

ABSTRACT

ANSBACHER, DAVID BENJAMIN. What We Talk About When We Talk About Vision: A Phenomenological Study of Principals' Understanding of Vision. (Under the direction of Dr. Lance Fusarelli).

The concept of 'vision' in the principalship is simultaneously extremely important yet surprisingly vague in its definition and practical application. This phenomenological study investigates the ways that principals understand and use the concept of vision in their daily work and their approach to school leadership. The study examines the ways that principals understand and use vision in the daily work of the principal, considering questions of genesis of vision, cultivation of vision, and frameworks for understanding vision. The researcher conducted interviews with five recent Principals of the Year from an urban school district and concludes with a framework for a phenomenological understanding of vision based upon the metaphors used by these principals.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Vision: A Phenomenological Study of
Principals' Understanding of Vision.

by
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DEDICATION

I would like to thank my wife, Melissa, for her support and patience throughout this process. Every hour I spent on this research was an hour I did not spend with her and my three children, but she never wavered in her belief in me and her support. I wouldn't have been able to complete this, or anything else I've accomplished in the past years of our marriage, without her beside me.

BIOGRAPHY

David Ansbacher grew up in Burlington, North Carolina, and graduated from Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio *magna cum laude* with a double major in Political Science and English in 1992. He spent his junior year studying Irish Literature at Trinity College Dublin, and developed a senior independent study on Education Policy which served as the basis for a course at the college. After graduation, he spent a year and a half teaching English in a rural area outside of Windhoek, Namibia.

He returned to complete his Masters in Teaching at Brown University in 1994 and taught high school History and English for three years at Irvington High School in Fremont, California. He returned to North Carolina to teach History and English at Southeast Raleigh Magnet High School. He enrolled in the Principal Fellows program at North Carolina State University and earned his Masters in Educational Leadership.

In 2000, he completed an administrative internship at A.B. Combs Leadership Magnet Elementary School and was appointed assistant principal at East Millbrook International Baccalaureate / Creative Arts Magnet Middle School in 2001. He was promoted to principal at East Millbrook in 2003. He was the Wake PTA Middle School Principal of the Year in 2004, and was a finalist for the Wake County Public Schools Principal of the Year in 2006 and 2007. He served as chair of the middle school committee on the Wake County Division of Principals and Assistant Principals.

In December 2007, he was appointed Senior Director for Magnet Programs with Wake County Public Schools. He completed his Ed.D. at NC State University and graduated in December 2008. He lives in Raleigh with his wife Melissa and three children.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Vision. A simple word, yet in the hands of the business and education worlds, it has come to mean everything and nothing at once. Pick books at random off the business and leadership shelves at the local bookstore and try to find one that does not have vision in the index. Each book, usually with a number of reference points throughout, will have its own conception of vision, each one drowning in verbiage. Talk to most school leaders about what makes a good principal and the word will pop up, usually in the context of “a principal has to have a clear vision.” Yet delve deeper, and you will find a world of contradictions: Vision is all-important, yet difficult to define. Vision is owned by all, yet guided by one. Vision is vital to a school community, yet pointless to discuss. Vision is vital to a principal’s success, yet intractable to evaluate. Vision must be steadfast, yet vision must change.

As principals come into the profession, there find many ways to look at vision. A new principal may seek a vision from the school board, superintendent, or state. That same new principal might look inside for a vision, conjuring a vision from her experiences as an educator. Or, he might look to effective schools in the research or in the surrounding districts to study and create a vision from key aspects of those schools. Still further, the vision could come from nebulous memories and perceptions of previous school experiences. The vision might be rooted in an exhaustive exploration of available data and committed to changing as that data changes. Or the young principal could adopt the vision of a valued mentor or trusted writer, or merely jump on the bandwagon of the day. Each of these avenues, and many more, are accepted and realistic approaches to forming, nurturing and leading with a

vision. The dizzying options available beg the question: How should principals think about and use vision? With the success of the children and teachers of a school seemingly dependent upon a leader with a compelling vision, the question is certainly worth a detailed exploration.

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the paradoxes listed above, the Educational Leadership Constituents Council (ELCC) has vision as a key component of its Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership. The first standard prizes “educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning supported by the school community.” This definitive document serves as the foundation for principal evaluation in many states, yet fails to clearly define what vision looks like in practice (see Appendix A for full standard). North Carolina’s state school board, in its newly revised Standards for School Executives (2006) mentioned the concept of vision nine times in the brief standard, most significantly in defining the first standard, Strategic Leadership, by stating that “the principal will create conditions that result in strategically re-imagining the school’s vision, mission and goals in the 21st century” (NC School Board, p. 5) (see Appendix B for full standard). Beyond that, there are hundreds of definitions of vision available. Each different conception of vision could find success, depending upon the school culture in which a principal finds herself or himself. It is important to understand vision beyond a simple definition by observing its use in practice: how specifically does vision work in today’s principalship?

These apparent paradoxes lead to several important questions, including: How do principals understand vision? How do different concepts of vision affect school climate and student success? Is vision personal or something derived from the school environment? Should one's vision change, or should the vision be steadfast and permanent? How do directives, policy, and changes in law affect vision? How should principals be educated in the use and misuse of vision?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how principals understand and use vision. Specifically, I will examine the varying ways principals think about and use the concept of vision. Or, to borrow from the title of a short story from American writer Raymond Carver (1989), this study looks at “What we talk about when we talk about” vision (p. 1). This phenomenological study does not aim to define vision or to investigate how the art of visionary leadership is practiced. The researcher does not focus on the policy implications associated with vision, although there certainly are policy issues that come into play and conclusions that could affect policy, which will be addressed in Chapter 5. The research is about how principals think about vision and how that thought affects the actions they take in their roles as school leaders. Through this sort of exploration, present and future principals can explore their own frameworks of vision in comparison to the models discussed here. This research could be useful to novice principals trying to establish a sense of vision in their work, as well as for veteran principals looking to make sense of the maze of ideas competing for a place in their approach to vision.

Definition of Terms

The word “Vision” has a variety of definitions. In a phenomenological study of understandings of a word, it is useful to start with a dictionary definition, this one from Merriam-Webster (2006):

VISION. Etymology: Middle English, from Old French, from Latin *vision-*, *visio*, from *vidEre* to see --

1 a : something seen in a dream, trance, or ecstasy; *especially* : a supernatural appearance that conveys a revelation **b** : an object of imagination **c** : a manifestation to the senses of something immaterial <look, not at *visions*, but at realities -- Edith Wharton>

2 a : the act or power of imagination **b** (1) : mode of seeing or conceiving (2) : unusual discernment or foresight <a man of *vision*> **c** : direct mystical awareness of the supernatural usually in visible form

3 a : the act or power of seeing : **sight** **b** : the special sense by which the qualities of an object (as color, luminosity, shape and size) constituting its appearance are perceived and which is mediated by the eye

4 a : something seen **b** : a lovely or charming sight

Each of these definitions finds reference in the descriptions and metaphors that writers employ, but it is the second, and, in some part, the third definitions here that find prominence in terms of appeal to the world of leadership.

The understanding of the term vision has gone through substantial changes since it first gained wide management appeal in the mid-1980's with Bennis and Nanus' book,

Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge (1985). Nanus (1992) defines vision as “a realistic, credible, attractive future for your organization” (p. 8). This definition of vision focuses on the leader’s ability to create the mental image of a possible future state for the school and communicate that vision to the members of the community. Bennis’ (1989) vision motivates change because the described condition that the leader creates is “better in some important ways than what now exists” (p. 89).

Ylimaki (2006) points out since the 1990’s, a newer definition of vision has evolved which focuses less on a descriptive future state and more upon “clear and measurable goals that guide organizational members’ efforts forward through a change process” (p. 632). This concept of vision has found much favor with the focus on accountability and data-driven decision making that flourishes in the No Child Left Behind era. Fullan (1997) emphasizes that an organization “needs both a vision of the nature or content that it represents and a clear vision of the processes it characteristically values and follows” (p. 34). While Bennis focuses on the future image, Fullan and others in the 1990’s began to emphasize that a vision must include the processes, goals and outcomes by which that vision could possibly be measured.

Finally, Roland Barth (2001) brings a moral component to vision that, while not absent from other definitions, was more clearly emphasized in his book, *Learning by Heart*. He describes vision as “a kind of moral imagination that gives school people, individually and collectively, the ability to see their school not only as it is but also as they would like it to become” (p. 204). This perspective, echoed as well by Sizer (1999) and Sergiovanni (1992, 1994) focus on the moral component of school leadership, placing a central

importance upon the school leader for ensuring that the vision echoes and reinforces the moral vision of the school. Sergiovanni (1994) explains that “moral ties emerge from the duties we accept and the obligations we feel towards others . . . (and) they are likely to be stronger than extrinsic or intrinsic ties” (p. 54). According to these authors, vision without the moral element is lacking the cornerstone on which the trust and viability necessarily will be built.

While these myriad definitions are valuable and provocative, a practical guide, from Wake County Public Schools’ principal evaluation instrument (1999), gives description of what vision looks like in practice:

(A principal should) demonstrate the ability to develop, articulate, and use a vision of excellence. For example:

- Present evidence that the vision is a shared vision
- Use the vision to guide and define decisions
- Maintain a steady flow of two-way communication to keep the vision alive and important. (p. 1)

To present an operational definition of vision would undermine the very objective this research strives toward, but the above description can serve as a starting point.

It is important to distinguish between vision and the general concept of leadership. Leadership is the more all-encompassing term, including skills of management, communication, expertise, and, of course, vision. Vision is more particularly concerned with the specific, less tangible, internal thinking and planning that comes with understanding the big picture of an organization. Thomas Sergiovanni defined the five “leadership forces” as

“technical, human, educational, symbolic, and cultural,” and his description of these forces shows the distance between the focused concept of vision and the broader understanding of leadership (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 6). There are certainly areas where the two terms overlap and this study will make an effort to avoid confusion between the two concepts.

