplaces and catch phrases one has to assimilate, imaginatively, something of another's experience in order to tell him intelligently of one's own experience. … It may fairly be said, therefore, that any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participate in it. (Dewey, 1916, p.9).

Educational conversation in recent times has been structured, topic-driven communication with a purpose of exchanging pre-determined information, usually presented by the leader of the conversation. Structured conversation is often meant to illicit responses to specific questions without any attempt at relationship building. While this kind of dialogue is important, it was Theodore Roosevelt who said, "No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care." Without learning about each other, it is difficult to discern care. Conversation is not the exchange of knowledge as much as it is becoming informed about each other (Scott, 2009). A conversation is a way to capture and share phenomena and a way of expressing abstractions. Learning is a continual conversation with others and with ourselves to test ideas, ask questions, collaborate with others and seek new connections in the external world (Sharples, 2010).

Leaders who intentionally engage teachers in deep, thought provoking conversations build trust, extend learning, solidify support and provide a common and safe ground for exploration of meaning. Since conversations occur in relationship with others and since learning is relational, it follows that conversations are a straight-forward way to enhance learning (Barnett, 2007; Beard, 2009; Block, 2008a; Freire, 1970; Hoy, 2003; Kouzes,

2007). More relationship-based leading, built upon interpersonal competence can inspire

others to be more effective(Goleman, 2009).

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

We all have a façade, a persona, a public self.
What the persona does is what the world sees,
but something very different may be happening deep inside,
where our private selves hide. The public self that we
choose to share generally bears little resemblance to the private self,
a self so private that even we ourselves may know it only slightly.
(Kets De Vries, 2007)

An Exploratory Phenomenography

This exploratory phenomenographic qualitative study focused on perceptions that

principals and teachers formed about each other through conversations and how those

perceptions may influence either the principal or teacher. Phenomenographic studies

concentrate on how participants experience a phenomenon and the variations in

perception of the phenomenon (Akerlind, 2005). This study focused on the perceptions

formed by each participant as they engaged in open-ended conversations over an eight-

week time period and how those perceptions influenced the will to learn and lead. This

exploratory work was an initial step into conversation as a way to unleash the power of

adult relationships in the school to transform the will to learn—leader learning, teacher

learning and student learning.

Phenomenography was developed by Marton and his colleagues to study the

qualitatively different ways that people can think about, conceptualize and experience the

world around them (Marton, 1986). The data collected from the participants in the study

were analyzed and sorted into specific categories of description as the primary research

outcomes (Akerlind, 2005; Marton, 1986). From the primary outcomes, additional

analyses and sorting occurred, comparisons were performed resulting in related themes

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(Akerlind, 2005; Barnard, 1999). Through this study the perceptions of three educators in each of five schools engaged in conversations with each other over an eight-week period were examined. Participant perceptions of the impact of conversation guided inquiry. Other categories of description emerged from data analysis.

Phenomenography is consistent with other kinds of qualitative research in that reality shifts with changes in people's perceptions; phenomenography is the study of perception (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006). Studying perceptions from an insider viewpoint, that is, through the participants, has integrity with qualitative research and is the purpose of a phenomenography (Barnard, 1999). This study was value bound since human beings attach value to experiences; the experience of open-ended conversations has value assigned to it by the participants. The orientation of the study was discovery from subjective data collected from the ever-changing data source—humans, under naturalistic conditions (Barnard, 1999). The raw data and the subsequent analysis and interpretation of that data will result in thick and rich descriptions which could serve as the foundation for subsequent studies.

Quantitative methods of inquiry continue to be widely accepted and commonly utilized to investigate phenomena. However, when a phenomena is difficult to quantify objectively, rich contextual methods provide good scholarship and authentic investigation (Marshall, 2006). The epistemological foundation for this investigation of human engagement as a practical means of improving leading and learning is grounded in the qualitative hermeneutic value of interpreting participant meaning within the context of the participants lived experience (Malhotra-Benz, 1998). Bandura (2001) viewed learning as socially dependent and socially motivated. From a social learning perspective

Bandura discussed human functioning as continuous and reciprocal. Hart (2004) cautioned that any approaches used to motivate and inspire be simple patterning his thought after Maslow (1999) who offered precursory support for this approach in his assertion that the most motivating and meaningful learning experiences are often single life experiences within the context of real conversation. This study examined conversation from a phenomenographic perspective as a means of improving adult and learning and as a tool of leadership.

Through culturally and historically specific engagement, qualitative investigation in general and critical investigation in particular reaches beyond objective description and pursues socially conscious and transformative change action (Malhotra-Benz, 1998). Critical qualitative investigation seeks shared understanding of truth and meaning through interpretation and constructive examination of participants' lived experience from their own words and observable behaviors (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).The aim of a phenomenographic study is to look for variation in how participants experience a phenomenon and how, through interpretation and analysis, meaning can be made (Akerlind, 2005).

Credibility in phenomenographic research is established by detailing the relationship between the data and categories of description suggested through data analysis. In this study, data was obtained from conversations and interviews and categories of description were labeled through iterative data analysis. Similarities and differences supported by the data from transcriptions and excerpts of conversations and interviews were categorized to determine key themes. Phenomenographic research credibility depends upon these categories of description being logical and probable

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(Dahlin, 1999). For this study, phenomenographic characteristics were used as category names which were determined through data analysis. Semi-structured questions asked during the mid-point and final interviews were asked to reveal participants' perceptions of conversation as a tool for improving leading and learning. Data analysis was iterative, that is, categories were developed and refined to be parsimonious capturing only critical variation in the data (Akerlind, 2005; Marton, 1997). Data was triangulated data through member checks, external review of the data, and the researcher's analysis of the data (Marshall, 2006).

Confirmability was established through examination of raw data which included participant reflections of conversations, transcripts from audio tapes interviews, and researcher field notes from the interviews. The data was analyzed and interpreted by the researcher then reviewed by external auditors (Lincoln, 1985). The purpose was not to confirm whether participants' perceptions were accurate but rather to ensure that research findings accurately reflected those perceptions and whether any significant variations of those perceptions have been defined (Walker, 1998).

Table 3.1 summarizes the ontology, epistemology, and hermeneutics that directed this qualitative exploration of conversation in leading and learning in education. Table 3.2 summarizes the methodology and method in this study.

Table 3.1: Summary of Context, Explanation and Relevance: Ontology, Epistemology, and Hermeneutics

Context	Explanation	Relevance
Ontological Beliefs	Truth exists as a socio-cultural, empirical whole, not as isolated facts; truth is emergent, individually and socially situated; truth is teleological	Exploration of human thoughts and emotion through experiencing a phenomenon is true to this belief construct
Epistemology	Transformative, constructivist, Dialectical	Exploration of conversation as a tool in leading and learning is useful, relationship-based, interpersonal and communicative
Hermeneutics	Interpretive, Process driven, communicative	Use of phenomenography embraces interpretation, iterative processes, and perception while conversation is communicative

Table 3.2 : Summary of Context, Explanation and Relevance: Methodology and Method

Context	Explanation	Relevance
Methodology	Dialectical, transactional, emic, contextual, interpretive, transformative	Conversation analysis is used to determine the participant's voice, participant values exposed, intrinsic, reflexive
Method	Qualitative, exploratory design; conversations, interviews, analysis of data for descriptive categories	Analysis of data to determine the usefulness of conversation as a tool in leading and learning is exploratory, innovative and designed to produce exploratory results

Table 3.3 summarizes the participants, procedure and data analysis used in this qualitative exploration of conversation in leading and learning in education.

Table 3.3: Summary of Participants, Procedure and Data Analysis

Context	Explanation	Relevance
Participants	Purposeful sample; 15 participants (five principals and 10 teachers in 5 separate elementary schools)	Exploratory phenomenography involves a small number of participants; method produces large amount of data
Procedure	Unstructured conversations among participants; semi-structured interviews with individual participants; data collection and analysis with external review; descriptive categories (parsimonious); summary	Conversations allow participants to experience the phenomena; interviews allow researcher to gather participant perceptions and reflections; data analysis allows for the formation of descriptive categories to guide further study; summary is a rich description that can be further investigated for trustworthiness
Data Analysis	Interviews; verbatim-interpretive narratives; coded themes and patterns; descriptive categories	Data analyzed in keeping with phenomenographic study

<u>Questions to be Answered in this Study</u>

1.   What are principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a method of meaning-making?

2.   What are the principal/teacher perceptions of the importance of principal-teacher conversations?

3.   Were conditions uncovered during the conversations that facilitate a transition from one way of thinking to a qualitatively better perception of reality?

4.   What are the principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a way to discover/build the will to lead and learn?

<u>Research Design</u>

        This was a qualitative, exploratory study, employing phenomenography as the

research approach, that contributed to the understanding of conversations as a means of

developing leader efficacy, enhancing leader and learner will and leader/learner

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productivity. A purposeful sampling of five paired elementary school principals and teachers were selected to participate in an eight-week study where each pair engaged in four conversations ranging in length from fifteen to sixty minutes. Participants were oriented to the study prior to engaging in the conversations (Phase One) and were interviewed at the mid-point after two or more conversations (Phase Two) and at the conclusion of four or more conversations (Phase Three). Interview questions were opne-ended, semi-structured and allowed for follow-on questions (Appendix B).

All data from the orientation and interviews were analyzed, grouped into categories where the similarities and differences among the groups were described. In this study a category is described as a set of ideas that are grouped together because of common characteristics. A theme is a distinct, recurring and unifying quality or idea that emerges from analysis of categories and relationships. The analyses were iterative and allowed development of categories of description, relational examination, and classification. Stories and quotations from the interviews provided a crystallized understanding of participant perspectives and a thick and rich description. The relationship among the categories was detailed using illustrations where appropriate.

Purposeful sampling methodology, defined by Patton (1987) as identifying and selecting information-rich participants who can contribute to a meaningful understanding about issues of central importance to the purpose of an investigation, was employed in this qualitative investigation for three reasons: 1) to enhance research credibility through what Patton described as investigative validation that incorporates alternative explanations and comparative analysis; 2) to enhance research authenticity which was linked by Lincoln and Guba (2000) to a balanced perspective that raises awareness levels

and promotes action; and 3) to enhance investigator reflexivity and the essential

pondering and reflection.

<center>Participants</center>

In phenomenographic studies a coherent purpose, from initial planning through

data presentation, is needed to develop a comprehensible focus around people's

perceptions. Participants were selected to yield variation in experiences but still maintain

the purpose of the study. Working with central office administrators in a large,

southwestern, urban district, five elementary school principals were selected. The

primary supervisor for elementary principals identified only those principals whose

performance was satisfactory based upon the district's performance standards. From

those principals, ten were selected for inclusion in the project. Five accepted

participation in the study. The researcher met with the five principals to describe the

scope of the study.

Each of the five principals represented different degrees of experience. One of the

five principals was within her first two years as principal and one principal was opening a

new school with a staff newly formed for that school. Another principal had just been

transferred to an existing school within the school year. One of the five principals retired

at the conclusion of the 2009-10 school year and the last principal had been an

administrator in three other districts with a combined service of over thirty years.

Each principal identified teachers from the school who demonstrated satisfactory

performance and then selected two teachers from those identified with the following

criteria: one of the two teachers was relatively well known to the principal or someone

with whom the principal had established a positive working relationship, while the other

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teacher was one the principal was relatively unfamiliar with or with whom no positive

working relationship had been established. Principals made the final decisions regarding

the two teachers with whom to converse. The total number of participants in the study

was fifteen, five elementary principals and ten elementary teachers.   No other participant

variation was included so the exploration of conversation as a means of improving

leading and learning was not complicated by multiple variables. Keeping the sample

small was consistent with phenomenographic studies and with exploratory studies; this

study was both. (Booth, 1997; Bowden, 2005; Creswell, 2007).

In an exploratory study, a researcher examines a little-understood phenomenon to

identify or discover themes or patterns that can be arranged into categories of meaning

and explore how these resultant categories are linked together. Data were generated

through pre-conversation discussions, four conversations per pair, and interviews. The

data produced was extensive and the analysis process labor-intensive, requiring

reflection, iteration, and development of deep narratives (Creswell, 2005; Marshall, 2006;

Martin, 1986; Martin & Booth, 1997).

<center>Data Collection</center>

Data collection occurred in three phases. Phase one, the initial phase, included

scheduling participant participation in the study and orienting them to the study's

requirements. This phase also included the initial, audio-taped interview. Phase two

included an audio-taped mid-point interview with all participants. Phase three included

the final audio-taped interview with twelve of the fifteen participants. One schools' three

participants did not attend the final interview that was pre-arranged and scheduled. Three

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additional attempts were made to schedule the final interview but no schedule was secured.

After collection of data, transcription of audio-taped interviews, and reading of transcripts, the researcher analyzed the collected data. Table 3.4 shows the relationship among research phases of data collection and analysis, kind of data collected, and the research questions in phases one through three.

After the researcher discussed the study, participants' willingness to participate was secured and informed consent documents signed. Protection of confidentiality and additional study information was provided (Appendix C). A possible timeline for four conversations to be conducted between each teacher and the respective principal was established as well as a time scheduled for mid-point interviews. All interviews were audio-taped and transcripts were provided to the participants for member-check.

Conversations were to be a minimum of fifteen minutes long, however, participants reported conversation duration of between thirty and sixty minutes per conversation. After each principal-teacher pair had concluded two conversations, interviews were conducted with each participant resulting in an audio taped interview and transcript. The purpose of this mid-point interview was to check in on each pair, determine the approximate length of the first interviews and gather impressions and perceptions that had formed early in the conversation process. The final phase was used to complete the final interview at the conclusion of all conversations. Again, participants were provided transcripts of the interviews.

Table 3.4: Research Question Matrix

Phases	Kind of Data Collected	Time	Research Questions
Phase 1 Orientation	Orientation to the study Initial interview Participants' questions with answers Discussion of study with follow-up participant questions	Prior to beginning the study No conversations had been held 3/2010	What are principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a method of meaning-making?
Phase 2 Mid-Point	Mid-Point interview with all participants	Two or more conversations had been held among participants Four weeks after initial interview 4/2010	What are principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a method of meaning-making? What are principal/teacher perceptions of the importance of principal-teacher conversations? What are the principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a way to discover/build the Will to lead and learn?
Phase 3 Final	Final interview conducted with all participants at the conclusion of at all conversations	All conversations for the study had been completed. 5/2010 During weeks 9-12, final interviews were conducted and audio-taped. 5/2010	What are principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a method of meaning-making? Were conditions uncovered during the conversations that facilitate a transition from one way of thinking to a qualitatively better perception of reality?

Qualitative researchers use interviews that are similar to purposeful conversations and are used to reveal participants' perspectives (Marshall, 2006). In phenomenographic research the aim of an interview is to have participant account the experience in such a way that the researcher and participant mutually understand the meaning of the experience (Akerlind, 2005; Booth, 1997; Marton, 1986). After the interview, participants were provided transcripts of the interview and given the opportunity to clarify or modify any of their comments (Marshall, 2006; Spradley, 1980).

Participant Disclosure, Consent, and Confidentiality

The purpose of this investigation was explained during the initial phase conducted with participants and was reinforced with a cover letter sent to each participant prior to beginning the conversations (Appendix D).

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Data collected from the initial interview, the mid-point interview and the final interview were audio taped, transcribed, analyzed in an iterative way, and then presented in categories of description. The first category of description is a relational category. The name of this category stemmed from one characteristic of phenomenographic research (Martin, 1986; Merleau-Ponty, 2005) and was suggested by the external reviewer as a descriptive term for the relationship among the participants at each of the five elementary school sites as well as participants' relationship to conversation. The key term, relational, provided a logical link to the findings. Relationship to conversation provided findings for the first research question, *what are principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a method of meaning-making?* The second category of description, Experiential Category of Description, includes participant experiences related to the

conversations. The findings related to research question 2, *what are the principal/teacher perceptions of the importance of principal-teacher conversations?* The third category, Content-Orientation Category of Description includes an analysis of how well the participants related to the idea of conversation. The third research question, *were conditions uncovered during the conversations that facilitate a transition from one way of thinking to a qualitatively better perception of reality,* provided the framework for this category. Participants' relationship to conversation was analyzed to determine if there had been changes in their perceptions or changes in the way they may perform at school. The fourth category is Evocative Category of Description and includes question four, *What are the principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a way to discover/build the Will to lead and learn?* This category also includes participants' relationship to conversation and time.