Finally, this study defines phenomenology as the discipline within the broader field of qualitative research that focuses on understanding individual experience of a particular phenomenon. Discussion in this field looks for understanding of experience through individual understanding. Phenomenology finds its home in the underlying belief that the “reality of an object, then, is inextricably related to one’s consciousness of it” (Creswell, 1998, p. 53). In other words, as Merriam (2002) explains, “The researcher’s focus is thus on neither the human subject nor the human world, but on the essence of the meaning of this interaction”(p. 37). There will be further discussion of the phenomenological approach in Chapter II.

Significance of the Study

This study will help to bridge a gap in the research on vision and leadership. Already present in the literature are many first-hand accounts of leadership, from case studies of individual principals to biographical and autobiographical research of the lives of effective principals. There are also a great many prescriptive accounts of what a principal with vision looks like, or how vision can be used to effect change. Yet, what is clearly missing in the research is a connection of these two kinds of research. This study will look metacognitively at the way that principals think about vision, connecting the internal and personal with the theoretical. The research will show the way that different metaphorical, practical, and

strategic approaches to vision work in the minds of principals and how those approaches affect the reality of school leadership. With this research, it is my hope that new and experienced principals can reflect upon their own use of vision in daily work, perhaps seeing, within the many ways that vision is conceived, used and modified, possibilities for their own leadership.

Overview of the Approach

This research will study the understandings of vision by the five most recent principals of the year in a large urban school district. These principals will be asked to think about the way a vision is formed, how it is cultivated, and how vision affects the everyday work of the school principalship. Through these interviews, I hope to establish a number of different metaphorical frameworks through which aspiring school leaders can find an understanding of vision. This phenomenological approach to the methodology will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature surrounding the development of vision, the cultivation of that vision, and frameworks for understanding the components of vision.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

This section of the study will review the important literature on the subject of vision in the principalship. Sashkin (1988) speaks for many when he states that “effective schools must have effective leaders such who can create and implement a vision of the school’s culture that contains within it the values on which excellence is built”(p. 248). Yet, inherent in this broad statement are many unexplored questions about development, forms, cultivation, and assessment of vision. After a brief discussion of the history of the idea of vision and school leadership, I will explore three key aspects of the literature. First, there will be an exploration of the genesis of vision, then a discussion of how the research views the different ways that school leaders cultivate vision, and a presentation of two frameworks from the literature for describing different forms of vision. Finally, I will present a review of the empirical, qualitative and quantitative studies that assess the impact of vision on principal and school effectiveness.

Historical Perspective

The response to the Coleman Report in 1966 was strong, as many educators sought to rebuke the theory that schools had little or no effect upon the educational futures of students of poverty. As Rahan (2001) reports, researchers like Lawrence Lezotte (1977) and Ronald Edmonds (1979) conducted research to establish key elements of the characteristics of effective schools, and they settled on a set of correlates which saw patterns in the public schools which found success. One of the seven correlates was “strong instructional

leadership and emphasis,” (Rahan, 2001); Lezotte (1994) explains that “effective schools and school districts are led by individuals who have the vision that learning in a democracy must be inclusive – learning for all. Second, these individuals have the ability to communicate this vision to the others in the district and in the school so they share the vision and accept the vision and accept the mission of making it happen” (pp. 21-22).

While the language surrounding vision seems at times overwrought, it is important to realize that it is only recently that the role of principal as ‘visionary leader’ has been an important part of the metaphors surrounding the role. Beck and Murphy (1993) have shown the historical progression of the principalship and the way that

certain metaphors dominate the literature from particular eras. In the twenties, for instance, spiritual imagery abounds. In the thirties, we find metaphors from business management . . . principals are expected to be social science experts in the 1950’s; bureaucrats in the next decade; community leaders in the seventies. (p. 197)

While descriptions of the principalship were not void of ideas connected to vision before the 1980’s, the focus of the principal’s work has shifted from the spiritual to the managerial to the instructional (Beck & Murphy, 1993). While it may be too soon to judge the future of discussion on vision, it seems that the conversation about the principalship, at least from the research produced, shows a refocusing away from the principal as visionary to the principal as data specialist or change manager. As the role of the principal sways from that of visionary to data manager, there is a question about the relevant importance that vision needs to play in this new leadership. If one is simply allowing data to drive decisions, then one could argue that idealistic concepts of vision are the antithesis of leading by data. We will

return to this idea in the summary and conclusion.

Genesis of Vision

The literature on vision has gone through substantial changes since it first appeared in the mid-1980's with Bennis and Nanus' book, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*. "Vision" quickly became the buzzword of leadership in the late 1980's and early 1990's, culminating publicly with president George H.W. Bush's public vexation over his inability to grasp "the vision thing" (Conley, Dunlap, & Goldman, 1992). This approach to vision was born in the corporate world, and the concept was clear:

(The leader is) the one who articulates the vision and gives it legitimacy, who expresses the vision in captivating rhetoric that fires the imagination and emotions of followers, who - through the vision - empowers others to make the decisions that get things done. (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 10)

The key to leadership, according to Nanus (1992), is in "establishing a vision so compelling that everyone in the organization will want to help make it happen" and this, in the end, is the toughest and truest test of great leadership (p. 13). The focus is clearly on the individual intelligence and creativity of the leader him or herself. This approach, I will define as Leader-Based Vision.

In this framework, the genesis of vision clearly comes from the leader him or herself. As Nanus (1992) explains, "Vision is composed of one part foresight, one part insight, plenty of imagination and judgment, and often, a healthy dose of chutzpah" (p. 34). In Bennis and Nanus' original conceptions, it is the responsibility of the leader to develop this vision from personal experience, observation, and an understanding of the future. Consulting employees

and other stakeholders is an option, but is not required. As Nanus (1992) stipulates, “at a minimum, make sure you completely understand (the organization’s) expectations and needs and the dependence of your organization on their support” (p. 38). Others, such as Brooke and Mills (1998) have been more blunt in explaining the central position of the leader, maintaining that vision “is the embodiment of a personal view subject to criticism and information from experts” (p. 15). This is not a collaboration, but merely input from “a body of implementors” of the vision (p. 3).

Tichy and Devanna (1986) continue along these lines by firmly stating, “Leaders are responsible for the creation of a vision, and the vision provides the basic energy source for moving the organization towards the future” (p. 52). This individual-centered approach to vision is one that certainly seems tied historically to the eras of school leadership that Beck and Murphy describe as more leader-centered, as in the military metaphors of the 1940’s and the bureaucratic emphasis present in the sixties. The central idea is that the vision comes primarily from the leader him or herself:

If there is a spark of genius in the leadership function at all, it must lie in this transcending ability, a kind of magic, to assemble – out of all the variety of images, signals, forecasts and alternatives – a clearly articulated vision of the future that is at once simple, easily understood, clearly desirable and energizing. (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 103)

With a leader-based vision, the individual can lead with a combination of imagination, a perception of the future, and charismatic explanation of the vision, and is “has to come from within” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 34). Note how Kouzes and Posner describe the focus on

the individual in their influential *The Leadership Challenge* (1995):

Discovering a vision for your organization is similar in many ways to the initial stages of planning for an expedition. You feel a strong inner sense of dissatisfaction with the way things are in your community, congregation, or company and have an equally strong belief that things don't have to be this way. . . .As the desire grows in intensity, so does your determination. The strength of this internal energy forces you to clarify what it is you really want to do. You begin to get a sense of what you want the organization to look like, feel like, and be like when you and others have completed the journey. (p. 96)

It is, indeed, an exceptional individual who has the faculties necessary to accomplish the development and deployment of a leader-based vision.

Accounts of leader-based vision are popular in tales of schools experiencing drastic institutional change, as observers point to the powerful vision brought by an individual principal or school leader. The image of a Joe Clark-style principal who comes in to a troubled school with a powerful new vision finds great favor in popular culture views of schools and school improvement. Pattison, notes that “this notion of vision as a chosen leader’s gift of foresight has latent religious overtones. ‘In the Judeo-Christian tradition, visions come from the creator, God. They are given to specifically chosen charismatic figures that then have the power and authority to make people change their ways” (Pattison, 1997, p. 69). John Martin Schroeder, the North Carolina principal of the year in 1991, expressed it this way:

One of the key functions of the principal is to be the Keeper of the Dream. It is your

vision that starts the whole thing moving at the school . . . The principal is the ultimate visionary who must keep it all in focus. Focus your school on what is best for children and getting them ready for their future. (quoted in Hart, 1997, p. 76)

This leader-based vision is one that emanates from the leader him or herself. This can evolve from professional experiences, deeply held beliefs, research and evaluation or a number of other sources. Regardless, the leader-based vision is one that comes from within, tied to strong principles and beliefs about what is right or wrong for schools and children.

While many have tried to instill this leader-based approach in schools, Thomas Sergiovanni (1996) is one of many who maintain that schools require what I will define as community-based vision as opposed to the leader-based approach of corporations. Principals must share their visions in an “invitational mode, not in the command or sell mode” because “moral connections cannot be commanded by hierarchy or sold by personalities, but must be compelled by helping people to accept their responsibilities” (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 83). In other words, as Robert Starratt (1995) puts it, “The point of leadership is not to get people to follow *me*; rather the point is to get everyone jointly to pursue a dream” (p. 16). Community-based vision puts authorship at the center: for a vision to be effective, it must come *from* the members of the organization itself. This is the opposite of leader-based vision. “If organizational leaders develop a vision in isolation or do not understand their role as communicators of the vision, then its power will not be realized” (Peel & McCary, 1997, p. 698).