Phenomenographic research includes an accounting of the process and the information provides a thick and rich description (Barnard, 1999). This was accomplished by providing two sets of stories taken from the transcriptions of the interviews. The first set is included in the Experiential Category of Description and are referred to throughout the analysis. The second set of stories is redacted accounts for each of the fifteen participants. This set is included in Content-Orientation Category of Description as was used to identify principal and teacher transformation as related conversation. These stories were also used in the fourth category, Evocative Category of Description, to develop the analysis of time. Data from the transcripts has been read, sorted, re-read, compared, evaluated and re-organized to produce the findings.

Additional patterns that were revealed along with researcher perceptions and discussion are included in Chapter 5.

Cross-classification of the transcript data was included to display the relationship of the conversation data to ontology, epistemology and hermeneutics. This was done to ground the work in the philosophical definitions provided in Chapter 3. The philosophical framework provided cohesion for the discussion to follow. Variations in perceptions that emerged through analysis and re-analysis of data allowed for a wide exploration of conversation as a tool of learning (Baker, 2002).

Some of the audio recordings of each in-depth interview were transcribed by a confidentiality-bound external transcriber and the rest by the investigator. These transcriptions were reviewed and confirmed as accurate by the research investigator before being returned to the participants for their confirmation. No revisions were made any participant. In total, 25 transcripts were produced from 45 interviews since, in some cases, participants chose to complete an interview as a group. The verbatim-interpretive interview narratives used in final data analysis were written by the research investigator. Interview narratives and any field notes were inductively analyzed to identify categories and themes that emerged from the data analysis. Interpretive analysis often creates conclusions that are tentative or inconclusive leading to multiple viewpoints and perspectives to be answered or investigated in later studies (Creswell, 2007; Marshall, 2006).

Using inductive content analysis produced tentative categories. Those categories were used to guide re-analysis of the data and were used by an external reviewer. Once the final categories of description were suggested by the investigator, an external assessor

reviewed the final analysis for cohesiveness, congruence and to suggest any variations. External review helps establish validity and may offer another perspective from a non-participant view (Malhotra-Benz, 1998; Marshall, 2006; Marton, 1986). The final categories of description, themes and summary analysis are reported in chapter five. Suggestions and recommendations related to human development theory, transformative educational action and further study of conversation as a tool to enhance leading and learning are included in chapter six.

As a retired public school administrator passionately committed to building and strengthening public education, the researcher leading this investigation held to the primary purpose for this inquiry which was to generate an in-depth understanding about the perceived importance of conversation in public education. A secondary purpose for pursuing this investigation was to offer the understanding coming out of this inquiry as a guiding resource for educators, educational leaders, and policy makers. This dual purpose was driven by a belief that a deeper understanding of human development in education would promote the development of policy and practice that addresses human development and human actualization in public education as these concepts relate to student achievement and educational and social equity and accountability.

Trustworthiness is an essential component of qualitative research and involves establishing credibility or confidence in the findings, determining dependability by displaying consistent findings, substantiating confirmability by using participants' quotations and voice, and by showing applicability of the findings to other contexts, or transferability (Lincoln, 1985). Peer debriefing and member-checking were used to establish credibility and external auditing was used to determine dependability.

Confirmability was substantiated through reflexive thinking since a researcher's background and position will affect any research and by attending systematically to the context and content of the study and by using external reviews researcher bias in minimized (Malterud, 2001).

Measuring perception of the imprecise and nebulous aspects of human development and human actualization in public education presents an epistemological dilemma. In this study, where the perception of a phenomenon is difficult to quantify, the rich contextual methods of qualitative research bring about good scholarship and in terms of moral investigation. The qualitative methodology that was employed in this investigation of human development in education was described for the purpose of clarification and to promote a reliable replication of this investigation.

Interview narratives were analyzed for content to identify patterns and categories that emerged from the data. Stories from the interview narratives were selected as examples. Inductive analysis was used for the purpose of producing interpretations from the content data. This interpretive research was concerned also with developing hypotheses through initial exploration. Therefore, the analysis was conducted as a means of producing hypotheses for later investigation as well as exploration of the research questions posed in this study.

Content/Theme Analysis

Data were analyzed to find relationships among the participants, their perceptions of conversation, and the research questions . This was accomplished by pawing through the narratives for key phrases that indicated some relationship to conversation or to the experience of conversing with another educator (principal-teacher

conversations). By handling the narratives multiple times, patterns were formulated

through what Bernard (2000) referred to as ocular scan.

Relational Analysis

Relational analysis is analysis that explored the relationships between and among

the concepts identified. This type of analysis was used to identify and display the

Relational Category of Description. Relational analysis was also applied to the cross-

classification of philosophical constructs, namely ontology, epistemology and

hermeneutics.

Abductive Analysis

Denzin (1978) explained abduction in qualitative analysis as a combination of

inductive and deductive thinking to create possible consequences. Recognizing and

valuing the experiences of individuals is a key component of adult educational practices.

Reframing the experience of the principal, the relationship to conversation, the

knowledge and use of conversation and the individual experiences with conversation

allowed for sense-making and possible explanations.

Noema and Noesis

Husserl's transcendental notions as ascribed to phenomenology include the

concept of intentionality. Intentionality refers to an internal experience of something.

The conscious act of experiencing something and the internal experience of the object

itself is intentional (Moran, 2000). This has to do with a person's focus on a particular

phenomenon. Noema refers to the perception of an object or phenomenon a person holds

intentionally. Noesis refers to the meaning one ascribes to that perception. In this study,

then noema and noesis refers to the perception and meaning of conversation held by each participant.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

> Ah, not to be cut off, not through the slightest partition
> shut out from the law of the stars. The inner—what is it?
> If not intensified sky, hurled through with birds and deep
> with the winds of homecoming.
> Rainer Maria Rilke, "Ah, Not to be Cut Off"

This study explored perceptions of the use of conversation as a tool for leading

and learning. The approach to this study was developmental phenomenography in that it

examined a sustainable process, conversation, and the way practitioners experience that

process in order to better inform current practice (Bowden, 2005). Conversation is a

phenomenon; this study sought to display perceptions of that phenomenon, hence a

phenomenography. Martin and Booth (1997) explained that knowledge is created

between persons and their relationship to the world, creating the world that is

experienced.

Studying conversations directly would investigate an aspect of the world; this

investigation sought to describe the collective experience of the participants with

conversation. This chapter is organized first to provide detailed description of the

participants and how the participant teachers were selected. Following participant

description, the findings are displayed in four Categories of Description and one cross-

classification. The categories include each of the four research questions. The cross-

classification includes the philosophical framework for this study.

Epoche

Moustkas (1994) discussed the importance of approaching phenomenological

efforts as free of prejudgment, preconceptions and beliefs as possible. The same holds

true for phenomenographic studies. This is known as the epoche process (p.22). The researcher used disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgment, preconception and beliefs without clouding the dynamics that underlay interpretive analysis. The researcher also embraced Husserl's notion that all knowledge is based on discovering the meaning of phenomena within one's own reflections, intuition and consideration. To that end, the researcher remained as free of prejudgment as possible without total disengagement from the interpretive process.

Investigator Disclosure

The researcher in this study retired as an assistant area superintendent from the sample district after thirty-two years in education. Because that tenure included supervision of 132 district schools, the researcher had prior acquaintance with some of the participants in this study. The researcher supervised the principals at Barryhill and Darwin Heights (pseudonyms used throughout). The researcher was also acquainted with one of the teachers at Sherwood through school visits and principal supervision at that school from 1988-1994. The researcher had no direct acquaintance with any of the other teachers.

Relational Category of Description

Relational categories are those bound by the relationship between two entities. For example, to be a bridge, relationship exists between that structure and whatever it is connecting, say, a road. Relational categories are often overlooked in research in favor of categories that display similarity among members. Medina and his colleagues (1997) argued that all categories are not of equal weight or uniform in character and those variations within categories support qualitative research. This category of description for

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the study looks at the relationship among the participants at each school and the relationship between participants and the importance of conversation.

A large, urban school district situated in a western state in the United States was selected as the sample district for this investigation. This large district is divided into geographic areas that include elementary, secondary and alternative schools. One of these areas was the setting for this investigation. This area was selected because the area superintendent had an interest in the study and volunteered to allow the investigation to take place within the area. Only elementary schools were targeted for possible inclusion. The variation occurred in the years of experience each participant had and for principals, the number of years at the current school location.

Principal Participants

Table s 4.1 and 4.2 display experience as a principal of each of the five principals in the study. Each of the five principals occupies a unique position, that is, different from the other principal participants. The difference in the years of experience along with their tenure at the five elementary sites was considered in relation to their knowledge of the teachers at the site, their ability to develop relationships with the teachers, and any unique information that developed as a result of their experience and/or tenure.

Table 4.1: Experience and Tenure of 2 Principals and Relationship to Study

Schools (Pseudonyms)	Principal Experience	Tenure Unique Position	Relationship to Study
Barryhill	More than twelve years; Principal at two sites	Retiring 2011 Has been at Barryhill for six years	Principal showed early interest in conversation; Principal used conversation as a way to develop good information for the incoming principal
Riverwalk	Six years Principal at three sites including Riverwalk	Opening new elementary school 2011 Riverwalk slated to open 2011-12 school year	Principal uses informal conversations now; Principal used conversation as a way to unite his new staff and as a way to develop relationships with teachers new to Principal Plans to move from informal to intentional conversations

Table 4.2: Experience and Tenure of 3 Principals and Relationship to Study

Schools (Pseudonyms)	Principal Experience	Tenure Unique Position	Relationship to Study
Mission	More than fifteen years; some experience outside of district	In current school more than five years; Plans to retire in 4-5 years	Volunteered for study because he thought it would help the area, district and the investigator Had no intention of using conversation for any of the research reasons
Sherwood	Two years as principal; Both at current site	Beginning second year in current school	Was excited about the idea of learning to use conversation; Had some teachers with whom better relationships needed to be developed; Hopes that conversations can become part of relationship building with more teachers in the 2011-12 school year
Darwin Heights	More than eight years as principal	New to current school; Appointed 3/10 to finish the school year; Principal was selected for Darwin Heights by the area superintendent to replace principal going to Riverwalk	Professes that conversation is difficult for him; Using the Balanced Leadership Framework Principal identified informal communication as a weakness for him Did not indicate use of conversation after the study

Teacher Participants

　　Each of the five principals selected for inclusion in the study then selected two

teachers from his or her school to participate. The total number of teacher participants

for this investigation was ten bringing the total number of participants to fifteen. While

the directions were to choose one teacher known by the principal and a second teacher

less known by the principal, the resultant selections varied from each other. Tables 4.3

and 4.4 show the relationship of the teachers to the study.

Table 4.3: Principal Selection of Teachers at Barryhill and Riverwalk

School (Pseudonym)	Teacher 1 (Pseudonym)	Teacher 2 (Pseudonym
Barryhill	Bernie—Worked with principal for 5 years; More than 10 years teaching　　Selected because principal has worked with Bernie for five years	Beth—New to school 2010; Been at current site less than 1 year; Two years teaching　　Selected because Bernie is not known by principal; Principal wants to provide exit information to incoming principal
Riverwalk	Roy—Been working with principal for four years; 7 years teaching; Teacher returning to classroom from assistant principal position because of budget cuts　　Selected because he has been responsible for testing and data coordination in previous school and has worked closely with principal in establishing procedures for new school	Rosa—Second year of teaching; both years with current principal　　Selected because teacher has unique background, has demonstrated willingness to work within the existing culture and is eager to be a great teacher; Principal wants to get to know teacher better

Table 4.4: Principal Selection of Teachers at Mission, Sherwood &Darwin Heights

School (Pseudonym)	Teacher 1 (Pseudonym)	Teacher 2 (Pseudonym
Mission	Melanie—Been working with principal for seven years at two separate locations; 14 years teaching; Followed principal to new elementary school when it opened six years ago Principal selected teacher because teacher is well known and trusted by principal	Mandy--In first year of teaching; Substituted for a year in the district awaiting licensure Principal selected teacher because principal wants to get to know teacher better and expresses some early concerns about teaching skills
Sherwood	Shawn—Been at current school for more than 20 years; 28 years teaching Selected because principal identified relationship between them as contentious; knows teacher but has not developed a positive working relationship	Sherrie—Been at current school for 4 years under two principals Selected because teacher has worked closely with principal on projects, procedures and on establishing a culture of collaboration; Would like to get to know her better
Darwin Heights	Dawn—Been at current school for 3 years; 10 years in teaching Principal has been at school for less than a month so everyone is new; selected because she introduced herself to him and volunteered to work on committees	Diane—Been at current school for 3 years under two principals Principal selected her because she is a specialist; he does not know her

The years of participant experience in this study range from less than one year at

the current location to more than 20 years at the current location. The teachers known to

their principals have no remarkable similarities. The only uniting similarity is that they are all considered better known by their principals. Less similarity exists among the unknown teachers in that some are actually known by the principal just to a lesser degree than the teacher selected in the known category. Principal of Sherwood used conversation as a way to repair a relationship. While this was outside of the expected means of teacher selection, it fell within the description given by the investigator. A follow up question from the Sherwood principal asked if choosing a known teacher with whom she had a contentious relationship was allowable. This variance, therefore, was known to the investigator.

<div align="center">Composite Textural-Structural Description</div>

The researcher used four redacted interview stories to construct a composite of participants' perceptions regarding the importance of conversation. Mission School participants are separated into two sections comprising one story. General analysis revealed that most participants began and ended with positive perceptions of the importance of conversation. Only one participant remained skeptical; he expressed perceived usefulness of conversation but would be unlikely to use it. He referred to time constraints within the school day and the lack of academic information gleaned from such an extraneous exercise. The four stories selected represent the greatest variation among all fifteen participant stories.

Table 4.5 offers a visual display of the variation. Analysis related to the first research question, *What are principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a method of meaning-making,* follows the stories.

Table 4.5: Variation among Sample Stories

Story Characters	Uniqueness	Comments about Principals
Diane	Career change; Principal is leaving to open a new school; She is close to the leaving principal but is staying at the current location because of money and because she likes the incoming principal	Diane's principal, Dick was at Darwin Heights for a month before the study began. Reggie was the former principal. Dick has been principal in one other elementary school
Reggie	He is the principal who is opening a new school; He is very receptive to conversation and was the most open of all participants to the study	Reggie has held a central office position as well as been principal at two schools prior to opening Riverwalk, a new elementary school
Sarah, Shawn and Sherrie	Sarah is a new principal in her first assignment; She is in the second year at the school; She preferred to hold the mid-point and final interviews first as a group; She was using conversations to build good will	Sarah is the least experienced of all principals in the study
Marshall	He has been the principal at the current site for seven years; He was the most skeptical about the usefulness of conversation as a tool; He declared he did not see the benefit of conversation; He talked the longest of any participant during the initial and mid-point interviews	Marshall is the veteran administrator of all participants; He has four or five years before retirement
Melanie and Mandy	Teachers are included because none of the participants from Mission completed a final interview	

<u>Stories</u>

To illustrate the general content of the interviews and to illustrate human interaction germane to the research questions, four stories are presented. Pseudonyms are used throughout the stories; all places have been changed. Quotations are taken from transcripts of interviews. The story told by each participant was summarized without losing the original context. These particular stories were selected from the 15 participants because they illustrate uniqueness and capture the essence of all interviews.

Darwin Heights Teacher, Diane

Teaching is a second career for me. I am in my thirties and have worked with special needs people for the last twelve years. I got a two-year degree and an occupational therapist license from the University of Jacksonville and worked as an occupational therapist with adults for several years and finished a four-year degree. Then I worked basically as a social worker for a few years. I worked for a non-profit agency while I finished my master's at a private college in Alabama. I got my MA in teaching but I could not find a job in Jacksonville or in Montgomery where Obregon University is located. "The schools pay very good money and it's very secure and stuff like that. And they (teachers) are all my mom's age, well most of them. So they should be dying out. They should be retiring." I would like to go back to Alabama; I have family there. I would like to stay in teaching though. Even though my background is with special needs, I have worked for the past three years with typical kids. "When the light bulb goes on with them it's amazing. They get the topics and the skills. Because I'm used to working with autistic and severely mentally retarded kids I would like to be in special education eventually. Besides it makes me more marketable." I have taught first through third

grades during these past three years, all here at Darwin Heights. When our previous

principal left to open a new school, I thought about going with him, but the incoming

principal, Dick, is nice and besides, there is extra money here for me through after-school

tutoring. I won't lose contact with our leaving principal because I babysit his kids

sometimes; he and Dick are alike in many ways so I decided for financial reasons to stay

put. (Researcher asked: Have you had a couple of conversations with your principal

since the orientation meeting we had two months ago?) "I have had a few actually. I am

on the school improvement committee so I have had opportunities to talk personally and

professionally. He picked a good person in me to be on that committee. I went right up

to him and introduced myself and told him I was glad he was here. So far we have

developed a great rapport. I actually think I have talked with him more than (leaving

principal). I kind of view it like I need a strong rapport. Like, I have told him about my

divorce things and (leaving principal) knew some of the stuff, too, but I thought it was

important for him to know about me." I talk with colleagues about work, school and

home, but it is still important for me to have a good relationship with my boss, too. If I

ever had a boss who didn't want to know about me personally, "…I'd be a little put out.

I would probably start looking for another school to work at because they need to know

what's going on and care." I guess if it was all business with the principal I could get by

because of the kids; they do care. Maybe I could just brush off the treatment and not take

it to heart, but "I know if your boss is not treating you well, not caring about you as a

person, it will affect you, you know. Being treated personally is important; it makes a

difference."

At the conclusion of the study I re-interviewed participants. Diane was only available for a short amount of time, but I still was able to hear her thoughts regarding conversations with her new principal. Her position had not changed since the mid-course interview but I did detect a change in her feelings about leaving the district.

(Researcher: "Diane, it is good to see you again. Now that you have completed some additional conversations, do you think that conducting conversations between principal and teacher are useful? Important?")

Dick and I have talked a lot since the last time you were here. He and I have worked through some school improvement issues and I have been able to tell him more about my desire to teach special education. I think we are on the same page now; it has really made this year go well. (Researcher: Are you considering going back to school to pick up special education classes?") I don't really know what I need; I mean, I have a 4-year degree and my master's so it might be just a few classes I need. I don't really know. I did look at (local) University to see what they offer; I might take some summer classes. I will be teaching first grade again next year so it won't be as hard since I will be returning to the same grade level I have taught for two years already. "I think I would like to stay with the younger kids for a few more years before going into special education. Then maybe I can take classes in the summers for the next five years or so." (Researcher: So would you take all the classes here at (local) university or would you take some in Alabama?") "Oh, probably here. I am probably going to stick around for a while, longer than I expected. It is working out here and I really love working for Dick. He makes me feel valued."

Riverwalk Principal, Reggie

This principal was supervised by the researcher when he was an assistant principal. My supervision was indirect since my main role was supervision of the principal and support for the school's programs and practices. Since Reggie was part of the school, I interacted with him on occasion. I have known him since he was a teacher in the district, then assistant principal and now principal. My relationship with this participant is as an acquaintance.

(Researcher: Reggie, this study is about conversations and how those conversations may be perceived by the participants). "Oh, good, so you are trying to reintroduce the idea that people are important and human!" As you indicated, you are looking at perceptions; I think that is really all that counts anyway. (Researcher: We are looking at conversation to see if it may be a good framework for leading and learning). I think you may be onto something; the idea of slowing down long enough to talk to each other is a great idea. "There was a gentleman who jumped on his motorcycle with his two kids last week. His son ended up dying. They were just riding around the block when a car pulled in front of them. It reminds me of just how fragile everything really is; it's important to take the time to get to know the people around you." (Researcher explained study participation to Reggie). "Hmm, it sounds kind of like the stuff I do already." I catch people here and there and ask about family or what they did over the weekend, stuff like that. It gives me that connection, that personal touch. I think it's important.

After two months, I returned to talk with Reggie about how the conversations with his teachers were progressing. (Researcher: I learned from one participant that she

worked in Washington D.C. with a senator. She was a press writer). Yes, she has great writing ability. During one conversation we talked about Washington and about how she was introduced to Teach for America. She just finished her master's degree at (local) university. She is proud and so is her dad. She told me about her parents' divorce when she was younger and how she is looking forward to getting to know her mom's side of the family better. (Researcher: "Do you think that personal connection makes a difference professionally?) "To me, absolutely, without a doubt. Knowing that you're human in important. It is like the relationship I have with (my boss). I never feel uncomfortable asking a question, asking about her husband or kids. It makes the workplace less like work and more like a career." (Researcher: "Do you think that when you know personal things about an employee, it causes you to cut that person slack when perhaps you shouldn't?" No, I don't think I can. I have to treat people fairly. However, the more I know about each person, the more I may be able to find solutions that are appropriate for the circumstance. For example, if a teacher who had missed seven out of twelve Fridays asks for a personal leave day and doesn't give the required amount of lead time, I may be more reluctant to grant the day than I would to a teacher with near perfect attendance. By the same token if I know a teacher has a sick baby and calls to say she is going to be five minutes late a couple of times, I would not be likely to confer with her about contract hours. I might have that discussion with a teacher who is late twice without calling and for no apparent reason. (Researcher: So how is it you might know about the sick baby and not know about the reason for the other teacher's tardiness?) "Hmm, good question. I have conversations about stuff outside of school with many of my staff members, informally, catch them in the hall or on the way to their cars if I

happen to be out there. So, the conversations have been frequent but not uniform. I mean, I probably have talked with some teachers many times and others very little. Participating in your study has made me look at how important conversations are and to hold them intentionally rather than informally." I have learned that building relationships with others through conversations does not give you similar relationships; I still have teachers that I have closer personal bonds with than others. But, conversations do give you the chance to build a relationship of some kind. "That's important; that's human."

Sherwood Teachers, Shawn and Sherrie
Sherwood Principal, Sarah

Two teachers, very different from each other in experience, have worked together in the same grade level for two years. Shawn has been at Sherwood for over twenty years and has seen principals come and go. He was very close to the second principal at Sherwood, three principals ago. This researcher met him as I supervised the school during the time of the second principal. He and Sherrie preferred to meet together along with the principal for the mid-course interview. (Researcher: How have the conversations been progressing for you?) Sherrie—We have had two conversations so far and they have been really good. "It is just kind of nice to be able to come in and take a load off and explain how I'm feeling or what I'm going through and been so busy that sometimes it's hard to make it in here and that's what, to me, your study is about— finding time to have those conversations. Even when it is hard you have to make time. Some days I come to school and have so much to do I don't want to talk to anybody. But then, by the end of the day, I am about to go insane because I really need some conversation. I need to talk."

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Shawn—Yes, adult conversation

Sherrie—Yes, you are so right. It is important to touch base with other teachers and with my principal every day. It is so nice to know I can go into Sarah and we can talk about pretty much anything. I know time is sometimes hard.

Principal Sarah—"I am having as much of a hard time with time as they are but at the same time I find it a must at this point, especially for someone like me coming in new this year. You get to learn your teachers on a professional level but I think if you really want to understand their philosophies and their passion, I have two very passionate teachers sitting in front of me, and by talking with them, on a personal level, I understand where they are coming from, what makes them tick, and Shawn, why is that? What did we say?"

Shawn—"The dynamics!"

Principal Sarah—Shawn has a passion for special needs kids because of a family member's needs and Sherrie understands that not all kids learn at the same time from her work in a small, rural setting. I knew before we started this study that it was important to get to know teachers on a more personal level and we had chit-chatted…

Shawn, interrupting—"Yes, we had chit-chatted but not like…"

Principal Sarah, interrupting—"…but I had never carved out time to actually sit down and really get to know teachers."

Sherrie—I had been into see Sarah many times and we had talked about a lot of things, but now, I don't worry as much about the time because I realize how valuable it has been for both of us. "And I really appreciate that because I feel like anytime I need something or even just a quick hello, she is receptive, friendly and open."

Shawn—The dynamics in education have changed so much. It is not as relaxed and friendly as it was twenty years ago. We just don't have the freedom to be cordial…

Sherrie—Or maybe it is not allowed, but it should be.

Shawn—You are right, not allowed.

(Researcher—"So, would you say that conversations as a tool of leading and learning is something worth pursuing? Is it something that would be worthwhile in our current educational dynamics?")

All responded at the same time—"Absolutely!" "Hands down." "Without question."

(Researcher—If you had the opportunity to buy a house that increased your drive by 25 minutes, would you look for a school closer to home?)

Shawn—"I drive more than 25 minutes now, so that wouldn't change anything for me. It's not the drive; it's the dynamics."

Sherrie—I would stay here because now that I know people and now that Sarah and I have bonded I would have more of a desire to stay and do my job right because I don't want to let her down."

Later, I had time to spend with each participant individually beginning with Shawn.

I was saying earlier that school has really changed. "When I started out you could make mistakes and there was nobody standing behind you to point out the mistake. If you faltered, well you faltered. You learned from your mistakes, picked up the pieces…but, by the same token, there wasn't anybody faulting you for your every move. There wasn't the pressure there is now. It has become mechanical rather than personable." (Researcher: Does conversation help?) It does. When this year started

Sarah and I had a difficult go of it; I was not comfortable with her and I don't think she liked my style much. But, as we have been talking, "I can see a change in both of us. She is more open to hearing about what I do and how I do it and I can see her point of view better now. It has eased the tension."

(Researcher—So where do you think you go from here?) "Oh, I think we just keep talking, opening the doors, learn more."

Sherrie and I had time together.

(Researcher—So Sherrie, what intrigues you about teaching?) "I just love it here. This is my third year here and every year I realize more why I teach. There are ten things during that day that just crack me up; kids are so much fun. It is amazing. It is really, really hard, but I think teachers have it good right now with all the tools and materials we have to use with our kids." I was thinking the other day that Shawn and I are not much different in that we both like to do our own thing, but we both like to be recognized for our work and our contribution. Maybe I need it more for validation than Shawn does, but still, we like the interaction. "It makes me feel comfortable and definitely like I am in the right place at the right time."

I ended this interview session by talking with Principal Sarah.

Sarah—I was an assistant principal until about a year ago when I was able to come here as principal mid-year. "I wanted to come here very much." Now I realize how big this job is, that we don't do it alone and that the more we know about each other's strengths, the more help we have. "I am looking forward to having more conversations." (Researcher—"Do you think you will build conversations into your schedule for next year?") I really see the value. Shawn and I got off to a really rocky

start. I had considered formal supervision that might have lead to discipline because he was so removed from others, so unwilling to cooperate and just so sure he was right all the time. "But after we started to talk, and our first two conversations lasted well over an hour each, I began to really understand his point. I value his experience and I think I was simply overlooking him before. I want to do more and I want to include more teachers next year. I am still so new I can't say for sure I will get to everyone, but I can do more and learn more."

Mission Principal, Marshall

The participants from Mission Elementary School did not complete the final interview. The researcher set up the schedule, confirmed the date and times of the final interviews and arrived at the appointed location as determined, but the principal had not informed the teachers of the visit nor was the principal on campus. Multiple attempts after that were made, however, there was never an agreed upon time to reconvene. The researcher attempted to contact the participants from this site by email to get written statements; however, no statements were sent to the researcher. The story is included here because the circumstances were unlike any other school set of participants and because information pertinent to the analysis and discussion was gleaned from this experience.

The researcher began the orientation with Marshall by reminding him of the purpose of the study and I asked if during his first years in education there had been conversations, to which he replied, "We probably didn't recognize the value of taking time to talk at that point in time, but it did give us time to really talk about what each other was doing and it was valuable. It wasn't to judge what another person was doing

but just to understand them better. When some issue came up, we knew how to deal with it better because we knew the person better." (Researcher-When you hold conversations with each of the two teachers you selected, you may talk about anything the two of you choose to talk about. It may be that the conversation is professional, or personal, or a combination of the two. It is your decision how the conversation goes). I find that interesting because if the conversation is about a really important topic then I will want the teacher to take notes, make decisions and be responsible for the information. If it is personal then we might have to cut it short and get back to work. (Researcher—At this early stage in the study, how do you view the conversations—helpful, useful, time consuming, an add-on, etc?) I see that they might be helpful since I don't really know the teachers well, but at this point in the year I don't know how it will go. "They might be sort of staged to make them fit into what is already happening."

(Researcher—During the mid-course interviews, Marshall remained true to his previously held perceptions of conversation. Although he talked in detail with specific dates and events for nearly two hours about his educational history, work history, work in the district and at his current school, and his disappointment at not getting a high school or central office position, he concluded by saying that he still wonders if conversations that are free flowing and informal are worthwhile.) In the early minutes of this interview Marshall said, "I have held two conversations with each teacher so far and it's just like, well, I am trying to get things done and this is a busy time of year so it's almost like you have to make a secondary, err not a secondary, an additional effort to stage a conversation." (He went on to say that he has picked up "a thing or two" about teachers as he has worked with them. "My first introduction to her (Melanie) was at, um, Marriot

Elementary School when I was an AP. I don't even remember if I was assigned as her supervisor or not. Then I lost track of her when I got transferred out. We had no communication until I came here as principal. She contacted me, interviewed, and from what I could remember about her work, I invited her to join the staff. Now she has been here six years." (Researcher—So, from the two conversations you have had with the teachers, how have they gone so far?) They have been OK. "I think with Melanie I have learned more about her family than I knew, some of her fears and hopes for her children, her community. With Mandy, well, she will tell you, I am almost 100% sure, that she is not a conversationalist." (Researcher—Do you see any use of this kind of conversation in schools? Do you think it would make any professional difference?) 'Uh huh, I do. Absolutely, because if she would know that I know her well enough that I'm not going to ask her to do something that would be more than she could do but also that she could trust me more to say, 'Yeah, you can do this' or 'I believe you can do this even though you feel in your own heart maybe it's more of a step than you can take', well, yeah, I do think it would make a difference."

Mission Teachers, Melanie and Mandy

Melanie has been at Mission Elementary School for six years. She explained that she had worked with Marshall on several school committees and "Marshall knows my capabilities." She said the two conversations they have had have been professional and about how to get ready for next year. "I am terrified every year about the criterion tests and how my kids will do. I think Marshall knows I can teach so even if the scores are horrible, I don't think he would penalize me. So, we talked about the tests and about the detailed notes I took to prepare my students. We also talked about students and

homework. They don't want to study; they don't think it's important. So right now,

division, they can't tell me how many times three goes into six…it has been a challenge.

So going home and studying spelling words doesn't happen. A large majority of my

class gets Ds or Fs…parents don't help. They say they're too busy, you know? They use

the economy, like, 'The economy is bad and I lost my job.' I think that, well, you should

have more time to help your kids then…well, my husband lost his job and I know he has

a lot of time on his hands. He is home more. He worked for the same company for

sixteen years so he's got a lot of people that he knows that once things start picking up,

he'll get something." (Researcher—So, other than what you have already told me, is

there anything else you would like to tell me about the conversations you have had with

Marshall?) "No, I don't think so. I mean, we were talking about things that were going

to change next year."

Mandy has been at Mission Elementary School for less than one year. Marshall

selected her because she was new and he said he didn't know her at all. Mandy asked

about how confidential the information she shared would be. The researcher explained

confidentiality again, showed her the confidentiality agreement to which she said, "Oh, I

know you will keep the information confidential and that my name won't be used. I get

that. But, I guess my concern is will you have to share what I say with Marshall?"

(Researcher—"What you say to me during these interviews is tape recorded, transcribed,

checked by you and used in my dissertation with names, places and any identifying

information changed or deleted. No one but you sees a copy of the transcript and I have

no reason to share any of your interviews with anyone at your school. No information

from your interviews will be shared with your principal, any teacher or staff member or

anyone associated with you school.") "When I was asked to do this, to be quite honest, I was extremely nervous because I know how clicks work and I didn't know what other teachers might be saying. I am already guarded and it's hard for me to break that wall down, so I don't know if we're going to talk about our conversations, but like the first one was really guarded and very uncomfortable, but the second one was completely different." (Researcher—What do you think made the difference between the first and second conversations?) "I don't know if it's just this week, but he's been so nice to me this week and so bubbly and just 'Hey!' but other times he is cold and intimidating. Like I think he likes knowing that he intimidates people. Like he—they—like to know he has the power kind of thing." (Researcher—Do you think so?) Yes, it is hard to read him and I think special ed. (Mandy is a special education teacher) has been put on the back burner. "But like after our first conversation like I was like OK and then like afterwards he was cold again. I would say something and he like brushed me off. So I was like, so I thought to myself, maybe I'm judging him too much and then afterwards it was like my thoughts were verified, you know. So I put in my head, 'hopefully things will get better when we get to know each other more.' So and I don't, I just don't know yet. Our second conversation was like why can't it like always be like this."

Later in the interview after discussing her work history, the researcher asked, "So tell me about the second conversation?" Mandy—"It went well. I felt like we really connected and understood each other. And it was about one of my kids who, I feel so bad for him and I almost started crying, because I just feel like he can do it but his home life is so awful. So, anyway, and we were like on the same page and I didn't feel like

nervous and I just spoke how I normally speak. It was great. It was a relief to know that our conversations don't have to be awkward."

It is not known whether the other conversations were held, what kind of reactions each participant may have reported, or if there had been any shifts for any of them. This story is included since the initial reactions to conversation were dichotomous, inconsistent and less positive than the other four sets of participants.

Research Question One: Analysis

Question: What are principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a method
of meaning-making?