W. Edwards Deming’s pioneering work in the 1920’s with the engineering of organizations set the stage for this community-based vision. Deming’s ideas were at the core

of Japan's reconstruction after World War II, and they focused around the empowerment of individual workers in the vision-building and decision-making process.

Everyone on a team has a chance to contribute ideas, plans and figures . . . Lead managers engage the workers in an ongoing honest discussion of both the cost and quality of the work that is needed for the company to be successful. They not only listen, but they also encourage their workers to give them any input that will improve quality. (Glasser, paraphrasing Deming, 1994, p. 14)

Peter Senge (1990) has picked up Deming's charge in his concept of shared vision, compelling leaders to think in terms of "listening to what the organization is trying to say, and then making sure that it is forcefully articulated" (p. 206). Senge (1990) maintains that individuals need to develop a vision for their own professional life and only then can the community come together to develop a vision for the organization.

Michael Fullan has championed this perspective of community-based vision through the 1990's and his arguments have found favor from leaders who seek a vision that does not come from within. His key point in his 1993 *Change Forces* is that "vision emerges from, more than it precedes action" (p. 28). He mocks the "old and dead wrong paradigm" (p. 29) of the leader-based vision, arguing instead that true ownership of a vision can only come as members of a school community "talk, try things out, inquire, re-try – all of this jointly" (p. 31). Even then, this vision is still a fluid and evolving entity, constantly changing as members of the community, current realities, and situations change. While schools may hope to arrive at a shared vision, 'arrival' as we have seen, is only temporary; the most powerful shared visions are those that contain the basis for further generative learning and recognize that

individual and organizational learning will always be in dynamic tension” (p. 33). These principals ‘expect anxiety to be endemic in school reform” (Fullan, 1998, p. 9). It is the acceptance of the necessary tensions of change and the ever-evolving vision that marks Fullan’s understanding of the community-based vision.

In his recent case study of Denali Elementary School, David Hagstrom (2004) describes this development of community-based vision, a process that grew out of informal conversations among stakeholders.

[staff and family members] talked about what they wanted to create in their own lives, and as they did, they joined their interests and passions with the simultaneously emerging and evolving vision of the school and its community. . . the process of finding a vision draws out who people are and what they’re calling for. The vision that is found might surprise the principal, the staff, and the parents. (p. 77)

This is an archetypal example of the vision coming from the community, and one that Barth (2001) describes in his research as well. He explains that “by some form of hydroponics, agriculture, or alchemy, members of the school community . . . create together a vision that provides a new and profound sense of purpose for the organization” (p. 204). The principal is not necessarily at the center of this process, but is a key facilitator. Without the organic process of growth of a vision from within the organization, these community-based thinkers would view a vision as less than practicable.

Cultivation of Vision

Once a vision is developed, principals need to understand how to make vision a part of their leadership and school culture. The literature provides a number of different

approaches to this question. First, there is a focus on reflection as a means of developing, refining, and strengthening vision. Starratt (1995) explains that “reflective practice” involves consistently reflecting on actions to see whether proposed paths do indeed connect with the vision. The concept of reflective practice was described by John Dewey (quoted in Barth, 2001) as “a specialized form of thinking, arising from perplexity and about a direct experience and leading to purposeful inquiry and problem resolution” (p. 74). Reflective practice calls upon school leaders to “puzzle out why things worked and why they did not to build up a reservoir of insights and intuitions that they can call upon.” (Starratt, 1995, p. 66) Reflection can happen in isolation through journaling or through ongoing collaborative reflection with colleagues, but regardless of the form, the consistent reflection is vital to an effective vision.

Lawrence Lezotte (1994) looked at the cultivation of vision as a shared enterprise of a leader with a clear vision of instructional leadership and a staff of educators who could follow along democratically. Teachers, as all humans, have a “basic need to be a part of a community of shared values” (Lezotte, 1994, p. 22), and they long to be involved in the acceptance and cultivation of vision. Individual leaders can bring an established vision to the table, and this can be a leader-centered vision, and the teachers and community will play a vital part in dispersing the vision. As he points out, “The visions that have endured and changed history were those that were quickly dispersed among the community of the followers and became shared visions” (p. 22). The cultivation of vision, in Lezotte’s paradigm, comes not with the community changing the vision of the leader, but in sharing it and bringing it to a larger audience. The vision of the instructional leader is central in

Lezotte's view and the community of the school owns the vision of the instructional leader and cultivates it through their work in its shadow.

Another perspective the ways vision is perpetuated and cultivated comes from a focus on the rituals, procedures, and traditions that school leaders can foster and protect. Deal and Peterson (1999) demonstrate how vision is institutionalized through managing school culture, emphasizing the importance of passing along stories, preserving artifacts of school history, and protecting traditions which reflect the vision of the school. In one simple example, they describe a school where the mission statement is reviewed each fall and then "redone in new calligraphy by a local artist and signed by everyone," renewing the sense of purpose (p. 36). Cultivating vision in Deal and Peterson's framework revolves around putting school culture at the center, revisiting aspects of the culture that reflect the vision and holding them up, reflecting upon aspects of school culture that go against the vision, and looking to ceremony, tradition or symbols to revitalize that aspect of school culture.

Wallace, Engle, and Mooney (1997) present a model of a "learning school" based on Senge's "learning organization," which demonstrates that a viable vision is interrelated with authentic teaching and learning, a supportive school organization, and authentic assessment. This line of thinking has found new energy in Rick DuFour's (1998) research around professional learning communities, but the central tenets of this approach to vision are the same, that a school is "a place where teachers engage in life-long learning to expand their pedagogical skills, thus enhancing their impact on student learning" (Wallace *et al*, 1997, p. 167). Whereas Deal and Peterson focused on the aspects of a school *around* the learning, the learning organization approach puts learning at the center of the cultivation of the vision;

through this continual questioning and learning, the vision can change and develop through the collaboration and interaction of the professionals involved.

Forms of Vision

With all of the research surrounding the importance of vision in school leadership, there is startlingly little attempting to describe the different kinds of vision that exist and are utilized in practice. There are, however, two useful paradigms that have emerged from the literature on vision and school leadership: Manasse's (1986) study which breaks vision into four interacting components, and Ylimaki's (2006) description of vision which focuses on the different forms of the visionary archetype.

A. Lorri Manasse's (1986) study of vision breaks down vision into four interacting components: organizational vision, future vision, personal vision, and strategic vision. Each of these components can exist in one phenomenological framework as the sole embodiment of vision, or they can work interchangeably in the hands of a capable leader.

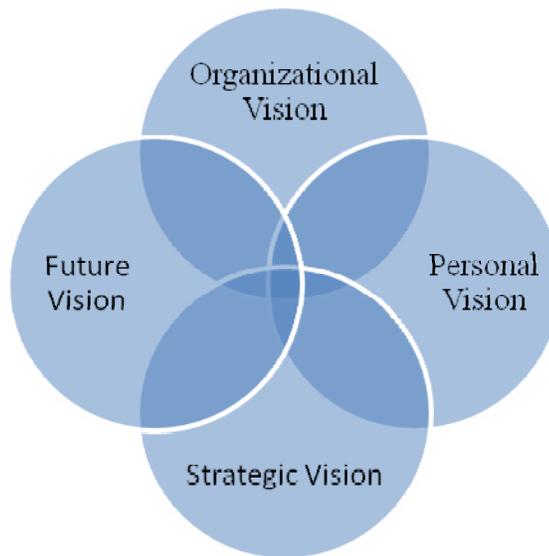


Figure 1. Manasse's Four Components of Vision

The first component, organizational vision, focuses on the necessary systems perspective a school leader must possess, allowing “one to understand how action in one area may affect other, seemingly unrelated areas” (Manasse, 1986, p. 155). This sort of vision focuses on understanding and predicting the interconnectedness of the school environment. Organizational vision “assumes that the parts of the whole are dependent on each other” (p. 155) and those parts are best understood in their connectedness. It demands skills of processing information, learning from other organizations, and the ability to see the organization through different lenses.

The second component, future vision, is a “comprehensive picture of how an organization will look at some point in the future, including how it will be positioned in its environment and how it will function internally” (Manasse, 1986, p. 157). This component of vision requires a fundamental understanding of the current reality along with an intuitive sense of the future possibilities. Bennis and Nanus (1986) discuss the need for skills of foresight, hindsight, worldview, depth perception, and peripheral vision in developing a sense of future vision (p. 102). This component of vision requires a high level of creativity, confidence, and knowledge of the changing terrain of public education.

Personal vision, the third component, requires a high level of self-awareness and emotional intelligence. “It is through personal vision that leaders identify their own personal resources and position themselves to play to their strengths” (Manasse, 1986, p. 160). It is only through a keen sense of what the leader does well and how to capitalize on those strengths that a leader can marshal his or her own resources and delegate other tasks. In their study of emotional intelligence, *Primal Leadership*, Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002)

point to this understanding of individual strengths and “how leaders handle themselves and their relationships” as the central factor in the success or failure of a leader (p. 6). As Day, Harris, and Hadfield (2001) point out, “the lack of an ‘emotional quotient’ has been used to explain why some otherwise skilled, intelligent people fail in their leadership roles, while others who are less intellectual succeed. (p. 53)

With the final component, strategic vision, Manasse (1986) points to the importance of connecting all three of these previously described components into a strategic plan. “Strategic vision is more than a formal planning process or an organizational mission statement. Strategic vision enables leaders to make on-the-spot decisions that are consistent so that the message from their actions supports the message in their words” (p. 162). It is in strategic vision that leaders make use of metaphors to draw the varied components into one holistic vision with clear priorities to communicate to stakeholders.