It is one thing to know something but quite another to understand what it means and something else entirely to value that knowing in such a way that one forms perceptions, beliefs and eventually actions. Humans constantly organize and select information taken from the natural world and try to make sense or meaning from it. It is a human interpretation and a way of self-discovery. Analysis of the stories presented above for meaning making revealed the way participants looked at themselves, their practices and each other through the lens of conversation.

The researcher asked about how the participants understood conversation as a way to understand self and others.

"I talk with colleagues about work, school and home, but it is still important for me to have a good relationship with my boss, too. If I ever had a boss who didn't want to know about me personally, I'd be a little put out. I would probably start looking for another school to work at because they need to know what's going on and care."
"Being treated personally is important; it makes a difference."

"It (conversations) has really made this year go well."

"Oh, good, so you are trying to reintroduce the idea that people are important and human!"

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"I have learned that building relationships with others through conversations does not give you similar relationships; I still have teachers that I have closer personal bonds with than others. But, conversations do give you the chance to build a relationship of some kind. That's important; that's human."

"You get to learn your teachers on a professional level but I think if you really want to understand their philosophies and their passion…by talking to them on a personal level, I understand where they are coming from, what makes them tick…"

"I would stay here because now that I know people and now that Sarah and I have bonded, I would have more of a desire to stay and do my job right because I don't want to let her down."

"Now I realize how big this job is, that we don't do it alone and that the more we know about each other's strengths, the more help we have."

"But after we started to talk, and our first two conversations lasted well over an hour each, I began to really understand his point. I value his experience and I think I was simply overlooking him before."

"It (conversations) went well. I felt like we really connected and understood each other. And it was about one of my kids…we were like on the same page and I didn't feel like nervous and I just spoke how I normally speak. It was great. It was a relief to know that our conversations don't have to be awkward."

The meaning participants' made about conversations centered around being human, being treated personally and personably, building relationships and discovering the contribution others can make to education. This was the most significant finding in the study. The term Invitational Conversation is coined to express the useful, fluid, welcoming and encouraging conversation explored in this study. Participants wanted humane and human treatment that Invitational Conversation gave them.

- Invitational Conversations allow educators to be treated humanely with respect, dignity and purpose.

- Invitational Conversations allow educators to understand each other at a level that bonds them together in their mission.

- Invitational Conversations allow educators to be valued.

- Invitational Conversations reveal hidden strengths that can reinforce the educational processes, systems and enhance progress.

<u>Experiential Category of Description</u>

Phenomenography is focused on ways of experiencing different phenomena, ways of seeing them, knowing about them and having skills related to them. The aim is to find variance in the awareness, or in this case, perceptions. This category describes the importance of conversation as experienced by the participants. Participants report the importance in a variety of ways often blending what was perceived before the study and what is now perceived after engaging in the principal-teacher conversations.

The volume of qualitative data collected through three interviews of twelve participants and two interviews of three participants has been analyzed to identify core consistencies and meanings in relation to the importance of conversation. This section compares the participants initial perceptions of conversation as a useful tool in leading and learning with their final perceptions as determined through transcribed interviews. Parts of the interviews germane to this research question are presented below for all fifteen participants in chronological order of their initial interviews. Some of the information is repeated from the four example stories in the last category of description. A table summarizing the findings follows the fifteen accounts.

<u>Fifteen Accounts</u>

Barryhill School—Principal Bea

The initial interview for Bea and her two teachers, Bernie and Beth, was procedural. This researcher supervised Bea as a principal at another school from 1998-

2000 when supervision assignments were changed by central office. Bea retired at the end of the 2010-11 school year. She said during the initial interview, "I am hoping that I can use the conversations to help at least these two teachers make a smooth and successful transition to the new principal. I am planning on conversing with many others at the same time." During the mid-point interview Bea invited both teachers to join us and when I asked about her educational history she included, "When I was teaching I just kept looking at the principal role thinking there has got to be a better way to do this, a more personable way, a way that builds relationships rather than destroying morale. I think the idea of conversing with teachers is so simple and so powerful. It may be the key I was looking for all along." I asked, "I think I hear you saying that the conversations have been useful for you, is that right?" Bea added, "I think the conversations were easy and productive. At first we did not talk in depth but then we began to talk about little things, things I didn't know about either teacher. I remember saying to Beth, 'Why haven't we talked on a more personal level before? Did we get so caught up in the accountability and mandates that we forgot how important it is to respect the person?' I was just struck by how off course we have been in our relationships with one another."

Barryhill School—Teacher Beth

Beth has been a teacher for ten years. She has a degree in public relations and worked in the private sector for three years before moving to this state. A divorce prompted her need for a "J.O.B." since she had stayed at home with her young children for a number of years. Her husband at that time worked in construction and helped her go back to school and get her teaching degree. "I love teaching because of the amazing

minds of the kids. I think about how to treat each one and how each child can be special. I spend time every day talking with the children about who they are, how the project they are working on reflects their joys and feelings. Even though they are first graders, we have developed close ties and we understand each other. It has been a blessing for me." (Researcher—"You have conversations with your children. Do you think conversations could be included in the school day for the adults with similar outcomes?") "I have worked with Bea for about five years and I honestly don't think we have ever taken the time to just sit and talk. It was wonderful for me. I now feel so connected to her. It's funny, but now that she is retiring I thought that getting to know her better was going to make me miss her more and I was skeptical about talking at first. But after talking with her I now feel like, sure I am going to miss her, but we are now connected beyond Barryhill."

Barryhill School—Teacher Bernie

Bernie is in his second year of teaching after a career change. He was an accountant. When he and his wife were moving to the state, the van driver told Bernie he was born to be a teacher. Bernie dismissed the comment and moved his family to the city and he took a job with the auto industry. He and his wife have two children under the age of three. "I knew that learning, that is, how kids learn, is different than how we learned and how we were taught. So I said I better get my tail in gear and see what's going on in there so I can help my boys be successful." He enrolled in a local college and was hired in the district. After his first year of teaching a friend at Barryhill said, "Come here. I could use a friend." He did and believes it to be a good move. I asked about how the conversations had been going so far since it was the mid-point interview. "I think I was

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afraid the first time. I even told my friend I was like, 'I don't think I even looked at her. I think I kept looking at other things.' We had only talked about parent concerns, student issues and things like that. By the second time I was more comfortable and the rest of the times were comfortable and worthwhile." (Researcher—"Is there benefit in conversing with the boss?") "Getting to know Bea on a more personal level I think is very valuable. I mean, it's been time to me well spent and I could have spent more time. I just really…it's worth the time. I didn't miss doing, well, I didn't say, 'Oh I should be doing this or that. 'I thought, 'Oh good, it's time to talk to Bea.' Now I am more personally invested I think. It is a personal and professional connection that I guess I wasn't expecting but now I would not want it to be any other way I think." (Researcher—"If a position opened up closer to your home making it an easier commute for you, would you consider it?") "If a position opened up at my previous school or somewhere like that, you know, closer to home, I might consider it, with Bea leaving and all. I had a good relationship with my previous principal and it was hard to leave that school. I think that relationship with your boss makes a big, big difference. I would be happy to stay here or go back because both principals reached out to me and let me know I was wanted, needed and valued."

Sherwood School—Principal Sarah

Sarah is a new principal in her second year at Sherwood having arrived mid-year last year. She is the fifth principal in nine years at Sherwood so she perceives, "a feeling of instability at the school" and "I would like to get to know teachers really well so they know I am not going anywhere." During the orientation Sarah remained neutral about the idea of conversations. She asked procedural questions and made some statements

about her two selected teachers by saying, "One of the teachers I selected is fairly new and doing a great job. The other teacher is from the same grade level but is one I have struggled with. I am hoping the conversations help." Sarah was more forthcoming about conversations at the mid-point interview. She invited the two teachers into her office and the mid-point interview was a group setting with all four of us in the room. Sarah said the conversations were progressing that "I see real value in holding conversations, especially now being so new to the building. It is a way to connect."

By the final interview Sarah expressed clear, strong perceptions of the usefulness of conversations and of how conversations should progress. I asked if she thought holding small "popcorn" conversations in the hallways or at other times "on the fly" would accomplish the same goal to which she replied, "I think even personal conversations need to be scheduled since it says to the teacher, 'This is your time' and it is protected time. When I was talking to Shawn he told me very personal information that he chose to share in that protected and safe environment." I asked about the importance of including conversations in the principal's routine. Sarah said, "I am a person; I make mistakes. The conversations have made me feel like I am one of the team. I know I need to spend more time talking with a handful of teachers who are still struggling. I now understand that I just haven't figured out why. Next year I will incorporate conversation into what I do to show who I am. Further, I maintain that when teachers speak to each other on a personal level, they work together better, they go to bat for each other, they care about each other. If that is true for teachers then it is true for me."

Sherwood School—Teacher Sherrie

Sherrie and Sarah had formed a close bond prior to beginning the study. Sherrie was on several school committees that gave her opportunities for professional discussions with Sarah on a regular basis. During the orientation she expressed enthusiasm for the project but it was in the mid-point and final interviews where she specifically discussed conversation as a tool. "Getting to know Sarah on a more personal level has changed time for me. I mean, it's hard to get down here (principal's office) sometimes with all that is going on, but I don't mind leaving my classroom because I just don't want to not get to see her." The principal said that now time is a little different for her, too. "Now I want to carve out the time for that soul satisfying conversation." Sherrie added, "Yeah, and going back to what Sarah was saying, I have more of a desire to do my job right because I don't want to let her or anyone down."

The final interview was held at the end of a very busy school day. I had expected low energy and brief comments, but the interview lasted 46 minutes with highly charged conversation. Sherrie began by saying, "I get along with Sarah very well and it is nice to have somebody to talk to. I never felt like I could go to my previous administrator and just talk. It is so much easier to come to work when there is someone who cares." (Researcher—Could that someone just as easily be a teacher, a colleague?) "Well, yes, but it is not the same as having a close relationship with the principal; that is what really makes the difference. I asked her to consider a hypothetical situation where she wanted to try something different, out of the box and perhaps a little risky in her classroom. Sherrie said in her previous school she would have just done it without asking or informing an administrator because, "they wouldn't have ever known about it anyway."

She went on to say that with Sarah her thoughts are different. She thinks she would

develop the idea, research ways to approach it, ask Sarah for ideas and guidance and put

the whole lesson together before ever trying it in the classroom. I asked what if after all

that work Sarah voices concern or doubt about the lesson. "I probably wouldn't do it

because I trust her judgment and I think she is very knowledgeable when it comes to

children. I would listen and respect her opinion."

Sherwood School—Teacher Shawn

Shawn has been in education for 33 years, 23 of those years at Sherwood. He has

always taught first grade and continues to teach with a team of eight teachers. It was

during the mid-point and final interviews Shawn said the most about his perception of

conversation. I asked would there be any benefit from holding conversations during the

school day between principal and teacher? Shawn replied, "Absolutely, yes, hands down.

Even if it was only five minutes after dropping the kids off at a special to come in,

breathe, say something supportive and move on. It is so needed and it is like it used to be

before the pendulum swung to the far side of testing." Shawn and Sarah had a difficult

beginning to the school year by their own admission, so I asked if a wonderful

opportunity arose near to Shawn's home would he consider it. "No, I don't mind driving

for the dynamics of this school. No, I wouldn't even look at it." This was eye-opening

for Sarah who was also in the room, "I pushed Shawn over the edge this year and I have

made it harder on Shawn than it needed to be." Shawn replied, "When I started out you

could make mistakes and learn from them. Now, it is so standardized and not as

personable as it used to be. We just have to do more to reconnect people to each other

and to the profession. I think I taught better when we weren't so test driven. What

happened to developmental? It is now always paper and pencil. No time to explore, to

play with ideas, to talk with others and develop the craft and art of teacher or the kids. It

is like a big machine that eats up creativity and humanity."

Darwin Heights School—Principal Dick

Dick was still unpacking boxes from a recent transfer to Darwin Heights during

the orientation interview. His transfer was at district request. He looked frazzled and

said as much. Initially I thought he had agreed to participate in the study out of some sort

of perceived need to do anything that came his way, but I found that was not the case.

"When I got my doctorate Deidre was the principal at the school where I was assistant

principal. She mentored me through the process and it was really helpful. If I can help

you then I feel like I am paying it forward." When asked how he thought conversations

may fit into a school setting, he voiced support. "Talking with teachers about

professional items is not hard for me, but it will be a stretch to talk personally. I think it

might be useful and I am willing to give it a try. I am not sure with being so new at this

school, how my wanting to talk personally may be taken." By the mid-point, Dick was

more supportive, but still cautious. (Researcher—Have you been able to see anything in

the conversation experience that would lead you to believe conversations like these may

have a positive effect on teaching, learning, leading?) "Not yet. No, not really. But

again, both of these teachers are new to me and it is eye opening for me. Everything they

share with me is new and it's all good information at this point. I'm hoping over time,

well, I don't think I've seen what you are looking for. Building that relationship is a

good thing but whether it is productive or not, well, I just don't know." At the final

interview Dick said that finding the time for conversations and sticking to it was the most difficult part for him.

"Thinking back to the school I just came from, I don't know if I could dedicate the kind of time it takes to talk with every teacher. But here, I am so new that the information I gathered was well worth the time in cost." (Researcher—So let's think back to your previous school. Do you think this would be useful with teachers you know better or at least you have spent more time with?) "I don't know about the format of sitting down and having a conversation, but I knew more about more of them simply by catching them in the hall or talking for a while after school or seeing them out somewhere and because I had more time to spread it out and get little bites of information along the way. At least these two teachers talked for thirty to forty-five minutes each conversation so I don't know how I could possibly do very many. And, again, as a new principal, I don't want to seem overly forward and yet I do want to reach out to folks." As we continued to discuss strategies for conversations in an already tight schedule, Dick admitted that when he had looked at the Twenty-one leadership responsibilities in the Balanced Leadership Framework, "This (communication) was definitely one of those components and it was one of the areas where I am the weakest so it was stepping out of the box for me so an

ah-hah for me was that I really can do this and live through it. I have to consciously make the effort and reach out. Knowing that the school is staffed for next year and knowing that I will begin the year with them gives me the opportunity to reach out to the one that I haven't been able to speak too much." (Researcher—It sounds like you are planning to hold conversations next year. Does that mean you found it useful to talk with

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teachers?) "Oh, it is definitely useful. I think the long term benefits are if your staff feels comfortable with you and you are comfortable with your staff, retention of teachers will improve. A cohesive relationship builds better working conditions and better improvement. (Researcher—"What do you think about a question like this during a one-to-one conference about a classroom observation and you say, "When you chose to begin your lesson by doing such and so, tell how that is a little bit like who you are?' How might that strategy work to incorporate this kind of conversation with the already scheduled conferences?") "Oh, I really like that. That would really work for me. There has been instability in this building so to begin building stable relationships where there is a personal relationship might reassure teachers that I am going to be here for a while."

Darwin Heights School—Teacher Diane

Diane has taught at Darwin Heights for three years and while she enjoys the district and the city would like to go back to Alabama eventually. She had developed a close relationship with the previous principal and during the orientation expressed enthusiasm for using the conversations as a "quick start" to developing the same closeness with Dick. She said, "I'm a talker so this is going to be comfortable for me." When asked about conversations and what her initial thoughts were, she said, "I am the kind of person who will introduce myself and walk right up to people. I like the idea of having a time in school to get to know someone better." By the mid-point it appeared as though her conversations with Dick had been mostly professional, but that she "had gotten to know him a bit better" and that "even though the time has been short, I mean since we started the conversations to now, I think we've developed a strong rapport, maybe even stronger than with my previous principal."

During the mid-point interview Diane had a question about whether teachers who did not develop a strong relationship with a principal may still find satisfaction through the students at the school. "It might be different in teaching, and this is where your study might fall down, someone could be really uncomfortable with administration but you have those kids to think about so maybe they would still produce because they're not in that room with you all day long." When asked if she meant that the emotional support she or another teacher needed could be supplied by the students even if the administrator was not offering emotional support, she replied, "Even if they're treating you just OK and it's just not very personal, I still think it would be OK." Later Dawn added, "…but I think talking with Dick has made a difference for me so maybe I am contradicting myself. When the researcher asked if it was important to her that the administrator got to know her personally, she replied, "I would probably start looking for another school to work at because they need to know what's going on and care. I guess if it was all business with the principal I could get by because of the kids; they do care. Maybe I could just brush off the treatment and not take it to heart, but I know if your boss is not treating you well, not caring about you as a person, it will affect you, you know. Being treated personally is important; it makes a difference." In response to the question "Have the conversations made a difference", Diane responded, "I definitely think as time and weeks progressed the conversations went better and I have seen a different side of my boss, a personal part. Knowing this makes me think of him more as a person rather than just a boss. I think I know him better and he knows me better; that will affect our working together for sure."

Darwin Heights—Teacher Dawn

For Dawn, teaching is a career change. She began her undergraduate degree in education and psychology in Vermont. She dropped out of school and worked in retail for a year. Her family pressured her to go back to school, choose one of the two majors and stick with it. Because psychology took less time to complete, she dropped her education major. After getting an undergraduate degree in psychology she returned to retail as an assistant manager working with a close friend of hers who was the manager. "Through a conversation with my mother I said I couldn't do this (retail and working with a close friend) anymore. I need to do something else and the lady that I used to nanny for when I was in my undergrad had a friend at church that was a teacher in Newport and he needed an aide badly. And so, through some strings, and he had thirty years of experience, so through some strings and all kinds of things happening I got taken. I applied and was hired like the next day to work with him. And while I was working for him as an aide I went back for my master of arts in Hartford. In an internship program I got my first master's in elementary education and I worked the entire time either as an aide, as a substitute, as an intern, and then as a medical specialist. I was offered a full time teaching position as a gate and eighth grade teacher and I did not want it so I came out here." Dawn has been teaching for ten years. Her initial impression of conversation was that even if the relationship is close such as working for a close friend in retail, the conversations will "be weird." She added that "I am excited to give it a try because I would like to get over this weird thing I have about bosses." Dawn also told me she would be gone for about a week to be a bridesmaid in a friend's wedding but that she thought she and Dick could arrange time for conversations around her absence.

When I returned at the mid-point Dawn said before any question was asked, "I felt comfortable with Dick right away! I am very happy knowing how much interest he has taken in me!" Dawn said the conversations had taken at least 45 minutes each and that "Since he now knows my goals I think it will be easier for us to plan together." She told me that she was not going to the wedding because of some needed medical attention. She told me in detail about her condition, her fears, and the outcome she hoped would occur. I asked, "When you shared this with Dick, what was the reaction?" She had not shared it with Dick, "I think it is weird that I came in here and told you all about it but I have not even considered telling Dick all these details." I asked if the conversations had been professional or personal and she replied, "Oh, a little of both, so it still seems weird to me that I didn't even bring up the surgery." When I returned to conduct the final interview, Dawn said she had told Dick about the surgery and, "He was so supportive and so thoughtful. I wouldn't hesitate to tell him stuff now." When I asked, "Do you think holding conversations between a principal and a teacher would affect how the teacher does her work?" Dawn answered, "I always go above and beyond, but now, I wouldn't even consider saying no to a request for something because he is a human who has needs too. If this (how to hold conversations) was taught as an expectation, it could foster and build relationships among teachers and administrators." I concluded by asking if she saw any downside to conversations like these. She laughed and said, "Yeah! Now I can't say no!"

Riverwalk School—Principal Reggie

Reggie was preparing to open a new school at the beginning of the next school year. He had been released from his principal position at Darwin Heights in February to

concentrate on hiring a staff, ordering materials and all of the work associated with opening a new school. Of all the principals in the study, Reggie had the most time to devote to conversations but, because his teachers were still teaching in other schools, conversations had to be planned during scheduled teacher release time. Reggie was enthusiastic and excited about the study, "Oh, good, so you are trying to reintroduce the idea that people are important and human!" He was more than willing to begin conversations immediately and said, "This is the kind of talk I do already."

Reggie had been as assistant principal at one of the schools I supervised more than fifteen years earlier so our initial orientation developed into nearly two hours of conversation about his new school, his family, his previous school and the community partnership activities he had begun for Riverwalk. Before the mid-point interview began, Reggie introduced me to his seven year old son who attended Darwin Heights. I met Reggie there so he could drop off his son. "Marjorie, one of the reflections I had about conversation in general is do you think we could do this kind of study with administrators because sometimes you feel like you are on an island. You can talk to people at work sometimes but there is a certain level of guardedness during the school day and, usually, over the phone. It would be great to get to know more of my colleagues personally so that I would have a sounding board on a different level." (Researcher—"So Reggie, it sounds like you think a personal connection makes a difference professionally.") "To me, absolutely, without a doubt. Knowing that you're human is important. And even though I have held informal conversations, I think I now will hold them intentionally." Riverwalk School—Teacher Rosa

Rosa completed a four year degree in media studies, journalism and political science. She did an internship with a U.S. senator in his Washington press office. She was asked to stay for another year after the internship and become his Deputy Staff Writer, but she was homesick and wanted to find a position back in the state. She took a position with a non-profit agency, got her teaching license through Teach for America and has now completed her master's degree. While she intends to continue teaching she is planning to apply to Harvard for the Education Leadership and Policies program. "I have already talked with Reggie about this and he was supportive." (Researcher: "What is your perception of conversations in the workplace?") "I think they are absolutely necessary. I cannot imagine working for someone who is unwilling to become personally involved with other people. I like invitational environments." By the mid-point, Rosa said, "Our conversations are going really well. With him I feel I can speak, well, with my current principal I am sort of nervous, but with him I feel I can relax, speak one on one. They have gone really well. I feel like next year if I have a problem I will be able to go to him." Conversations progressed; Reggie and Rosa reported having multiple conversations in four months, "I already in four months have a better relationship with Reggie than with my administrator previously after working for him for two years. I feel comfortable texting, calling and talking with him about professional decisions and personal needs as well." She concluded the final interview by saying, "The surprise in all of this was how different and refreshingly positive it can be at work when there is someone who cares. I will try to stay here with Reggie as long as I can because I know he cares about me."

Riverwalk School—Teacher Roy

The district was eliminating several administrative positions due to budget cuts. When I first met Roy he was an elementary assistant principal who was returning to the classroom to teach at Riverwalk. While he was disappointed to give up his administrative position and pay, he was eager to teach with Reggie. His perception of conversation at the beginning of the study was positive. "I hear you saying that a teacher's Will should be affected by conversations, whatever the topic happens to be. I hear you because when our jobs got eliminated, Dr. Peters, our region superintendent, spoke with me and with others personally saying he was sorry this was happening and that we would not get shoved to the back burner but would remain his priority. That says so much; it says you are not number 13793 and too bad but goodbye. So conversation is vital, is important. To validate authentic, free-flowing conversation is very nice." He also asked rhetorically, "So when I am talking to Reggie I don't have to write any, I mean, you give me the opportunities if I have any ah-hahs, but mostly you are interested in unrehearsed, unstructured, natural conversations; right? I think that is so great."

At the mid-point Roy continued to verbally support the idea of conversation. He had told me that he and Reggie had been in communication, personally and professionally for over a year so the conversations were ongoing rather than something new for the two of them. "Reggie is easy to talk to; he makes me comfortable. And you have to make people feel like they're comfortable coming in and doing their job and that it's not just a place to come into and then leave." (Researcher: "Did the two of you discuss your return to the classroom from the position of assistant principal?") "Oh yes, many times. When it first happened we talked and then we talked when I was placed at Riverwalk. We

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talked during the conversations for your study about it again, about how it was working out to be good for both of us. It was really good to have someone sympathetic to the situation to talk to." (Researcher: Do you think having conversations has any affect on how you do your job?) "(Talking) has nothing to do with kissing up or just building different bridges to get ahead. It has everything to do with 'I can't do my job as well as I'd like to if I'm nervous about the people around me.' If my boss is questioning my value I can't just sort of laugh and joke and have a good time. There is, I think, a positive side to the socializing and something that we as a society made important; we're not just workers, we are human beings. Trust is built on the personal side and carries over to the work we do." Anthony continued talking about conversation, "There has to be a personal journey component, you know, life. I can take one step alone on my personal journey or I can connect my personal journey to yours through conversation."

Roy held fast to his perception of conversation through the final interview. He had spent time reflecting on conversation as a phenomenon. "Given my current circumstances I have gone to Reggie for advice, counsel, and reflection, but having a relationship with him already made the conversations even easier, richer, deeper. Heck, even having the conversation with you a couple of months ago when you explained the study to me made a difference in my life. The way you phrased the questions and considered what I said before you jumped into the next question let me know you really valued what I was saying."

Mission School—Principal Marshall

The principal, Marshall, expressed the importance of talking with teachers when he said, "Early in our careers we probably didn't recognize the value of it (talking with

teachers)…but it gave us time to really talk about what each other was doing and it was valuable." However, when discussing this study, he voiced concern for how genuine the conversations would be. "If we are going to have conversations that might be important to us, we could have them on any given day at any given time. This (conversations described in the study) may not even fit, so now we're going to stage something to fit." At the mid-point interview, Marshall expressed concern for the time conversations were taking. I asked, "How do you think the conversations have gone so far" to which Marshall replied, "Um, good. It's just, well, I see a distracter in that it's the time of year and, just like trying to get things done and busy and so it's almost like you have to make a secondary, err not a secondary, an additional effort.

It is not known how Marshall's perceptions may have changed by the end of the study since he did not attend the final interview.

Mission School—Teacher Melanie

Melanie is in her fourteenth year of teaching and has worked at three district elementary schools. During her two year stay at one elementary school she met Marshall where he was serving as assistant principal. She transferred to Mission Elementary School so she would be closer to her home. She has small children and she is working on a master of arts in education through online study. Her initial perception of conversation was that talking with Marshall would help with school related issues; however, she was not sure how it would be any different from one-to-one professional conferences. "So, Marshall and I talk for at least fifteen minutes about anything?" (Researcher—"Yes, you can discuss anything you both would like to discuss.") "So, that means we can keep it purely professional if we want to, or, um really, if I want to, because I do." After being

assured that was the case she said, "OK, but I still don't really see the point." At the mid-point interview Melanie had changed her perception. "We have talked about things that are going on next year. I had some questions about what we were doing next year so he explained that. And, it was good in a more one on one situation instead of where you ask a question and other people understand and you need clarification." She went on later in the interview to say, "Yeah, so it was just good to have him just kind of back me up and help me out with a problem I've had in the last couple of weeks so he was supportive." She talked about the kind of professional discussions she and Marshall had and then added, "It's nice to have the ability to kind of banter back and forth and have somebody that understands what you're going through. You don't want it to be a gripe session every time but you do need to release it or else it festers inside."

Mission School—Teacher Mandy

Mandy came to Mission School midyear as a special education teacher. She was nervous about participating in the study and asked many procedural questions during the initial interview and at the mid-point interview. On both occasions the researcher assured her that her participation was voluntary, that information was confidential and that at any time she wanted to stop her participation, she could. "I am extremely nervous. I am already guarded as well; other teachers might think I am getting like special treatment or something. Marshall said you guys are friends so I don't know how honest I can be." The researcher assured Mandy that she could be completely honest and that the relationship was professional and indirect. Researcher—"Since I was an assistant superintendent in the district for more than ten years and a principal before that, I know

many principals in the district, some better than others. I did not supervise Marshall so our relationship would have been one of greeting each other at meetings or workshops."

Mandy's perception of conversation was somewhat clouded by her anxiety toward Marshall and the study in general. "I think conversations are different for people who bond instantly and those who don't bond. I think some people are conversationalists, you know? And warm up really fast; other people don't. Like when Marshall first interviewed me and I got the job and I was like, we bonded very well because we came— we're both the same religion and from the same state. We are also both diabetic. But after that, like, no warmth or help and I just got nervous and I still am."

During the mid-point interview Mandy still expressed a guarded, anxious attitude toward talking with Marshall. "This information doesn't go back to Marshall, does it? It stays with you doesn't it? Like, I don't want him to know what we talk about." As we continued she compared the first and second conversations. She said the first conversation was "awkward and I was scared" but the second conversation went well, "I felt like we really connected and understood each other…and we were on the same page and I didn't feel nervous and I just spoke how I normally speak and it was great." When I asked her if conversations were useful in the school setting she said, "Oh, yeah, like, if it could always stay like it was after the second time, it would be great. I don't know if it will or can, but that would make me feel like a lot better."

Tables 4.6 and 4.7 summarize participants' perceptions related to the importance of conversation.

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Table 4.6: Comparative Analysis of Perceptions: Importance of Conversation I
             (Principals denoted with asterisk)

Participants	Perception Initially	Perception Later
Bea*	Important as a means of transition	A powerful and simple way to build relationships
Beth	Skeptical about talking to boss	Felt connected to principal beyond the school
Bernie	Afraid to talk to boss	Would not want school without conversation now
Sarah*	Sees conversation as a means to repair a relationship	Intends to continue conversations next school year—sees importance
Sherrie	Sees value in taking time to converse	Easier to work in a location when someone cares
Shawn	Hands down, conversation helps build relationships	Conversations that are scheduled are needed
Dawn	Enthusiastic as a quick start for developing relationship	Feels so connected that she would take on extra assignments
Reggie*	Already includes conversations and wholeheartedly believes in conversation	Sees a need to move from informal to intentional conversations
Rosa	Conversation is absolutely necessary	Will stay at the site as long as possible because of the care shown

Table 4.7: Comparative Analysis of Perceptions: Importance of Conversation II
                (Principals denoted with asterisk)

Participants	Perception Initially	Perception Later
Roy	Conversation in any context is important	Conversation has deepened relationship with principal
Marshall*	Did not see conversation of this kind as useful	Saw conversation as a distracter, useful perhaps but unnecessary
Melanie	Did not see the point of having conversations	Good to know principal will support me
Mandy	Guarded and skeptical	Comfortable and more at ease with principal

Research Question Two: Analysis

Question: What are the principal/teacher perceptions of the importance of

principal-teacher conversations?

In terms of importance of principal-teacher conversations, less variation was noted

between in initial perceptions and later perceptions with the same participant. The only

group who expressed negative attitudes toward conversation was from Mission. While

the two teachers from Mission expressed more positive dispositions toward the

importance of conversation at the mid-point, the principal did not change his perception

over the time of the study. The overarching perception of twelve participants was that

conversation is important, should be part of the school day, should include personal and

professional topics, should be invitational, and does make a difference in the quality of

work life. Four of the principals saw benefit in getting to know teachers on a more

personal level and saw conversation as an important tool in building and maintaining

school culture. One principal conceded that conversation would be useful but he would be unwilling to build it into his schedule. Teachers reported the importance of conversation to teacher efficacy, morale, and performance. Five teachers said they were more likely to remain in their current locations because the level of comfort with their principals had increased.

<u>Content-Orientation Category of Description</u>

The epistemological basis of a phenomenographic approach is appropriate to this category of description. The aim of phenomenography is the understanding of experiences. Careful descriptions in the form of interview transcripts provided access to the meanings of experiences in social situations. The meaning that was sought through analysis of the transcripts and use of the redacted stories and accounts was how participants may have changed from one way of thinking to another through the conversations in this study.

Research Question Three: Analysis

Question: Were conditions uncovered during the conversations that facilitate a

transition from one way of thinking to a qualitatively better

perception

of reality?

Phenomenography makes no assumptions about the nature of reality or about conceptions. Primarily, phenomenography looks at the interaction of humans and their experiences with the external or natural world (Svensson, 1997). Marton (1994) posited that different ways of experiencing phenomena represent different capabilities for dealing with those phenomena. Those different experiences may also lead to a new reality.

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From the sample stories already presented, quotations are presented that begin to link a current reality to another reality, in this case a better perception of reality. Steel (2004) posited that the unconscious mind is where most of our deep thinking occurs. This deep think includes a combination of experiences, beliefs and reflections that form perceptions. Emotion, often the emotion associated with a particular past event and reason combine to produce value, beliefs and eventually, action (Barnett, 2007). That action becomes a person's experiences. Education is about developing the capacity to interpret experience and, therefore, understand our world, to make meaning and change reality (Liston, 2001).

One participant had expressed a desire to return to her home state. She had stated in the mid-point interview that she would give the school "two good years" but that within five years she was planning to move closer to family. During the final interview, she stated, "I am probably going to stick around for a while, longer than I expected." When asked what part conversation may have played in her new decision she said, "It is working out here and I really love working for (principal). He makes me feel valued."

A principal who was adept at developing personal relationships with his staff was asked if he thought personal connections make a difference professionally to which he replied, "To me, absolutely, without a doubt. The more I know about each person, the more I may be able to find solutions that are appropriate for the circumstances."

Another principal was discussing the difficulty of finding time to really engage in deep conversations but, she said, "I find it a must at this point, especially for someone like me coming in new this year. You get to learn your teachers on a professional level but I think if you really want to understand their philosophies and they passion…talking

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to them on a person level (allows me) to understand where they are coming from, what makes them tick, and why."

After four conversations, one teacher held that she would stay at the school because "now that (principal) and I have bonded, I would have more of a desire to stay and do my job right because I don't want to let her down."