Recently, Rose Ylimaki (2006) conducted a useful study of curriculum directors of literacy to foster a unique understanding of vision based the concepts of archetypes. As she explains in her study, archetypes “come from the Greek *arche* meaning ‘first’ and *type* meaning ‘imprint or pattern’ ...and are most often associated with the work of psychologist Carl Jung” (p. 627). These are patterns of roles, like a father, leader, warrior, or truth-teller, which, according to Jung (1964), inhabit the consciousness of members of a culture. Ylimaki’s framework is based upon the concept that the ‘leader’ or ‘visionary’ archetype forms a leader’s understanding of vision. Arrien’s description of the archetype of the visionary focuses upon three central characteristics:

1. maintains his or her authenticity by telling the truth without blame or

2. knows and communicates his or her creative purposes and life dreams, and
3. honors the four ways of seeing: intuition, perception, insight, and holistic seeing (vision). (Arrien, 1993, quoted in Ylimaki, 2006, p 629).

With this archetypal vision as a starting point, Ylimaki (2006) discovers four key metaphors through her interviews to describe the varied forms of vision:

- (a) telling the truth of local change efforts – the view from stepping stones on the river
- (b) telling the truth of external change efforts – the view from the bridge
- (c) telling the truth for the marginalized in change efforts – the view from the heart
- (d) forging a new path through the woods – a leader’s vision of the future (p. 629).

She maintains that any useful framework for understanding vision must understand that vision is a “dynamic interaction among inner human resources (e.g. insight, intuition, and perception), an outward perspective, and the context of a particular visioning situation” (p.649). This awareness of the impact of individual perspective and intuition is a valuable contribution to the discussion of vision.

Ylimaki’s framework is significant for the importance it places upon perspective and position in the development of vision, as well as a focus upon the subconscious archetypes that work within leaders as they think about vision. As she points out, earlier descriptions of vision “rely strictly upon the single sense of foresight and fail to take into account the human factor” (Ylimaki, p. 649). However, one could criticize the research as limited because of a metaphorical reference point that seems to evolve more from the researcher than from the

subjects themselves. Her study also focuses not on school-based administrators, but on district level curriculum specialists. While one might speculate that this could limit its metaphorical power, in Chapter IV I will apply these metaphors to the principalship to demonstrate their potential for understanding school leadership.

While Manasse and Ylimaki's frameworks are useful as a starting points, I found them lacking in their practical power, and the research limiting both within the study and in further research. This study will attempt to offer a new framework within which we make use of some of Ylimaki's and Manasse's' concepts while building into it key factors that touch both on the different views of the genesis of vision and cultivation of vision. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology that I used to collect data about school leaders in this study.

Assessment and Measurement of Vision

There have been a number of literature reviews and studies that have attempted to measure the effect of vision upon school achievement or principal success (Conti, Ellsasser, & Griffin, 2000; Brown & Anfara, 2003) . Each of the studies explain in great detail the difficulty of separating the effect of principal leadership, including principal vision, from the variety of factors that can contribute to school success. One of these, conducted by Hallinger and Heck (1998), attempted to review relevant research from 1980-1995 to explore the principal's contribution to school effectiveness by focusing directly upon "substantive findings from empirical studies conducted during this period" (p. 159). Their research offered "strong evidence of the importance of vision and goal cohesion in terms of the leader's role in school effectiveness and improvement (p. 173). Kathleen Cotton (2003), in

her literature review of principal effectiveness recognizes a number of studies that point to the ability of the principal to develop, articulate, and gain acceptance for a powerful vision as a key part of school effectiveness. While she points to over twenty-five areas in which effective principals find success, the importance of “principals’ work with others to establish a vision of the ideal school and clear goals related to the vision,” is clear throughout (p. 68).

One of the earliest attempts to study vision and its effects on a school was Ron Renchler’s (1991) study of effective principals and their use of vision. This study selected sample schools without quantitative data, but merely based upon snowball sampling various Oregon state officials for schools that “were actively engaged in carrying out programs that defined or promoted the school’s vision” (p. 14). With this sampling limitation duly noted, the authors did provide interesting case studies of six schools that utilized vision in ways that garnered qualitative support or evolved into quantitative success. Renchler speaks of the common themes of “reflection and self-analysis,” “generating staff support,” and the importance of using current educational research in the development of vision (p. 34). This study is symptomatic of the kind of research that has currently been done to assess vision and its impact. It is a decidedly difficult process, and one that lends itself to generalization and vague conclusions.

Given the relatively nebulous concept of vision, it should be no surprise that there are limited quantitative studies that try to evaluate vision’s effect upon the school climate or school success. One of the few to tread into these waters was Greenfield, Licata and Johnson’s (1992) study which attempted to develop an operational definition of effective school vision. They did this by hypothesizing that there was a positive correlation between

teachers' perceptions of their principal's effectiveness in advancing a school vision and their perceptions of the principal's "robustness" and "supervisory expertise" (p. 67). Their study found that "principals who are effective in exchanging ideas about the vision and encouraging others to make sacrifices towards its accomplishment tend to be perceived by teachers as effective instructional supervisors who are robust in their leadership" (p. 75). This study successfully quantifies perceptions of staff and principals, but was not able to draw connections between those perceptions and student achievement or overall school health.

There are also a number of qualitative case studies of principals, superintendents and other school leaders that emphasize the importance of vision in effective school leadership (Brown, 2002; Petersen, 1998). Admittedly, each qualitative study came at the concept of vision with a different operational definition of vision and a different measure of 'effectiveness.' Each of these studies identifies principal vision as a key facet of the effective changes that principals were able to encourage, or they cited a lack of vision that hindered principals' efforts. One interesting qualitative study by Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001) attempted to argue that traditional and current theories of school leadership are ineffective because of the "highly contextualized and relational construct" of "effective leadership" (p. 2). Their research found that the principals studied "did not neatly adhere to existing leadership theories or models," because of the "complex, messy, and at times, wholly non-rational activity" of school leadership (Day, Harris & Hadfield, 199, p. 27). Yet in the midst of this complexity, one of the few constants that they found in school leadership was that principals were "clear in their vision for the school and communicated it to all constituents"

(p. 25). Qualitative research on vision and the principalship can be dizzying, but the end result is a general agreement upon the importance of vision in principal effectiveness.

Irrelevance of Vision

This literature review would be remiss if it did not consider the perspective that vision itself may be irrelevant to the daily work of the principal. Certainly the majority of the research cited here would differ, but authors such as Alexander Wiseman (2005) argue that ideas such as instructional leadership and vision are half-truths that principals tell themselves to convince themselves they are more than simple bureaucratic managers. The reality, as he points out, is that most “principal activities fall into the administrative management category” (p. 106) and that “making school principals be CEOs of instruction when they are needed as managers is inappropriate and actually sabotages student learning and achievement” (p. 106).

If principals are not visionary, charismatic leaders, that the conventional wisdom advocates, then what are they? Clearly, there are no school systems comprised entirely of visionary leaders. School principals are primarily managers. Management does not have the ring or allure of ‘leadership,’ but it is closer to reality. What do principals do that makes them managers more than leaders? Consider this: Do principals lead schools anywhere? Are they really agents of change? Or are teacher-student interactions in classrooms really where the rubber hits the road? (Wiseman, 2005, p. 44)

To enter this debate would not be the purpose of a literature review, but it should be noted that the analyses listed above which attempt to measure the impact of vision on school

success seem to have general consensus on vision's importance, while Wiseman's work is more a philosophical argument for a re-thinking of the role of the school principal. His general point that principals may forget that the teacher-student relationship is the primary element in student learning, however, is well-taken, and one that comes through in the research as well.

On the other side of this debate, Oscar Kotter's (1999) research on the effectiveness of transformational change initiatives in business certainly points to the importance of vision in managing change. His research showed that, "without a sensible vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing and incompatible projects that can take the organization in the wrong direction or nowhere at all" (p. 92). Not only is the ability to form and develop a vision important, but also the intense focus on incorporating the vision into all aspects of the organization, infusing the vision at every point. Successful change initiatives are marked by "executives use all existing communication channels to broadcast the vision," and behaviors changing to mirror the vision (p. 93). Kotter's arguments for the centrality of an effective vision are the antithesis of Wiseman's, and offers an interesting counterpoint from which further research could stem.

Summary

In this review of the literature, I have shown a sample of the research on the genesis, cultivation, components, and possible irrelevance of vision. I have shown the basic distinction in the literature between vision that essentially comes from the principal him or herself, and vision that essentially is drawn from the school community; I have defined these as leader-based or community-based vision. I have also shown three of the many ways that

writers in the field have described the cultivation of vision, through reflective practice, the learning organization, and shaping school culture. Finally, I have examined one limited exploration of the different components of vision. I will now explain the methodology behind this project and the theoretical and practical frameworks that guide the research.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

Merriam (2002) stated that “all qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds” (p. 39). This study aimed to make sense of a pair of essential questions about principals and vision. What do principals understand vision to be, and how is the concept of vision important to their daily work? This phenomenological study attempted to examine these questions in terms of “what principals think about when they think about vision” and the practical implications that vision have upon the work that they do. This chapter will describe the methodology that guided the research, as well as address issues of reliability, subjectivity, ethics, and the limitations of the study.

Qualitative Approach

The subject of individual understanding of vision is essentially qualitative, and it as the review of literature in Chapter II showed, it is difficult to fashion an effective study done on vision in the principalship conducted in a quantitative manner. In this study I looked for depth rather than breadth of understanding. Through interviews with successful principals and in-depth investigations of the different mindsets, metaphors, and ways of seeing that principals use in their development of vision, I sought to provide insight into the phenomenon of vision itself. This study could be useful for beginning principals who might

find themselves stumped by vision or veteran principals looking to find the “big picture” in their work.

Research Questions

Two overarching questions guide this study. First, what do principals understand vision to be? Second, how is the concept of vision important to the daily work? In looser fashion, this study paraphrases the title of American writer Raymond Carver’s collection of short stories, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1986), to apply it to principals and vision: What do principals think about when they think about vision?

Theoretical Framework

In developing this study, I considered a case study approach. Much could be learned from a single case study of a successful principal and his or her individual approach to vision. There are singular examples of principals who lead with an exceptional or unusual vision, and the research community could benefit from a case study of these individuals. Alternatively, there is great potential for learning from a case study of principals who seem to lead without a concept of vision guiding their work. Some of these are successful, and others find direction instead by the mandates from above or requirements of standardized testing.

I chose a phenomenological approach to the research. In Clark Moustakas’ (1994) seminal work on the method, he claims, “Phenomenology is the *first* method of knowledge because it begins with ‘things themselves’” (p. 41). Proponents of phenomenology have a sense of confidence that the most intractable concepts can be studied objectively, a faith that through allegiance to the tenets of the approach, one can get at the essence of an experience.

Phenomenology attempts to discern “knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (p. 26). I was attracted to a theoretical framework that prioritized “formulating questions and problems that reflect the interest, involvement and personal commitment of the researcher” (p. 21). Within the guidelines of phenomenology, “researchers search for the essential, invariant structure or essence . . . of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). Creswell here explains exactly what I attempted with this study to do with the concept of vision.

Phenomenology evolved out of Edmund Husserl’s writings in the late 19th century. In short, as Mohanty (1997) explains, Husserl was interested in “meanings, not only merely with meanings of words and sentences, but also with meanings of experiences, of perceptions, beliefs, hopes and desires” (p. 1). Husserl was learning and writing in a balance between the competing ideas of positivism and psychologism. Positivism maintains that scientific principles and their certainty can be applied to understanding of all phenomena, while psychologism finds that “all knowledge is fundamentally, but not exclusively, subjective” (Mitchell, 1990, p. 254). While positivism ‘seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena with little regard for the subjective state,’ phenomenology “examines how the world is experienced” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 2). It is within this tension that phenomenology finds its power: it simultaneously maintains that scientific approaches can lead to verifiable knowledge while respecting the power of individual perspective to shape that knowledge. Mitchell (1990) defines phenomenology from a Husserlian perspective as “a subjective, intuitive, reflective, philosophical analysis of the ways by which we become

aware of the phenomena which are presented to our consciousness and of the interpretations of the nature and meaning of that consciousness” (p. 256).

Essential to the practice of phenomenology is the commitment to “bracketing,” or as Moustakas (1996) explains it, *epoche*. Through the *epoche* process, “we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things . . . (we) invalidate, inhibit and disqualify all commitments with reference to previous knowledge and experience” (p. 85). This ‘unfettered stance’ is crucial to the point that failure to truly embrace the *epoche* in phenomenological research can invalidate the study. This is an appealing yet tricky concept, and one that has gathered much attention and faith among a community of phenomenological researchers. I will return to this idea in discussions of subjectivity and limitations of the study.

Sampling

In seeking out an appropriate sample for this study, I considered a number of different approaches. I settled upon a sample size of five principals. My hope was that within five principals, I would find either a consensus or two to three general metaphorical frameworks within which one could understand vision. More principals might have provided a broader terrain, but when working with metaphorical frameworks, too many varied approaches could cloud the results. Again, in this study I strived for depth rather than breadth in its contribution to the research field.

The selection of principals is crucial, and I chose to interview the five most recent Principals of the Year from a large urban school system. First, by focusing on principals who are viewed as very successful principals, one could assume that a defined concept of vision is

essential to being chosen as a Principal of the Year (See Appendix E for selection criteria). While this is inherently a bias of mine that I will discuss later, it is very possible that one or more of these principals could think very differently or not at all about vision. In other words, each of these principals has probably already had to spell out and think about vision publicly in the competition for this award. Secondly, by focusing on principals from an urban district, the findings may be applicable to both urban school leaders and other school leaders.

By sampling from Principal of the Year winners, I did not discriminate by gender, race, experience, school level, or tenure. This can be seen as strength or a weakness in the overall usefulness of the study. One could also argue that the selection of Principal of the Year award winners is politically or personally based; in this district, five preliminary finalists are elected by the body of principals as a whole, and then a panel made up of administrators, teachers, school board members, and PTA officials makes the final selection of the individual winner. This choice of sample also ensured that the knowledge gained by this study will be in some sense based upon excellence in leadership. Further validation for this sampling method came from the fact that the award is not based upon one criterion, such as standardized test scores or teacher satisfaction surveys. This sample should provide a sense of vision by those school leaders who have found success in the eyes of their communities, and this can certainly hold value.

Data Collection

I collected the data for this study in the summer of 2007 in a series of interviews with recent Principals of the Year from a large, Southern, urban school district. The interviews took place at a variety of times in the offices of the principals on the school sites. I conducted

interviews in one primary sitting with a possible follow-up interview for clarification and additional questions. I recorded interviews with a digital sound recorder and a hired professional transcriber transcribed the interviews verbatim. Each interview lasted between 45-90 minutes and followed an interview protocol (see Appendix C). There were occasionally follow-up questions asked to provide clarity or to elaborate on interesting topics brought up by the subjects.

I had a prior relationship with each of the principals in the study, as I work in the same school district as the subjects. There are ways this could be a disadvantage, and this will be discussed later in the methodology. I planned to use this prior relationship to my advantage in collecting data about the thought process of the subjects of the study. As Seidman (1998) explains, “effective questioning is so context-bound, such a reflection of the relationship that has developed between the interviewer and the participant” (p. 78). In the interviews, it is important to develop a trusting relationship with the subjects to allow the subjects to express the ways they truly experience vision in their work. I reviewed the school improvement plans, testing data, teacher working conditions surveys, and other data about the school before the interviews. It is important to take care to not bias the perceptions of the interviews with quantitative data that could slant my interpretations; this is a fine line that I respected while honoring the *epoché* to which I strive.

Data Analysis

Once interviews were transcribed, I coded the interviews for early data sorting and analysis. There are schools of thought in phenomenological studies that maintain that coding

is not beneficial to the process. Scheurich (1997) cautions researchers that through coding the researcher imposes biases:

The decontextualized interview text which is transformed through the coding process becomes that from which the conventional researcher constructs her/his story. The bricks of the construction are the reductive monads of meaning, coded in categories in the transcript. These bricks are formed, however, from a mold that is shaped from the researcher's conscious and unconscious assumptions and orientations. (p. 63)

In other words, the act of coding can only be done with the researcher's biases as the tool for categorizing, thereby nullifying the attempts at bracketing researcher perspective. I disagree, and experienced this through detailed coding of recurring themes that surfaced through the different interviews.

The coding was done using a five different frameworks discussed in the Literature Review and some from core questions and themes of the research. Coding utilized Manasse's (1986) four interacting components of vision, organizational, future, personal and strategic. Another coding approach coded interviews based upon Ylimaki (2006) four archetypal metaphors of 'truth telling' in vision discussed earlier. Three other coding methods were born out of the research questions posed earlier. One focused upon the question of whether vision remains constant or changes over time or place, while another revolved around whether the genesis of a vision is leader-based or community-based. Finally, coding analyzed each interview through the lens of a core metaphor from each interviewee, looking to see if commonalities of theme or metaphor surface through and

among the subjects. While none of these coding approaches alone could suffice, I hoped that with thoughtful coding of each, conclusions could be drawn about the experience of vision.

The process of developing meaning and analysis in phenomenology is best described by Moustakas (1994) as “phenomenological reduction” (p. 90). After the interviews and initial coding, I began with what Moustakas (1994) describes as “horizontalization” of the data, listing out different ways the subjects experience vision to develop “a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 147). These statements, or “horizons” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95) developed from a position of *epoche*, allow “each phenomenon (to) have equal value as we seek to disclose its nature and essence.” From there, I created a “textural description” of the experience of vision from each subject, breaking the different descriptions of the experience of vision into “meaning units” (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). This textural description “facilitates clear seeing, makes possible identity, and encourages the looking again and again that leads to deeper layers of meaning” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). The development of this textural description is a spiraling process, moving from the interview text, through a reflective interpretation, and back through the text to complete a complete representation of the phenomenological experience of vision and the principalship.

Once the textural descriptions of each subject’s experience of the phenomenon of vision are presented in Chapter 4, the study will proceed to set up the discussion of the results through “synthesis of meaning.” Moustakas (1994) explains that a key step in the phenomenological process is “imaginative variation,” which he defines as the process by which a researcher is able to

seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, positions, roles or functions. (pp. 97-98)

This is a reflective process by which the researcher finds possible structural meanings and underlying themes in the experience. This will be the substance of the findings in Chapter 5's discussion and implications.

Within the phenomenological tradition, triangulation to establish validity takes a different approach, as there is a unique acceptance of the role of researcher perspective within the process. Scott and Morrison (2005) point out that triangulation is vital in phenomenology, so as to “provide a more holistic and rich account of the phenomenon” while better assisting the researcher in “weighting and prioritizing of the various ‘truths’ revealed through multiple methods” (p. 252). While analyzing data, I used the strategy of “theory triangulation” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 253) to counter the possibility that the “bracketing” of my own perspectives is insufficient. Theory triangulation compels the researcher to “examine how the phenomenon being studied would be explained by different theories and perspectives” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 253). I took the metaphors developed through the interviews and attempted to explain the visions of the interviewees through those metaphors in an effort to gain insight into my own biases.