A principal discussed the magnitude of leadership and the daunting assignment as principal. "Now I realize how big this job is, that we don't do it alone and the more we know about each other's strengths, the more help we have. I am looking forward to having more conversations." I don't know if I will get to every teacher next year, "but I can do more and learn more."

A teacher who had not bonded with her principal and who had expressed trust issues regarding her principal noted after the second conversation, a "shift in my feelings toward (principal) and toward my job." She said of one particular conversation, "I felt like we really connected and understood each other…like we were on the same page and I didn't feel like nervous and I just spoke how I normally speak."

A particularly revealing interview included a scenario posed by the researcher. Suppose as a teacher in your previous school, you had decided to do a lesson that was outside the norm, perhaps a little bit risky, and one that would be totally different from anything you had attempted before. "How would you discuss your lesson design with your principal?" The teacher said, "To be honest, I wouldn't have discussed it with him; I would have just done it because he would have never know what I was doing anyway." The researcher then asked, "Would that be the same here in your current location?"

Teacher, "Now I think with (principal) I would research the idea, put it all together and then come to (principal) and ask what she thinks about it, if she has any ideas and if she sees any holes in my thinking." Researcher, "And if she said that she would prefer you not proceed?" Teacher, "I probably wouldn't do it because I trust her judgment and I think she is very knowledgeable when it comes to children. I would listen to her and respect her opinion."

One version of social constructivism patterned closely after the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein contends that knowledge and reality are created by social relationships and interaction (Berger, 1966). Gelven (2003) posits that humans undergo transformation when they think about their experiences, the reactions to those experiences and their beliefs; in short metaphysics or perception of reality. The investigator asked several participants if there had been any "ah-hah" moments during the conversations. Some of the comments were:

"I don't know anything about any teacher here, so for me, conversations have been eye-opening."

"Now that I have lived through what was at first very uncomfortable for me, that is talking personally to teachers, I realize I can do this and it has been so helpful."

"The conversations have really gone well. I feel I can speak with him in a way different from my current principal. I can relax, speak one to one. I am likely to have issues in the new school. If I am in crisis I can go to him and say, 'Look here's the issue; what do I do.' I am thankful for that because now I have been able to establish a relationship that supports that."

<u>Evocative Category of Description</u>

The concept of reflection in phenomenography draws on the notion of thinking about an experience in such a way as to cause variation. The analysis process is both one of discovery (Hasselgren and Beach 1997) as well as one of construction (Bruce 2002). The results are not known in advance but must be discovered, or emerge from transcripts, and constructed in an iterative way from the transcripts. As the transcripts are reviewed iteratively, patterns, often not part of the original study emerge.

Perception of Time

One variation that was a pattern in the study was the concept of time. The investigator asked the question of time in a variety of ways. One way was, "In an already full schedule, how would you see the addition of conversations such as the ones you have just completed?" Another way was "Do you see yourself engaging in conversations with your teachers as part of your routine?" Learning and leading are developed through complex relationships with others. Learning is meaning-making, the development of intricate interpretations, the use of multiple judgments and enriched perspectives of the world around formulated with others. This kind of learning and leading takes time. The educational arena is replete with mandates, directions, expectations and hierarchies of control and responsibility all requiring timely attention. Educators have daily responsibilities, yearly goals, objectives that require systematic attention and a myriad of complex issues that use more of the day's work time than sometimes is available. Because of the huge time demands placed on educators, the investigator heard "time" mentioned many times during the course of the interviews. This category of description

when cross referenced with conversation importance and transformation yielded outcome space that revealed new understanding.

Table 4.8 displays principals' perception of time and teachers' perception of time. Table 4.9 displays perception of time and importance of conversation and Table 4.10 displays perception of time and transformation.

Table 4.8: Domain Analysis of Perception of Time

Principal Comments	Teacher Comments
Important to schedule time so that it is protected time for teachers and principals to talk	Thinks taking time to talk to principal is important
Finding time for the conversations and sticking to the schedule was difficult	Time well spent; could have spent more time
Saw usefulness in combining conferences and conversations	Totally changed time; important to carve out time to talk
Time spent is well worth the effort	Even if it is only 5 minutes it is important
Building a culture of care is always worth the time	Good to have time during the school day to talk
	Time to reflect and connect
Takes too much time	
	Time to build solid relationships
Conversations are distracters	
	Time to release the day's pressure

Table 4.9: Perception of Time Related to Importance of Conversation

Comments	Theme
Important to schedule time so that it is protected time for teachers and principals to talk	Schedule to protect time
Finding time for the conversations and sticking to the schedule was difficult	Stick to a schedule
Time spent (on conversation) is well worth the effort	Time spent worth effort
Building a culture of care is always worth the time	Time to build culture of care
Takes too much time	Takes too much time for very little information
Conversations are distracters	Conversations distract from important tasks
Thinks taking time to talk to principal is important	Taking time is important
Time well spent; could have spent more time	Could spend more time
Even if it is only 5 minutes it is important	Even brief time useful
Good to have time during the school day to talk	Time during school important
Time to reflect and connect	Reflection, connection
Time to release the day's pressure	Release of pressure
Any time spent with teachers getting to know them better, through conversation and other ways, adds to the quality of the time at school and the amount of time spent at school	Any time spent in conversation adds to perceived job quality and to time willing to spend at work

Table 4.10: Perception of Time related to Transformation

Comments	Theme
Saw usefulness in combining conferences and conversations	Work conversations into existing schedule
Totally changed time; important to carve out time to talk	New time reality
Time spent informally may not be enough; moving toward intentional time for conversation	From informal to intentional
Time spent (on conversation) is well worth the effort	Time to build culture of care
Conversation at right time about career	Changed career path
Was going to return to home state in two years; now plans to stay longer	Changed decision about moving
Life is time sensitive; related story of child's death	It is important to know about people now
Conversations during the day made me feel important	Changed feeling from job to career
Time spent in conversation changes conversation	Conversation becomes more authentic and free-flowing persistence
Conversations in difficult times have kept me going	Personal/professional reflection
Conversations over time cause reflection	Effects performance
I can't do my job as well without time to get to know people We have to make time for the important things; talking to others is important	Time is attached to important activities

The comments from the three tables above when cross-classified reveal that

conversations are important and the time conversations take is time well spent.

Conversations that address personal strength, concerns and needs create safety and trust,

reduce vulnerability and can be transformational. The more conversations held over a

significant period of time may impact authenticity of content, free-flowing the conversations are and how much each person reflects upon the subjects. The outcome space can be summarized: conversations are important enough to find the time.

Research Question Four: Analysis

Question: *What are the principal/teacher perceptions of conversation as a way to discover/build the will to lead and learn?*

Perceptions of conversation and the relation to the internal force known as Will were not specifically referred to during the interviews. How Will may be externally linked to an educator's intentional use of conversation as a way to build Will to lead and learn was only tangentially referenced by three of participants. This result may have been related to investigator's diligence to not refer to Will for fear of guiding answers, but it is more likely that the question was improperly worded and then improperly asked during the interviews. More about the investigator's inclusion of this question will emerge in chapter 5. Participant references to individual interests, needs and strengths; to social relationships through conversation; and to system dehumanization were clues to the internal force to action called Human Will and to the external action taken by a person. To investigate Will in a more direct way may take an entirely different kind of investigation. In this exploratory investigation, the question of conversation as a way to discover and/or build the Will to lead and learn was not answered sufficiently to make any determination. The quotations presented below support this finding in that they approach the notion of internal force and external action but do not provide solid evidence to sufficiently answer this research question. The quotations have been taken from transcripts of the interviews. No reference was specifically found in the four stories

used for analysis. This further points to lack of question clarity and lack of sufficient response.

"I think there is a positive side to socializing (with other educators from the same school); it says that we are human with human needs, desires and wants. It says we are more than workers and that we can be trusted. Trust is based on who you are, not what you do."

"Getting to know my principal on a more personally level has changed who I am. It has caused me to work differently here at school. I have bragged to my friends that I get to go hang out with the principal and have seen their looks. I am more personally invested in my profession."

"I am not here for a paycheck. I am not here to kill time. I am here to teach. I think (principal) knowing more about where I came from will help him know where I am going and maybe, just maybe, he will help me get there."

Cross-Classification with Philosophical Constructs

Ontology, the study and philosophy of beingness, asks "what is truth?" In trying to get at "the truth" people make sincere efforts to understand the world. Here, participants explained conversation from their perspectives as the truth. Teleologically, then, participants attempted to discern the nature of conversation and its utility. By exploring human thoughts and emotion manifested through interviews, participants' beliefs about conversation were confirmed or enhanced. No evidence existed in this study of participants' beliefs about conversation being disconfirmed or reduced. One teacher in describing herself said, "That is just who I am—emotional, sensitive, scared." That teacher after two conversations said, "I feel more relaxed; I think I am still emotional and a sensitive person but I see that working for me rather than against me."

Epistemology argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from interaction with others. This study found that knowledge about participants engaged in conversation was revealed in, "I didn't know much about any teacher here. It was

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amazing, eye-opening and humbling all at once. The teachers here are gifted individuals." Other participants found language or dialogue created certain images that reflected conditions as they were or created new meaning. For example, "When I first started talking with (principal) I told him about my class and about what we were doing, you know, surface stuff, but the more we talked, like maybe the second or third time, I told him about my kids, my family and my desire to go back to school." Over time, according to the epistemological philosophy, language should help organize experiences, create new meaning, heighten awareness and include verifiable predictions about the future and the results of human actions. I asked one principal about being married with two kids and how that has affected his professional choices. "I always believed I would be a good dad, but to be responsible for two other lives has been an amazing transformation for me, you know, what I do, the choices I make are made with them in mind. There is nothing like holding your kids and hanging out with them. Teachers have those same experiences and by talking with them our lives are connected in ways that create care, concern and increased competence."

Exploring the nature of interpretation through language could be a definition of conversation and does describe hermeneutics. Listening to others, asking for more information or for clarification allows the listener to interpret the meaning of the content and apply it to an individual situation. One example for the interviews is from a teacher who started out in another field. She worked with a personal friend of hers both in management positions. After a time, that circumstance was not satisfying and, in a conversation with her mother, found a position as a teacher's aide that eventually led her to teaching. Hermeneutics in social theories includes sympathizing, that is the

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participants in a conversation need to listen, hear, sympathize with the other person and then interpret the content into personal meaning. One participant relayed a humorous story of a moving van driver declaring, "You are going to be a teacher" to the participant who was, at that time, in business. Not long after the move, the participant "found myself enrolled in education classes. I have often thought about how that moving van driver moved me from one state to the other, both literally and figuratively!" Another participant who had multiple conversations with his principal, with professors, with colleagues and with his family regarding learning from experiences and using that learning to create a new reality said, "I would say that after talking with (principal) about my current situation I let things go now a lot more than I used to and I'm able to reflect on how I was in undergrad and where I feel competitive and why. I think, taken together, all the conversations have shown me that people have different opinions, different takes on the situation, and I have listened, learned and come to a place of acceptance."

Summary

It was evident that participants' are committed to education and they feel the pressure of testing, large class loads, changing conditions and daily routines impede human development by taking away from the social nature of humans. Conversation by choice allows for intimate and authentic relatedness. Diversity of thought is given space to thrive and the people involved in conversation are the center-most important part of the experience. Conversations are central to transformation; conversation leads to relationship and relationship is education.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A single conversation across the table with a wise man
is better than ten years mere study of books.
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

This chapter begins with an overview of this phenomenographic study followed by

interpretations of the findings as related to the four research questions and to the patterns

that emerged from the iterative data analysis process. These interpretations include

explanations of the differences in vulnerability, time, the importance of conversation as a

tool in leading and learning and intentionality. The section regarding conclusions

includes a discussion of research question 4, how conversation may contribute to the

development or discovery of the Will to lead and learn, and its unsubstantial findings.

Also included in conclusions is a discussion of the investigator's growth in interviewing

and how that contributed to the overall study success. The investigator's growth as an

interviewer is included since some of the recommendations for further study include

interview suggestions. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further study.

Overview

As a result of this exploratory, phenomenographic study, fifteen participants

engaged in at least three conversations each, while twelve of the fifteen participants

engaged in four or more conversations each. These principal-teacher conversations

occurred over an eight-week period of time within the school year and during the school

day. The conversations were among principals and two teachers from each of five

elementary schools within a large, urban school district. One original direction given to

participants was to hold conversations of at least fifteen minutes in duration; however, all

45 conversations were longer than twenty-five minutes each with the longest conversations lasting 60 minutes. The topics of conversation were not revealed to the investigator by study design. Koocher and Keith-Spiegel (1998) considered confidentiality as the cornerstone of building and maintaining relationships. Some participants alluded to the conversation topics during their interviews but that information was not directly solicited. Building and maintaining trust is the foundation of relationships (Bryk, 2002; Covey, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2000), so the decision to sustain confidentiality of subject matter was important. Confidentiality became an important consideration for some participants and will be discussed along with other unintended outcomes. The current era of public scrutiny and the demands placed upon principals and teachers to reform American schools has created an atmosphere that requires school leaders to build trust, improve school climate, and maintain relationships (Marzano, 2005).

Initial, mid-point and final interviews were conducted with each of twelve participants. One school team, consisting of a principal and two teachers, did not complete the final interview. These interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and analyzed for categories of description. Additionally, by pawing through the data, patterns were suggested and will be discussed in unintended outcomes. The purpose of the study was to explore the use of conversation as a tool for leading and learning. After studying leadership for six decades, Bennis (2007) said that he was "struck by how small the body of knowledge is of which I am sure" (p.5) and he indicated that those who study leadership, "will have to invent new scholarly forms, new formats that allow us to be expansive and rigorous" (p.3). Conversation is such an expansion since the kind of

conversation considered in this study shines the spotlight on hidden aspects of leadership, internal decisions that result in actions, and the worth of building strong principal-teacher relationships in the process of school improvement. Listening to the voices in this study describe the complexity of education today and to the similarity of the human struggle that all individuals encounter on some level, individuals are forced to confront themselves in relationship with others. Wageman (2007) suggested that researchers and practitioners need to focus on how leaders learn rather than on what should be taught to leaders. The same holds true for teachers as researchers begin to examine and understand mental models and how these mental models influence daily beliefs and behaviors. Hogan and Warrenfelz (2003) suggested a stratified development model including leader development in business ideas and processes, leadership skills and understandings, and intrapersonal processes. Of these intrapersonal processes are the most difficult to study and to develop, but are also the most important.

Categories of description are groupings of information bound together by the ways people view and experience a phenomenon (Akerlind, 2005). In this study, the categories describe the ways fifteen participants viewed and experienced conversation as a tool for leading and learning. The data collected through investigator interviews with each participant were analyzed to discover the participants' articulation of the experience of principal-teacher conversations as well as the dimension of variation among their reported perceptions. Categories of description are part of phenomenography which was the framework and theory used in this study. Theoretical underpinnings included Marton's phenomenography and Mezirow's transformation learning theory. Transformative learning theory includes individuals' description of a learning process

where they become aware of their own assumption, expectations and perceptions as well as those around them and use that awareness to reflect, consider changes, and undergo perspective transformation (Mezirow, 2000).

<u>Data Analysis Process</u>

Phenomenographic research aims to identify and describe qualitative variation in people's experience of a phenomenon. Much of the phenomenographic research is scientific, but there is a growing body of research about learning, making evident the different ways learners apprehend their learning (Marton, 1997). Phenomenographic data are collected through a series of deep and open-ended interviews, which are analyzed through iterative readings to produce outcome space, or the interpretation of categories of description. In this study, interview data collected over a ten-week period included three interviews for each of twelve participants and two interviews for each of three participants for a total of 42 interviews.

The investigator first interviewed each of the fifteen participants (five principals and 10 teachers) to explain the study and gather initial perceptions of conversation. After the participants had completed at least two conversations, a mid-point interview was held with each participant. Key questions asked the participants to give their educational history and answer the question, *how are the conversations going so far?* This open-ended question led to discussions about conversation in general, the importance of conversation, the use of conversation as a way to make meaning and participants' reflections of the process. The final interviews were conducted at the conclusion of the conversations. This process occurred after the eight-week conversation period and took two weeks to complete.

The investigator read the transcribed interviews and participated in the transcription of some interviews and this process provided a lens through which the interview data and the interviewees were viewed. The investigator was becoming part of the investigated through this process. It was useful to look at the order in which questions were asked, the variations of a single question over the course of several interviews, and the depth of the interview. The interview, because of the ease experienced by participants and researcher alike, became conversational.