I loosely based the approach that I utilized in this study upon one that I used in two previous studies at the graduate level. In 1999, I studied a collection of principals selected in a snowball sampling fashion using similar questions, and again in 2002 I studied a group of area assistant superintendents about their perceptions of vision. Despite their limited scope,

valuable lessons were learned and applied to the design of this study. The earlier studies allowed me to refine my interview questions and allow the interviewees more space to develop their own metaphors. I also realized the importance of sampling and the various ways that experience, school population, teacher population, and geography play into the results I was able to garner from the research. With the integration of the strategies of phenomenology listed above, I believe the results of this study to have significant validity and reliability.

Research Validity and Reliability

As with much qualitative research, this study does not strive for vast generalizability, as evidenced by its criterion-based sampling strategy. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “your choices – whom to look at or talk with, where, when, about what, and why – all place limits on the conclusions you can draw and how confident you and others feel about them” (p. 27). The decision to focus on the former Principal of the Year criterion ensured that the subjects had a certain level of competence, respectability, and success. Creswell (1998) notes that criterion-based sampling ensures that “all participants experience the phenomenon being studied,” which was crucial for the reliability of this study (p. 118).

Reliability, according to Merriam (1995), asks whether the findings of a research study can be replicated if the same processes were followed again. Phenomenology challenges this expectation in its core tenets that recognize and accept that the perspective of the researcher will be present in the findings. Beyond the specifics of phenomenology, Merriam (1995) points out that qualitative research does not seek to establish laws or stable truths about human behavior, because it recognizes that the human behavior and experience

will change over time. Instead, qualitative research should aim for “consistency” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 288) through theory triangulation and investigator triangulation, inviting colleagues to view interviews and interpret metaphors and analysis. Through ongoing collaborative work with other researchers at NCSU, I attempted to utilize these processes in my research.

The commitment to the *epoche* process took steps towards the reliability of the study. If following the established process of phenomenology can indeed come close to eliminating interviewer bias, then this study attempted to meet that standard. Moustakas (1994) notes, “the challenge is to be transparent to ourselves, to allow whatever is before us in consciousness to disclose itself so that we may see with new eyes” (p. 87). A phenomenological study can only be as valid or reliable as the researcher is able to be transparent with his or her own biases, preconceptions, and reflections.

Safeguards Against Researcher Bias

I clearly have, as all researchers have, biases that I bring with me to this research. On a very basic level, I am interested in the concept of vision; this quite simply shows that I think it is important in school leadership. I am not qualified because of my own bias to determine whether my own vision or concept of vision is an effective one, but I often ask questions about vision of my fellow administrators and myself. At the time of the interviews, I was a middle school principal in the district in which I researched; my interviews certainly could be clouded by the relationship that I had with some of the principals that I interviewed, as I would consider at least one of them a friend in addition to being a colleague.

With these biases on the surface, I endeavored to keep them on the sidelines of my research. There are critics of phenomenological research, like Schuerich (1997), who maintain that this bracketing is fruitless pursuit, as the “complex play of conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, fears, power, desires and needs on the part of interviewer and interviewee can not be captured and categorized” (p. 73). I still worked, as Moustakas (1994) advises, to “set aside the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings” to allow phenomena to be “revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego” (p. 33). Extensive journaling and self-reflection facilitated this process. This was challenging work, but necessary for a qualitative work of this complexity to be completed with success.

Ethical Issues

The guidelines of the Institutional Review Board for the use of Human Subjects in Research policy of North Carolina State University is a comprehensive guide and one that I followed with fidelity. I gained informed consent by giving all participants a letter about the study, issues of confidentiality, and the purposes for which the study may be used and discussing this letter in person at the start of each interview (see Appendix C). The subjects were given a copy of the Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology for this research paper in the hopes that they could make an informed decision about participation.

I believe there is minimal risk involved in this study. There is a question about the relative difficulty of shielding the identity of the subjects or the district in which the study took place; there are only a few large Southern urban school districts in the United States. By choosing former Principals of the Year, identities could be determined from the accolade

used for sampling, since it is a matter of public record. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that the comments expressed in the interviews could cause harm to the participants. I also assured participants that they were free to participate by their own choice and were able to withdraw from the study at any time before the completion of the project.

This study strives to be personal and more intrusive than typical research. In attempting to look at the internal construction of individual vision, this phenomenological approach could be seen as imposing metaphors upon an individual's own cognition. While this cannot be avoided, it must be mentioned that this demands a high level of trust between interviewer and subject, and I hope that I met that goal. Again, the attempts at anonymity protected those subjects who disagree with the interpretations presented here from any embarrassment or consternation.

The data and conclusions from this study will be the property of North Carolina State University in accordance with university policy. Subjects did not have editorial control over the use of the data collected here, and they were informed of this expectation. In dealing with a phenomenological study, I utilized metaphors from the subjects themselves and drew metaphors from correlations between the subjects. The subjects were made aware of basic phenomenological techniques through the perusal of these initial chapters and in the introduction to the interview itself. I provided transcripts of the interviews to the subjects for their perusal and took input if they felt the transcriptions were not correct.

Limitations of the Study

This study, while potentially enlightening, has significant limitations that deserve discussion. First, throughout most of this study, I worked as a practicing principal in the

district where this research was conducted. During the end of the data analysis stage of the research I was promoted to a central services position where I worked with, but did not supervise, these principals. I chose to work within my own district partially because of the ease with which I could communicate with the subjects, but also because I have personal respect for the principals who won the Principal of the Year award and looked forward to learning from them. I also have a personal interest in the idea of vision that could certainly lead me to look disparagingly upon forms of vision that tend towards the managerial or uninspired. I state these biases in the tradition of phenomenological research in the hopes that with clear understanding of biases, one can work both within their confines and beyond. One could argue that an outsider to the district could possibly do a more reliable and generalizable study, but I maintain that by staying true to the tenets of phenomenological research methods, I have been able to make this a reliable and useful study.

The discipline of phenomenology itself provides limitations that need to be discussed. Phenomenology is a very personal form of research, and one that strives to goals of *epoche*, and believes fervently that one can create this distance from the subject and bias. Certainly one can have justifiable doubt about the validity of this claim. Can personal bias be removed from research? Is the *epoche* a realistic concept? Is it possible to do academic research about the thoughts and phenomenological experiences of an individual? Bogdan and Taylor (1975) try to work through these tensions by stating that through qualitative research, “Truth then emerges not as one objective view but rather as the composite picture of how people think” (p. 11). Critics, however, point out that the researcher “acts as a sieve which selectively collects and analyzes nonrepresentative data” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 12) necessarily

biasing the data and making it more of a collaborative, creative enterprise between researcher and subject. Scheurich (1997) suggests that researchers necessarily have “multiple intentions and desires, some of which are consciously known and some of which are not” (p. 62).

These are important questions that I hope I have addressed in the methodology. As Moustakas (1994) reminds us, phenomenology “offers a way of interrelating subjective and objective factors and conditions” (p. 175), an enterprise that is certainly valuable. However, reasonable people may disagree about the place of phenomenology in the scope of scientifically-based research. These criticisms aside, the phenomenological research community has much research to reinforce this field as a reliable and enlightening form of qualitative research.

This study is limited by the size of its sample and the singular district in which the study takes place. For example, principals in this district participate in regular professional development taught by a full-time former superintendent whose role is focused upon leadership development for principals. While it would give far too much credit to this individual to say that he has shaped the visions of these principals, it must be recognized that these principals are regularly invited and encouraged to think about their visions in these trainings and may have similarities because of similar professional development. In addition, by focusing only on Principals of the Year, we are only seeing the most successful approaches to vision and their results. With a larger sample, we might discover more reliable trends that could reflect the average approach, rather than the exceptional. Finally, there is always the fact that personal visions can be affected by political circumstances and external

forces; the capacity of a subject or a researcher to distinguish between an internal vision and external influences can certainly be questioned.

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, I have reviewed the theoretical underpinnings that guide this research, and given an overview of the data collection and analysis techniques that will be utilized. Through this exploration, I have touched upon the biases evident in the research, the phenomenological strategies I utilized to check these biases, and the limitations of the study. In the next chapter, I will focus on the results of the interviews conducted and later draw conclusions about these interviews and what they offer for an understanding of principals and vision.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate two essential questions about principals and vision. What do principals understand vision to be, and how is the concept of vision important to their daily work? In this chapter, I will first present the “textural descriptions” of the phenomenon of vision as experienced by the five principals in the study (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). I will then apply the concept of “imaginative variation” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98) discussed in Chapter III to integrate some of the frameworks from the literature to the experiences of the five principals. This imaginative variation explores the phenomenon of the principals through perspectives on genesis of vision, whether vision changes or remains constant, Manasse’s four components of vision, and Ylimaki’s archetypal roles of the visionary leader. Finally, I will present the five essentials of vision as expressed by the principals and discuss connections and conclusions from those essentials.

Textural Descriptions

The practice of phenomenological research guides researchers to take the experience and express it through an “interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). This process, starting with the *epoche* and bracketing personal biases along the way, leads to a “textural description” of the phenomenon, “explicating the phenomenon . . . and a full description is derived” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). What follows are five textural descriptions of the phenomenon of vision as experienced by the five principals in this study.

What Sandy Talks About When She Talks About Vision

Sandy is opening up a new year-round school in a few weeks. She was formerly principal of a less affluent elementary school for six years, after years of previous experience as a high school teacher. Books, tables, and projectors are stacked in haphazard piles in the lobby, and the office furniture has just recently arrived. One of the secretaries has just joined the staff this morning, and assorted contractors are milling around working with wiring or tiles. She retreats to the relative calm of the new media center, in comfortable chairs that will soon be home to reading students. To pause to talk about vision at this time could be a challenge for some, but vision is everywhere in her actions and decisions, and she warms to the opportunity to leave the sorting and cleaning to reflect.

Sandy's vision is one that has developed and is developing with each experience. She is aware that "I'm not even sure I really had vision when I became a principal," but that she was comfortable knowing that this vision would come with experience and learning. "I think when I started off, it was, I had a general sense that I want to impact beyond the classroom, or I want to be able to make a difference, but didn't have a real clear sense of what was that going to look like, and made my share of mistakes along the way in coming to that." As a high school teacher and middle school assistant principal she was assigned to her first principalship in an elementary school, and has stayed at the elementary level ever since. She knew very little about the pedagogy and learning of the elementary schools she now leads, and still acknowledges that there are many people in her building from whom she must learn daily. "It was a process of sort of trying to get a handle on what is really happening in this school, and what kind of place do I want it to be, and what is it going to take to get us there."

She knows that the success of her vision has been her ability to learn and to reflect on each challenge, and with each error along the way, she has learned how to better make her vision a reality.

As she recognizes the impact of experience and learning has on her changing vision, her current vision is shaped by the fact she is opening a new school. Not only is this time for reflection, but clarification for herself. “I had to think very hard about, and I wanted to tell people up front, this is the kind of place I would like this school to be.” When she talks about vision, she talks about people, hiring, and the importance of learning together. While she has confidence in her ability to hire well, the stakes are high as she knows that these teachers will shape her vision over the coming years. “I think I’m pretty good at identifying good people; that’s key, right there, and some of them have been with me since the beginning and are still with me, they absolutely helped shape what I believe and my vision too.” With a sense of vision that is rooted in the conversations with those around her, the hiring process is crucial because of the future unknown impact those voices and ideas will have upon her own vision.

Central to Sandy’s understanding of vision is a shared philosophy about children rooted in a core belief that all children can learn. For vision to work, it is crucial that the conversations happen between and among educators in the building to ask those questions, so ensure that commitment to the philosophy is present. “It’s not going to be completely up to me how this vision plays out; I’m a lot more clear about it, I’m a lot more confident in what I believe, and of course I’m bringing with me some key people who are part of that vision, so it’s not just my vision, and I mean, I’m already bringing along people that already buy into it,

so that helps make it easier when you have like-minded people that want to be part of that.”

The vision evolves through conversations with other educators rooted in a similar core philosophy.

Inherent in Sandy’s vision is a focus on hiring the right people. “I’ve come to believe that teachers have to have a shared philosophy; they don’t all have to be the same kind of teachers or the same personalities, but to really have a shared vision, I’m not sure you can accomplish that with people that might have some very different, differing philosophical beliefs about children, about teaching, about themselves.” With these people in place, the principal can let go of exactly how the vision will play out, and allow the school to help put structures, procedures, and rituals in place to support the vision. “I think it’s sort of the people I’ve been able to hire; I’ve really learned a lot from them. They really helped shape what I believe about, and what I would like to see happening for children, so all those things.”

At the core of her vision, Sandy believes that teachers must be learners. “It was really important that we wanted to foster an environment where teachers were thinkers,” willing to question together, engage in reflection and collaborative learning. Her own process of developing vision follows this ethos, as she gets energy from learning about her own vision. “It’s just interesting to think about, how did it, how was it shaped, certainly by people and by reading and by experiences and by self examination and by other external forces. That’s a huge concept.”

While there is much focus on the reflection and openness to learning in Sandy’s vision, she recognizes the principal must settle on a course and lead with the benefit of that

learning. “You’ve got to be a little bit of a pioneer, secure enough in your teaching that you feel comfortable doing that.” This takes the courage to adapt vision to the current situation and to ask difficult questions of yourself and of your staff. “It’s more important, not that you really have an explicit vision that you can name off, but that you’re reflective about and you really know yourself, and you take time think about what you believe and what you’re passionate about.”

What Oscar Talks About When He Talks About Vision

Oscar runs a complicated year-round elementary school, and time to discuss vision is hard to come by. Oscar had been principal for of a traditional elementary school for five years before opening this new year-round school two years ago. We had to reschedule our first afternoon meeting because the air conditioner broke and one of his buses was lost on the road. Once the bus was found, he was willing to talk, with a sweaty shirt and mind racing, but we rescheduled. Today, however, things are calmer and he quickly gets focus in his tidy office away from the fray.

When Oscar talks about vision, he comes back to a key metaphor of the long hallway in the center of his school. He and every student must walk this hallway and keep eyes on the door at the end. “I tell my staff that when I’m at the front of the building and I look all the way down at the end of the hall and there’s a door down there, and I’m saying, ‘That’s where my focus is. That’s my goal, to get my children all the way down there, and I know what that goal is.’” Central to his thinking around vision is belief – belief that the vision is strong, and that persistence in the support of this vision will lead to the result that “all children are provided opportunities to be successful.” The reality is that sometimes the

principal is the only one who can see that door and can know what is behind the doors you pass as you walk.

The principal is a filter, knowing where the school must go and not go. At the same time, Oscar recognizes that the path may need to change, depending on the environment or circumstance. “And so that’s hard, because as I said, if you’re the only person that can see that door, you’ve got to have enough confidence to keep pushing.” While the final destination does not change, the route you take to get there may. A principal must maintain the confidence, cultivated from training, experience, and the inherent knowledge of what is best for kids, in the vision and path to that vision. “What I’ve found is, once you’ve set that vision and you’re making good decisions because you’re trained to make good decisions, and you have the background knowledge, then you just keep pushing.”

The principal manages the vision and he must understand the pulse of the school. The principal must know what is right for the school, and he knows this because that is what a principal must know. “Lo and behold, you see that door at the end of the hall, and that’s what you’re working towards, and regardless of what other people tell you, you’re focused on that door and you’re going to do whatever needs to happen to make it happen.” The challenge for a principal is to manage the speed of change, and to allow those who may be behind to catch up. This takes persistence, belief, and strength to overcome obstacles to those people or processes that might obstruct the vision. “And so we have to be able to see over those barriers or know that we’re either going through the barrier, over the barrier, or around the barrier, but our focus is down there and that’s where we have to make it.”

Input from the community plays a part, and the principal must gauge the community, but not let the community dictate the vision. “Most principals probably already have a vision for their schools and for where they think they should take the kids, but I do think that the community and then the people that you work for, they have parts in that too.” The vision doesn’t necessarily change from school to school, or from situation to situation. “I want what’s best for all children: for all children to be successful. I may have to go a different route—but I think it’s still the same vision.”

What Ethan Talks About When He Talks About Vision

Ethan is in his fourth floor office in the district’s central services, and as always he is well-dressed, calm, and friendly. A former high school principal of eight years, he now oversees twenty-five schools in his section of the district, and while there are surely pressing issues and emergencies in many of them that could weigh in his mind, none of those stresses come across while he talks. He is thoughtful, yet careful in his choice of words, willing to explore ideas but always comes back to new questions.

When Ethan talks about vision, he talks about a picture of the potential for a school, one that gives him something to strive for. It allows you to chart the path for where you want to be, while creating a process for facilitating change. “I think that if crafted in the right way and consistently reinforced and consistently referred back to, it can serve as a framework which kind of guides all the different work and kind of benchmark you set things.” The principal oversees the process, and ensures that vision is central, but facilitates rather than dictates the vision. “I think the principal can be seen as a facilitator, as one who can ask those critical, crucial questions.”

The vision sets direction, unifies, and gives a sense of purpose for the school community. “Vision is a vehicle by which you can help bring people together to chart a path of direction of where you eventually see a school in the future. And I think underlying that, it serves as a vehicle for alignment, serves as a vehicle for motivating, and serves as a vehicle for demonstrating purpose.” Ethan recognizes that people need something to believe in, and the principal needs to develop those metaphors and those pathways for a hopeful message. “I think that it has the way of setting your purpose and guiding your purpose but at the same time it has that element to it of really inspiring us to be better and moving people forward.”

The principal must have a sense of presence to develop a vision, and this is somehow intangible yet vital. “You do kind of have to paint a vision of what you see the potential for your school and for your students and where you want to see them because I think that immediately demonstrates a commitment to the school, a sense of leadership, a presence that you have.” The principal who might struggle with vision also might lack the confidence that leads to a presence that others are likely to follow. “Often individuals who struggle in a principalship, a group of people will say, ‘I hear no vision.’ I think it is often related to presence that that person brings with them, the presence of leadership and the confidence that it evokes in others by being able to hear.”

The principal must also assess the culture and needs of a school, and facilitate the community asking questions, allowing people to talk, and eventually come together around ideas. “Even though you may paint elements of it, I think there is great value in whether it is the vision or the components that support the vision to get people within your community engaged in building that.” The collaboration around the vision is as important as the vision

itself, and the principal facilitates that with a careful combination of conversation, leadership, and collaboration. In the end, the principal brings these ideas together around metaphors, pictures, and hope to set and guide that purpose. The principal plays a vital role in developing metaphors that can unite the school community and provide a sense of purpose.

What Barbara Talks About When She Talks About Vision

In the room next door, Barbara's assistant principal and Instructional Resource Teacher are busily putting together the master schedule for the following year. The decisions they are making are important, and they happen while we discuss vision. Barbara is comfortable with this busy time, a veteran principal nearing retirement, with most of her over twenty-five years as a school-level principal. She has been in a number of different schools, and has thrived in different environments, publicly successful in each. Her current school is nestled in the middle of an affluent new housing development in a high growth part of the district, and there is an external pleasantness to the neighborhood and the school.

When Barbara talks about vision she talks about the way that individuals interact with a group, and the trust that is the foundation for the work we do. Vision is direct, intuitive, and about kids and learning, ensuring that every child experiences the joy of learning and every child makes progress.