In listening to the audio-taped record of the interviews, in reading and re-reading the transcriptions ten or more times, the investigator was able to reorient herself towards the data, reconstituting the socially and temporally situated interviews into data that began to give way to patterns and descriptions. This process was reflective in that the experience of interviewing and listening to the educators' stories was transformational for the investigator. Additionally, as the principals and teachers were going through a sequence of conversations and reflecting upon the content of those conversations as well as the implications of conversation as a phenomenon, the investigator was reflecting upon the content of the interviews and whether conversation might have a place in the daily processes of principals and teachers. This process conforms to Huddleston and Unwin's explanation of experiential learning. Questions were asked as a means of expounding on participant statements, clarifying the context and expanding the discussion.

Kvale (1997) considered transcription a translation of the lived experience. The investigator read, analyzed and developed categories of description that were then reviewed by two external reviewers in an effort to keep the conversations living and personal while using the transcripts as records of experiences. Once the transcripts had

been developed into stories and accounts, analysis of those written descriptions were used

to develop descriptions. The process was labor intensive, emotional, and both affirming

and disconfirming in that external reviewers helped affirm the patterns and categories of

description but the investigator was left wondering if more could have been done, if the

most important aspects of the data were highlighted and whether in unfolding meaning

the inconsistencies of thought that occur with human analysis marred the final analysis.

<u>Interpretations</u>

> While no single conversation is guaranteed to transform a company,
> a relationship or a life, any conversation can. Speak and listen as if
> this is the most important conversation you will ever have with this person.
> Susan Scott ("Fierce Conversations, p. xv)

The process of re-reading text allowed for an increased understanding of the

whole set of interviews as well as the meaning behind some of the statements participants

made. Looking at the parts, that is, the redacted stories and accounts, led the investigator

back to the entire transcript set and to the audio-taped interviews to hear the nuance and

discern the tempo, pace, rhythm and general mood of each interview. This hermeneutic

cycle produced variations within patterns called vulnerability, time intentionality, and

transformation. Also, this process elucidated the lack of data for research question four

about the Will to lead and learn. Identifying this inconsistency and absence of data

caused the investigator to look into the transcripts further seeking quotations or nuance

that would support the research question. However, Saljo (1997) argued that by seeking

an answer in such a focused and singular way epistemologically compromises the

outcome. Therefore, using the phenomenographic orientation of open-ended interview

questions, encouraging reflective articulation of the experience, reading the transcriptions

and developing categories of description hermeneutically, and using the raw data to

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confirm conclusions, allowed the investigator to determine patterns and to confirm the lack of evidence to support research question four.

Vulnerability

According to Liston (2001) education is "about developing the capacity to interpret experience and therefore understand our worlds." (p.13) Leading and learning, like any human activity, emerges from self, that inward push that causes action. That self or inner beingness has been all but forgotten in the current educational environment. Educators have been diminished to fulfilling demands of the nation, the state and the local school district. "Panic-stricken by the demands of our day, we need scapegoats for problems we cannot solve and the sins we cannot bear" (Palmer, 2007, p.3). When reduced to scapegoats educators make easy targets for social ills. As society has attempted reformed education through renewing appropriations and mandates, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula and increasing accountability, demeaned and disheartened educators have been overlooked, set aside, and deemed unimportant. To find a pattern of vulnerability among the participants was not surprising since efficacy is underdeveloped.

One subset of vulnerability was a sense of personal accomplishment. Educators must view the work as meaningful and important and must see themselves as major contributors. Marshall, principal at Mission School, was uncertain about the notion that conversations would be a good addition to his already busy schedule. He said he remembered a time years ago when we could take time to talk to fellow educators, but felt like that time was long past. He did not see how conversations could fit into an already busy schedule where every minute is consumed. He then talked for nearly two

hours about his educational history, work history and his disappointment at not getting a high school principalship in the district where the study was conducted. Each of the four administrative positions he held prior to coming to the district ended in disappointment for him. Of his first position he said, "So finally it wasn't comfortable and I wasn't enjoying it." He took another position in the same state and after two years was at odds with the union over negotiations. The third position lasted three years. When the school board changed so did the district's goals and the board asked for his resignation after five years of service. A buy-out agreement was struck; however, Marshall was left feeling dejected. "That was so negative for me that I was just so disappointed that I said, 'You know what? I never want to be superintendent again.' It was just so political." After another short stay in another state and another in a rural district, Marshall took a position in the current district. He has applied for several middle school and high school principal positions, but without success. Of one recent attempt he said, "So I felt bad about that and said, well OK, there's another situation where I said I was interested and these people just don't think I can handle it. I don't know anymore."

Marshall's discomfort translated into insecurity in the two teachers in the study. Neither teacher was excited to be part of the conversations. Melanie said that through the first two conversations she learned, "I'm not the kind of person that talks about myself personally. We decided to keep it strictly professional. We talked about things that are going on next year. It was definitely more comfortable to keep the information away from me." She said that the state criterion referenced test "terrify" her but through the conversations she had with Marshall, she thinks that if the scores are "horrible" he won't "penalize me or get upset with me because he knows I'm capable of teaching." She

divulged personal information about her husband's lack of work, their notion of moving out of state and her desire to go back to school. Near the end of a nearly hour long period of sharing personal information, Melanie suddenly stopped mid-sentence and said, "Where does all this discussion go? My husband would not be happy if he knew I had told what was going on. I don't want what I said to get around the school or get out." When the investigator assured her that names would be changed and that no identifiers would be included, she simply said, "Well, just know that I have told you more than I ever would say to Marshall, so I just don't want it out. I think he might use it against me in some way, but I don't think so."

This insecurity continued with Mandy who said, "I worry about the conversations with the principal, you know. I don't want any information to leak out. There are clicks at the school and, you know how that can be. People take what others say out of context. I guess I am a little paranoid." She said the first conversation with Marshall was "guarded and tense." She added that the second conversation was more relaxed but that she is still nervous. She had some hope after the second conversation that "things will get better when we get to know each other more. I just don't know yet."

The lack of trust and sense of personal accomplishment was easy to see among these participants. They did not complete the final interview. Of conversation, Marshall said he thought it was a distracter. It appears as though his perceptions may have influenced his teachers. The principal's willingness to be open to new ideas creates an atmosphere of trust and safety for teachers (Mulford, 2007). As goes the principal, so go the teachers.

Dick, another principal in the study, was fearful of the process. He said that after reviewing the 21 leadership responsibilities detailed in A Balanced Leadership (Waters, 2006) he realized communication and being open with staff were his weak areas. He said that the first interviews with his two teachers were "eye-opening" and that everything was new information. He was new to the school as of February and had only been there a month so it was understandable that he would not know the teachers well. He had been glad to be part of the study knowing that some of his nervousness about having conversations with teachers would be trumped by his need to get to know the staff rather quickly so that goals could be set for the next school year. He had been transferred to Darwin Heights by central office and while he was told Darwin Heights needed his expertise in school improvement, he had heard nothing else. "I think I am here to bring up the scores, but I hope they see more in me than that."

Dawn said that while the two conversations she and Dick had held so far had been useful in "breaking the ice," she was still unsure of herself. She had invited her team teacher to the first conversation just to "keep the comfort level up." Now she is more relaxed but still unwilling to share much about herself. She told this investigator about an operation pending for her and how it is going to change many of her plans over the next six months. She was planning on taking four days of personal leave time to participate as a bride's maid in a friend's wedding out of the country, but had to bow out to save the time for the surgery. When the investigator asked if the topic had come up during the conversations with Dick, she replied, "…he doesn't know yet. He knows that I went to the doctor and he knows I had a CT scan, but I haven't shared the results yet. He for sure doesn't know that I need surgery." When the investigator asked why she had shared that

information with me and not with her principal, she said, "You asked about the wedding and I thought, like, 'wow, she remembered about something important to me' and I guess that made me feel comfortable and anxious to tell you about a scary thing that is happening to me."

Principal-teacher relationships affect student achievement (Walsh, 2005). Efficacy is impacted the relationships formed in the building. This study demonstrated vulnerability in both a positive and negative light. When principals and teachers are vulnerable to each other through ways that include authentic conversations, barriers are removed. Feeling vulnerable and thereby protective and guarded are the barriers to an open and productive relationship. Teachers who see the principal as a facilitator, supporter and reinforcer are more likely to feel personally accountable for student learning (McEwan, 2003). Principals who empower teachers through open, honest and vulnerable discussions reduce tension, build security and increase teacher perceptions of hope, success and the school's ability to make a difference (Edgerson, 2006).

Despite the natural reluctance to being vulnerable, it is important to building and maintaining open, honest teams in organizations. The strongest forms of trust are built by those who allow themselves to be vulnerable to others who in turn accept the vulnerability as strength and do not exploit personal, sensitive or protected information (Brown, 2010).

Time and the Importance of Conversation

Leading and learning are done at the intersection of personal and public life and this crossroad evokes passion, reason and concern. Educators become involved with students, parents, and each other at the expense of time and energy, but the rewards are

passion and rationality. Reason and emotion are not separate; it is the combination that

creates transformational and authentic leaders, caring and reflective teachers and

organizations that succeed (Barnett, 2007; Beard, 2009; Begley, 2006). Time to connect

on a human level illuminates hidden talents among teachers and leaders, but it takes time

and time has become a four letter word. Time issues crowd the life of an educator and

frequently crowd out the softer side of human industries like education. Research done

over the past ten years has linked teacher job satisfaction to communication, shared goals,

friendliness, shared experiences, being valued and time spent with the building

administrator (Leithwood, 2008). Leader practices that include face-to-face discussions

and conversations with teachers as well as time spent socially with the staff are

significant ways to improve morale, productivity and loyalty (Blasé, 2008; Kouzes,

2003).

In this study time emerged as a pattern in relation to the importance of

conversation and to transformation. Dick commented about his newness to Darwin

Heights and, "although I don't feel like I have time to just sit and talk, I think I need to

get to know people so I can be effective." Reggie, principal of Riverwalk, explained the

relative luxury of time he has to spend with his teachers in setting up the new school. "I

plan to have these conversations with as many teachers as I can right now; I think it is

time well spent." When the investigator inquired about the length of each conversation

and whether he would have to limit the time once he had his whole staff on board, he

replied, "Conversations have run thirty, forty minutes, I'm guessing. I think even with a

full staff, that is doable." The investigator asked, "Would you limit these personal kind

of conversations to one per person per year?" Reggie responded, "Oh, no! You have to

make time, take time, to be of the situation. Once you invest in people, you have to keep investing." This is consistent with the findings of Palmer (2007) who explained that nurturing takes time and must be enduring otherwise it causes resentment and distrust. This endurance factor may be a reason some leaders are reluctant to engage in deep connections that attune one to another.

Teachers in every school in the study addressed the importance of conversation. When asked about the time it took to hold conversations and whether it was time well spent, Rosa said, "You bet it is! Absolutely! Because if you are working with someone day in and day out it's really hard to be fully successful if you can't talk to them and speak frankly with them and feel comfortable to speak frankly with them." Roy, another teacher from Riverwalk said that he had "finagled" his way into Reggie's office on multiple occasions because, "the conversations we have are authentic and natural and so they help me think clearly about my situation." He also added, "Even the conversation you and I had at the beginning of the study was important and helped me look at things from a different perspective. You took time to care about me." The investigator asked Roy during the mid-point interview if holding conversations of a personal nature or socializing with a principal is a waste of time or time that leads to something else. Roy talked about how connected he feels and how, although he is returning to the classroom from an administrative position, he is excited to work with Reggie. "There is a positive side to socializing and it is something that we as a society need; it is important. It is important that we are not just workers; we are human beings. People determine where they trust you based on who you are not necessarily on the work that you do. Every minute I spend with Reggie is time well spent."

Sarah, principal of Sherwood, answered a time question that came up when Sherrie (teacher in the study) said, "It's hard to make time to do anything let alone to get all your stuff done. Do you know what I mean?" Sarah replied, "I'm having as much of a hard time as they are to find time but it is a must. I get to learn about teachers in ways that support what we are going to do down the road. I look at it as time now or lots of time later." The investigator responded, "So, Sherrie, even with everything there is on your plate, do you think taking time to talk is worthwhile?" Sherrie said, "Going back to what Sarah said about it being a must I have to say the more I know her the more desire I have to do my job to the best of my ability."

In one of the five elementary schools, time was seen as a weakness in including conversations as part of the leader's routine. Marshall said that he thought of conversations that were personal in nature as "distracters" and he didn't see how "time could be spent on such a thing." It is interesting to note that he also engaged in a two hour conversation with the investigator without any outward appearance of concern for time. Contrary to popular belief, there is time in a day for all that is important; at least that is what my mother told me. Perhaps time and importance are more closely tied than what we now take time to consider. Learning is the development of complex relationships and through those relationships meaning is made, intricate interpretations give way to enriched perspectives and people co-create meaningful lives. To create, re-create, find meaning and connect takes time (Brown, 2005; Liston, 2001; Palmer, 2007). Further this study found that meaning-making, co-creation and relationship building can take place with workplace conversations.

Time and Transformation

Leadership is a universal phenomenon. The roles of leaders and teachers have become increasingly complex. Research on leadership over the past ten years has focused on knowledge—knowledge and accountability, school restructuring and student progress. This is, as Brooks (2011) noted in a recent New York Times article, an "amputated view of human nature" (p.A27). By looking beyond professional skills to thriving with other human beings in a complex world there can be a profound effect, transformation, of culture and, therefore, of education.

Bea, principal at Berryhill School, has retired from the district in this study. She served as a teacher, assistant principal and principal in her thirty plus years in education. "When I was teaching, I just kept looking at the principal role thinking there has got to be a better way to do this, a more personal way, a way that building relationships rather than destroying morale. I think the idea of conversing with teachers is so simple and so powerful. It may be the key I was looking for all along." Marshall, who was hesitant to engage in conversations and voiced disagreement to taking time for what was "an interruption" to getting things done, even saw the transformative property of conversation. When asked, "Do you think conversation might make a difference in the way teachers perform professionally" Marshall said, "Absolutely, because if she (teacher) would know that I know her well enough that I'm not going to ask her to do something that would be more than she could do but also that she could trust me more to say, 'Yeah, I can do this.' I believe you can do this even if you feel in your heart it is too big a step." This recognition does not constitute transformation. Transformation at its most simplistic is change.

Some participants in this study voiced intention to change, to develop a conversation culture. Reggie, who was eager to participate in the study and who had been talking to his teachers all along said that he was going to begin holding conversations with staff members as they were hired for the new school. He was going to schedule a time for ongoing conversations throughout the school year. Sarah voiced a similar change when she said she would schedule time for conversations with teachers so that the time would be protected from extraneous interruptions. "Conversations have made me feel like I am one of the team. I need to spend more time with a handful of teacher who are still struggling and I need to figure out why." Here she said that she planned to use conversation as a means to an end. Dick said through conversation, "maybe I can put teachers at ease and let them know, hey, he's not so bad." This was an important point for Dick who was new to the school and was transferred to the school mid-year. He felt that time was a real issue and that conversations would help ease the tension so the work could be done.

Teachers articulated changes they were planning. Sherrie said she would not hesitate to talk with Sarah about her classroom plans. She said that had a previous principal taken time to talk with her she would probably not have sought a new location. Rosa said, "Personable people get so much more out of me. My previous principal called me by the wrong name after six months into the school year. I did a lot less after that." She went on to say that she intends to stay at Riverwalk for as long as possible. "Even if something opened closer to home, I would stay. I feel like I am home here."

Leithwood (1999) studied leadership and concluded that transformational leaders are in continuous pursuit of helping teachers develop and maintain collaboration;

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developing a supportive school culture where teacher development is fostered and helping teachers solve problems together. This needs to be done with care given what was found through this study regarding vulnerability and time sensitivity. "Given the anxiety provoking nature of asking people to analyze critically the assumptions by which they habitually live, it is critical that educators find ways of doing this that are acceptable and non threatening as possible" (Brookfield, as cited in Mezirow, 1990, p.180). Reggie may have offered the most striking comment about transformation when he said that he was going to move from informal conversations to intentional conversations because they are "too important to hit and miss."

Intentionality

Intention is the expression of one's purpose, desire, volition or will (Malle, 2001). In this study the expression of intention was tacit in some cases and explicit in others. Beliefs and desires develop out of life experiences that have meaning to individuals. Intentionality allowed the investigator to focus on principal and teacher thoughts about how they might change their actions after participating in conversations. In a culture that sometimes equates work with drudgery, it is refreshing and transforming to think about educators who willing look at a situation, determine ways to make the situation better and then act on that determination. While this study was not able to see the final results of participants' intentionality, it did illuminate the desire to return human treatment to the schoolhouse. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 detail the statements made by various participants with regard to how they intended to transform their work.

Table 5.1: Implicit and Explicit Intentionality I (Principals denoted by asterisk)

Participants	Implicit Reference	Explicit Reference
Sarah*	Agreed with teachers that she had discovered more than she thought she might and that conversations had made her feel more connected to the team of educators at Sherwood	Will schedule time for conversations Will protect time for conversations Looked for ways to include conversation
Shawn	Learned more about Sarah than he thought he would and found that he had misjudged her; thinks the conversations should continue	Including time to talk is vital to morale
Sherrie	Conversations change the way she performs as a teacher	Will continue to converse with Sarah; important for her growth and to stay connected
Marshall*	Referred to conversations as distractions and not worth the time. It is doubtful that he will include conversations	
Dawn	Two upcoming projects interest her and now that she is more comfortable she would like to participate in them	Because there is a more comfortable relationship with principal, she will tell him about her medical concerns

Table 5.2: Implicit and Explicit Intentionality II (Principals denoted by asterisk)

Participants	Implicit Reference	Explicit Reference
Diane	Spoke about delaying her move back to Alabama because she is more comfortable with principal If a principal did not want to know about me personally I would look for another school	
Reggie*		Plans to hold conversations with every staff member Plans to move his conversation from "informal to intentional"
Rosa		Plans to continue to call, confer, and text principal when she has a professional issue or needs professional advice
Roy		Plans to continue conversations with principal whether he is assigned to Riverwalk or reassumes his administrative position
Marshall*	Referred to conversations as distractions and not worth the time. It is doubtful that he will include conversations	

Intentionality is born of beliefs, values and emotions that manifests as action

This kind of work appears to bind teachers to the school, impact their performance and create a culture of collaboration and support. This kind of culture positively impacts student achievement (Hoy, 1999). Barth (2001) summed up the importance of intentionality when he said,

"It is difficult to foresee what the schools of the new millennium will look like. Many of our schools seem en route to becoming a hybrid of a nineteenth-century factory, a twentieth-century minimum security penal colony, and a twenty-first century Educational Testing Service. I prefer a different future. If you want to predict the future, create it! This is precisely what school people now have the opportunity—the imperative—to do…There is no more important work" (p.213)

<u>The Will to Lead and Learn</u>

Some studies link the human brain to a person's mental life and to the outward display of thoughts. Without taking anything away from that view, philosophers and psychologists have held to the view that an inner force compels action and that psychological attributes determine the nature of that action (Argyrou, 2002; Ashkanasy, 2000; Barnett, 2007; Block, 2002). This more united view of a person disallows the subdividing of humanism into thoughts, emotions and actions. Human beings are creatures of the world, not in the world and when a human is mindful or mindless it is not a special occurrence inside the person but is that person's engagement with the world (Bakhurst, 2008; Freire, 1970). Salvati, a Russian philosopher of the late 1400s, discussed human will in combination with thinking or rationality. This was a new perspective during the time when philosophers saw divine will as separate from man's

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rational thinking and from free will (Edelheit, 2008). Free will is a philosophical doctrine that posits an individual, regardless of external forces, can choose at least some actions.

Plato denied free will saying no man would deliberately choose a worse course of action over a better one. Aristotle disagreed saying that desire will cause man to choose a worse condition over his reason. St. Augustine held that man was wholly dependent on divine grace. Jump to the 1970s when Benjamin Libet, a neuroscientist, said that brain signals associated with decision making occur before a human being is even conscious of making a decision (Farber, 2000). Come more current yet at Schopenhauer (1997) declares, "…every force in nature should be thought of as will" (p.43) to which Barnett (2007) adds, "the will is the foundation of educational energy" (p.20) and, "…without a will in place, no serious effort can be made to acquire a new skill…" (p.26).

The importance of Will and other dimensions of the human spirit have been recognized as critical to learning since Socrates. Education, however, has focused attention on skill development with no apparent regard for educator's beliefs, values or intentionality. To that end, this study sought to investigate principal-teacher conversations as a way to discover/build the will to lead and learn. While references to Will were discussed in chapter 4, no definitive evidence evolved to indicate that conversation is linked to Will. One reason no linkage was encountered may be that Will is a complex subject that has only recently been considered in social theories such as building relationships.

An overly simplistic view of human nature may have theorists and researchers relying too heavily upon reason, skill development, brain development and how to study student progress in light of testing outcomes. The 2010 agendas for the national

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conferences of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) listed connecting research, policy and practice and improving practice as major themes. A richer and deeper view of human nature is developing in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, sociology, and only very recently, education. Since education has been flooded with skill development for nearly twenty years, it may be that attunement, the ability to learn from others through a willingness to enter another's mind through communication, is still too new an idea and is, therefore, not part of common, everyday educational talk.

It may be that because educators have been driven down the path of simplifying education to separate units such as accountability, student progress, or reading improvement, that to see the world as complex situations requiring multifaceted attention is foreign. In the face of NCLB and the ever-increasing torrent of testing being brought to bear on educators by policy makers, school time has been consumed by that which can be measured with standardized tests. Little time has been left for invitational conversation. Time for educators to consider values, emotions, beliefs and personal connections to education in invitational conversation has been misused to develop more test centered activities (L.A. Putney (Personal communication, April 5, 2011).

Will is an ethereal construct, one that requires more study than was possible within the confines of this study. The investigator, concerned with offering too much explanation from her understanding and belief in the inclusion of Will as a required part of human learning and thereby prejudicing the outcome, held back and said very little about Will to participants. The research question was asked in such a way that some understanding of, or connection with, the construct of Will was necessary for participants

to relate to the idea. When asked what was built or discovered during the conversations, participants relayed learning more about each other, discovering a connection with the other person in the conversation, building trust and comfort with the other person, and building a connection to the school with the intention to remain at that school for longer than was originally contemplated. While these outcomes demonstrate a positive connection to conversation, they do little to shed light on Will and its connection to leading and learning.

The investigator, twenty years ago, developed a matrix that describes a possible relationship between issues around Will (dispositions, beliefs, values, human characteristics) and the skills required to complete a particular task, for example the skills for teaching reading. The investigator has used this idea repeatedly in her work with educators, business owners and workers, students and politicians. The idea has been positively received and the matrix has been used in schools and businesses across five states. Because of her predispositions toward the relationship between Will and skill, and to the belief in complex human synchronicity, the question leaned more to the investigators desire to find a relationship of Will to leading and learning and was, therefore, not as well included in this study and it perhaps could have been. To view human capital differently, in a more humane and complex manner, is still an area of study. This particular research endeavor moved toward the idea of increased humanity within the span of reason and emotion through conversation. Will and education has not been given its due. Pedagogy for inspiration is yet on the horizon.

<u>Investigator Growth through the Study</u>

As the conversations progressed and the iterative analysis began, the investigator realized personal growth as an investigator, as an educator and as a human being. First, the investigator conducted the initial interviews in a similar way at all five elementary school sites. The investigator began by introducing herself, the study and the participant's role in the study. Procedural questions from the participant were answered and the issues of confidentiality, volunteerism, and the ability to withdraw participation were covered. Then, the investigator asked, "What do you think of the idea of conversing with your principal (or teacher, depending upon the participant) over the next eight weeks?" Here the divergence began.

In the first two schools, the investigator asked follow up questions that clarified the participant's perceptions for the investigator, however, in the third, fourth and fifth schools, the follow up questions dug deeper into the participant's orientation to conversation, the principal-teacher relationship, participant hopes and fears, and in turn, caused the investigator's curiosity to increase. Freire (1970) pointed out that dialogue could not become a process for mere information gathering but an "indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing" (p.17). As the interviews progressed through mid-point interviews and final interviews, the investigation became less of a question and answer session; the interviews became conversations.

This shift caused the investigator to reflect, re-read passages from university texts and books read through coursework and in preparation for writing this dissertation. Phrases such as, "When I devote myself to something that does not flow from my identity, that is not integral to my nature, I am most likely deepening the world's hunger

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rather than helping to alleviate it" (Palmer, 2007, p. 31), helped me connect in a personal way to the participants so that the questions yielded richer context. There was energy and passion for the study and for the participants in the study. "Passion is degraded as if it were only in unseemly cases, and not necessarily and always, the motive force…" (Nietzche, 1968, p.208).

The experience of developing a study, presenting the study for participants' consideration and then moving to developing conversations and relationships with the participants was more than a journey and a turning to myself even more than to others, though this investigator has not wanted to, even at this writing. My hold on the world and its on me will be very different from this time forward and for that much I am resolutely grateful. Learning about the intertwining of theory and practice, leading to transformation of participation in the world is freedom (Freire, 1970).

Recommendations

"At its heart, leadership is about human behavior" (Kets De Vries, 2007, p.192). The purpose of this exploratory phenomenographic study was to investigate the perceptions of principals and teachers as they engaged in unstructured conversations during the school day. The primary outcomes were that fourteen of fifteen participants had positive responses to engaging in conversations during the school day, five participants showed implicit or explicit intentionality to include conversations as part of the school day, four of five principal-teacher teams at five elementary schools discussed time and how to make room in an already crowded school day for conversations, and three ideas for including conversations were discovered and made known to all principals in the study for their consideration. Participant interviews revealed that repeating the

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study may provide further information regarding unstructured conversations and may further reveal perceptions that lead participants from informal to intentional conversations. This study has reinforced the importance of this type of activity with an organization and has contributed to the literature related to principal-teacher relationships and to the use of phenomenography in the social sciences.

Replication of this study in other elementary schools or at another level (middle school and/or high school) may give greater clarity to the understandings of conversations and to its use as a method of meaning making. Replication of this study with the addition of principal participant interviews and teacher participant interviews may add depth to the perceptions of conversation and to the importance of conversation during the school day. One principal participant suggested the study be repeated using all principals to see if scheduled, unstructured conversations would develop a network of professionals who were personally connected.

Since the question regarding the Will to lead and learn was not sufficiently answered such that findings were definitive, seeking clarification of Will, leading, learning and the relationship of these concepts to conversation may provide greater clarity and additional research exploration.

As other researchers conduct studies to further explore conversation and identify the nuances of conversation within the educational context, more categories of description, themes and patterns may emerge. This researcher would welcome the use of this exploration as a point of departure for more searches, greater clarity and additional studies.

APPENDIX A

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

2/15/2010

Good Morning Principal _____,

Dr. (area superintendent) recently advised you about research I am conducting pursuant to my doctoral work in educational leadership at UNLV under the direction of Dr. James Crawford, Ph.D. The title of my dissertation is Change of Heart: A Phenomenographic Study of Principal-Teacher Conversation. I am exploring the impact conversations may have on leading and learning. Dr. Denson invited you to be a possible participant in this study and I would love to have you participate. The study involves your participating in at least four conversations with each of two of your teachers over six weeks. I will meet with you and the two teachers to explain the process, and I will interview you and the teachers about mid-way through the conversations and again at the conclusion of the conversations.

I would like to call you first to talk with you about this via telephone to see if we could find a time to meet and to see if you would like to participate. My cell is (702) 806-8031. Your participation is entirely voluntarily. As a former assistant region superintendent I understand how busy you are and I would like to make this as easy as possible should you decide to participate.

Is there a time when I might call you? I really appreciate your willingness to discuss this with me! Your thoughts will be so helpful and whether you decide to participate or not, it will be so helpful just to talk with you for a few minutes!

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. James Crawford, UNLV, College of Education, Department of Education Leadership at 702-895-4949 or by email at jrcrawford@unlv.edu. He is the Principal Investigator for this study and will be happy to answer your questions or provide additional information at your request.

Thank you again!!

Marjorie Conner

APPENDIX B

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS

Marton characterizes the phenomenographic interview as productive interaction, as an extension of the conversation (Marton, 1996). The purpose of the interviews is to determine how participants view the phenomena, in this case, conversation, and how the experience is progressing or has gone for them. Interviews for phenomenographic purposes are meant to build and maintain rapport, determine social meaning, and encourage reflective articulation of experiences ((Dortins, 2002; Saijo, 1997).

Guiding Topics for Interview #1 (midpoint interview)

1. How are the conversations going so far?
2. What does the term "conversation" mean to you?
3. What do you think about conversation of this nature in a school setting?
4. Tell me about your experience so far?

In phenomenographic interviewing, there should not be too many questions pre-determined since this may alter the reflective nature of the interview, may lead the interview in the researcher's direction and may not discover the true experiences of the participants (Marton, 1986).

Guiding Topics for Interview #2 (concluding interview)

1. Can you tell me about your experience with conversation in general? That is, conversation in other situations as well as during this study.
2. What did you expect from this particular this experience?
3. Has your meaning of "conversation" changed any through this experience?
4. Was there anything difficult about this experience?
5. Has anything changed for you, as a teacher, (as a principal)?
6. Is there value in this kind of conversation in the workplace? Explain/expand
7. What about the time it takes to converse with another person? We often hear about how little time there is to get done all that needs to be done in school.
8. If you were to make remarks about conversations as part of the principal-teacher interactions, what would you say?

Phenomenographic interviewing has a focus, that is, a way to understand the concept being studied, but that focus is not maintained by a long series of interview questions or by disallowing participant digressions that may yield valuable insight into participant descriptions, approaches or experiences (Bowden, 2005).

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INFORMED CONSENT
Department of Educational Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: Change of Heart: A Phenomenographic Study of Principal-Teacher

Conversation

INVESTIGATOR(S): James R. Crawford, Ph D

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 895-4949

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore principal and teacher perceptions of conversation as a framework for leading and learning. Principals and teachers often have little opportunity to hold informal conversations with each other. This study provides you with an opportunity to have conversations and then have the perceptions that are formed as a result of those conversations assessed. .

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are an elementary principal OR, an elementary teacher who has been asked to participate by your principal. Even though you may have been asked to participate, you understand your participation is entirely voluntary.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Complete an orientation interview with the researcher that will be audio taped during   which time you may ask questions, seek clarification, and gain information about the study.
2. Engage in four (4) conversations over a six week period of time with:
    a) Two separate teachers from your school (if you are the principal)
    b) With the principal from your school (if you are a teacher)

     c) Keep a notebook of notes, questions, ideas and other reflections during the conversation period that I may use during the interviews and may offer to the researcher at the conclusion of the final interview.

3. Complete a midpoint interview with the researcher that will be audio taped. This will occur after two conversations have been completed.
4. Complete a final interview with the researcher that will be audio taped. This will occur after all conversations have been completed.
5. Review and make corrections and/or additions to typed transcripts of the interviews you had with the researcher.

Benefits of Participation

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn how conversations might encourage stronger professional relationships that may lead to more productive performance and/or improved school performance.

Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. As you are conversing with your research partner or responding during the interview you may share or remember experiences or situations that were uncomfortable for you. You will not be forced to share any information you are not very comfortable sharing.

Cost /Compensation

There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately four hours of your time for the conversations and approximately one hour for the interview. The follow-up meeting where you can review the transcript of your interview should take no more than 30 minutes unless you have additional information you choose to share. You will not be compensated for your time.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact James R. Crawford at **895-4949.** For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.**

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university, to your school location or any personnel of the Clark County School District. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for three years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be shredded.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Participant Name (Please Print)

Audio Taping:

I agree to be audio taped for the purpose of this research study.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Participant Name (Please Print)

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

(Date)

Dear _____,

    This will confirm our recent telephone conversation regarding research I am conducting pursuant to my doctoral work in educational leadership at UNLV under the direction of Dr. James Crawford, Ph.D. The title of my dissertation is Change of Heart: A Phenomenographic Study of Conversation and, as we discussed, the purpose of the research is to explore the impact conversations may have on leading and learning. During our conversation we established a time to meet at your school: (date and time). This meeting will take approximately one hour. If this time is not convenient, please do not hesitate to contact me at (702) 806-8031 to reschedule.

    During our meeting we will discuss the purpose of the study, the procedures, the potential benefits and risks, the costs and compensation associated with this study, audio recording the interviews I will conduct at the midpoint and conclusion of the conversations. I will describe the measures that will be taken to maintain confidentiality of the audio recordings and of your identity. At any time you may withdraw from this study; your participation is entirely voluntary. From the list of six teachers on your staff who meet the criteria of (describe the criteria necessary for this site), one will be selected randomly by me during our meeting. If he/she is willing to participate, I will meet with the teacher at a convenient time and go over the same information with him/her. After hearing the information if you or the teacher chooses not to participate, your withdrawal from the study is without any penalty. Participation is voluntary for you and the teacher from your school.

    If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information, please feel free to contact Dr. James Crawford at UNLV. His telephone number is (702) 895-4949 and his email is jrcrawford@unlv.edu. If you would like to talk with me before our meeting, my number is (702) 806-8031 and I am on interact at marjorieconner@interact.ccsd.net.

    Thank you again for your willingness to assist me with this research. I look forward to discussing the study with you further and seeking your participation.

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