She is very purposeful about the way that the social contract of school community is constructed. The development of the social contract involves everyone and allows each member to trust that everyone will share these core values. At a basic level, this contract changes from year to year, but is rooted in "what is in the best interest of our kids and in promoting ways of learning." Those values come back to ensuring that every child

experiences the joy of learning and every child makes progress. She works together with the staff to clarify each year, “How we do things here, and this is why we do it here, and this is what we believe in.” With this contract in place, the school community expects each member to walk the walk throughout the work.

Choices are made for the good of the school because the school relies upon that trust and core contract. She trusts her staff to “do what it takes, and that is why you were hired, because we made the assumption that that is what you were going to do. So I’m going to give you that professional courtesy of doing that.” With the social contract in place, if someone or something is not in line with the agreements, it is easy to address. “You have to have open, honest communication and you have to have healthy conflict.” Vision allows agreement on what is good for the organization, and everyone has to live it, walk it, and talk it.

It is not enough for the leader to have vision, but the vision must be shared with everybody in the trenches, ingrained, and become “just part of the air in the school.” Vision comes from a combination of the leader’s intuition and the social contract developed with the staff. “I think it has to be ingrained, and everybody in the staff has to just live it, walk it and talk it.” If Barbara hires the right people – and she believes she does – she then can trust them to execute the agreements the school has put in place and the results will follow. “My philosophy is simple: To just hire really, really good people and then trust them 100%.” This concept of trust flows through her thinking of vision, and it highlights her relationships with staff and an atmosphere of mutual respect. “It’s that real, real important work gets done through relationships,” rooted in trust.

The leader may have a vision, and that vision remains relatively constant. “How you went about rallying everybody around the vision and moving everybody forth might change, depending on the lay of the land, depending on what all the variables are that you got to work with.” But it is the implementation based upon these core agreements that allow the vision to manifest in different ways. “I might have one, but it doesn’t matter if I have one and it is not shared by everybody that is out there doing the day-to-day and really in the trenches, working with the kids.” Continuing work through trusting relationships allows the vision to remain constant and adapt to changing circumstances.

What Dan Thinks About When He Thinks About Vision

Dan smiles a lot, and is a big gregarious guy who seems to make friends easily wherever he goes. He has been a high school business teacher, an elementary principal for four years, and he is entering his third year at this middle school. He exudes intense pride in his school, and humbly passes responsibility for success along to others. He simultaneously communicates a sense of meticulous attention to detail with a comfortable style that appears laid back. On the summer day we talk, this dual spirit of urgency and calm comes across as his middle school prepares to host a SWAT team practice drill, and Dan balances the worlds of emergency and reflection with ease.

When Dan talks about vision he talks about inspiring those around him by example. His role as the principal is to exude hope and possibility, modeling the kind of work that we should expect from our teachers and students. “Part of the inspiration is probably developing and leading that vision, trying to get that picture in everybody’s mind. I guess I love the word ‘inspire.’” A principal inspires those around him towards “what I believe our schools

should look like and what the end results will be.” His thoughts about vision encompass the duality of vision being two things at once, static and changing. “I don’t want to say it is all a process because I think it is this picture, it is this picture that says this is what our school should look like, and this is what it means.”

Humility is central, as he must show in actions that the principal supports the work that teachers do. “One of the things I tell my new people when I am interviewing and remind my staff is that I am a support position. School can run without me.” He ensures that it is a shared vision by talking to those around him and inspiring them to follow. It is something that is shared and that everyone understands what that looks like, at least because they can see that he lives the vision in his actions. “I am trying to live it out so that when they see me, you know, I mean I want them to think about it.”

For Dan, vision comes from a variety of sources. The principal instills the vision, and it must be his vision. “It kind of came out of what I thought our vision here was, that that is where we need to go and that is what you know. Is it me forcing it on them? Yes, it is me forcing it 100%.” At the same time, it must be developed and shared together. “Part of me says that yes, part of it is the principal who instills that but it has got to be shared. So it has got to be something that everybody helps create and helps move towards.” While these two statements might be contradictory, it highlights Dan’s awareness of the duality of vision: vision simultaneously comes from the principals’ intrinsic beliefs and the collaboration of staff and school community.

The vision is large but it is encapsulated in small actions and steps. “You know the panacea, this is what it is going to look like, and this is what this school is going to look like

if this is where we get to. We want to get to that point where *boom*, this is where it is at.”

The symbolic work of vision comes with showing the large vision in the smallest of actions, as he sees “part of it is trying to encapsulate it in small ways so that everybody can understand that yes, we are working towards that vision.” “It is my belief that I have to live out this vision. So when you see me not being passionate about kids, you know then how can I inspire that in anybody else?” Vision is something articulated, but also something lived and experienced through modeling actions for others.

Frameworks for Understanding: Imaginative Variation

Phenomenological research applies the concept of “imaginative variation” to apply frameworks from the literature, perspectives, and possibilities to the phenomenon being studied to arrive at an understanding. Clark Moustakas describes this process in

Phenomenological Research Methods as follows:

The task of imaginative variation is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles or functions. The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced.

(1994, pp. 97-98)

This process demands variation and patience to apply a number of perspectives and the acknowledgement that each can provide illumination on the essence of the phenomenon.

“Through imaginative variation, the researcher understands that there is not a single inroad to truth, but that countless possibilities emerge that are intimately connected with the essences

and meanings of an experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). What follows are explorations of four different frameworks for understanding vision through imaginative variation: genesis of vision, whether vision changes or remains constant, Manasse’s four components of vision, and Ylimaki’s archetypal roles of the visionary leader.

Framework 1: Genesis of Vision

There is a clear division in the literature on vision on whether an effective vision comes from within the leader or whether that vision is drawn from the community. The leader-based vision is rooted in the archetypal image of the wise, strong, and bold leader as the one who knows the path out of the darkness. The leader-based vision “is composed of one part foresight, one part insight, plenty of imagination and judgment, and often, a healthy dose of chutzpah” (Nanus, 1992, p. 34). The community-based vision approach, on the other hand, would add other very significant parts absent from Nanus’ definition, including collaboration, listening, facilitating, and knowing the community which a leader serves. Some, such as Fullan (1993) go so far as to mock the “old and dead wrong paradigm” (p. 29) of the leader-based vision. The perspectives on whether vision is an internal creation or an external collaboration vary both between and within the principals in this study.

Ethan expressed this tension well, asking, as a new principal, “Do I stand before my new group and outline a vision of what I see? Or do I take time to bring everybody into the fold and we develop a vision together? I think there are pros and cons of it both ways.” The choice for a new principal is an important one, as these initial conversations are vital to establishing leadership and expectations. Sandy wrestled with the tension between leader and community based vision as well:

You're going to try to shape a new culture and create a new culture; it's not going to be completely up to me how this vision plays out. I'm a lot more clear about it, I'm a lot more confident in what I believe, and of course I'm bringing with me some key people who are part of that vision, so it's not just my vision. I'm already bringing along people that already buy into it, so that helps make it easier when you have like-minded people that want to be part of that.

She sees that while she doesn't create the vision herself, she brings ideas, conversations and people that will craft the vision in a way that echoes her own learning.

Oscar sees clear advantages in a leader-based vision, and sees his role as the one who needs to know the path to the "door at the end of the hall." His vision is one that relies upon the principal as "the one that has to have the pulse of the school," keeping the principal at the center of the conversation about vision. He says

Sometimes you're the only one that can see that door, and so other people all along the way are telling you, "No, that's not going to work," or the system that you've developed or worked with your staff to develop, you start working the kids through the system and then you have different things that come up and people say, "That's not going to work," or "I saw this program over here, I really think we should try this." And what you realize is that, if you start taking these off ramps all the time and then trying to get back onto a highway, it's going to take you a long time before you get to downtown, and you may not ever get there because you're taking all of these detours. And so that's hard, because as I said, if you're the only person that can see that door, you've got to have enough confidence to keep pushing.

Oscar does not negate the part played by the community, but recognizes that “most principals probably already have a vision for their schools and for where they think they should take the kids, but I do think that the community and then the people that you work for, they have parts in that too.” This approach gives him the confidence to rise above the “naysayers” and to allow the school a sense of comfort and confidence that the principal and school knows where it is going, and the belief that it will be successful on that journey.

Other principals saw more of a balance between the two views, and continue to wrestle with the balance between leader-based and community-based vision. As Ethan expresses, “I think the more people that you bring into it certainly the more ownership that you have in it. At the same time the more overwhelming of a process it can be.” As Dan thinks through the balance, the challenge of serving both perspectives is apparent.

Part of it is the principal who instills that but it has also got to be shared. So it has got to be something that everybody helps create and helps move towards. So it can’t just be, you know, I’m saying that, “Our vision is that we have 100% on the End-of-Grade tests. Let’s go for that.” But I think the principal as a leader has to inspire that vision. And part of the inspiration is probably developing and leading that vision, trying to get that picture in everybody’s mind, I guess.

Dan goes on to explain the process of developing a school-wide vision where “we went to everybody—parents, through the carpool line, sending stuff home, went to kids, went to teachers, and we had kids just write down words of what it would be like.” Once this community-based vision is established, however, it is his role to make it happen. “It has got to be everybody. Is it me forcing it on them? Yes, it is me forcing it 100%.”

Community-based vision has its advantages, but certainly can be a messy business. More than one principal described the process of involving the larger community in a complicated process with varying results. Ethan explains the frightening beginning of an ultimately successful process of developing a vision for his large high school staff.

I did involve the entire staff in it; everybody had a voice in it. I will tell you, that by the time we were finished I walked into the media center after all the different groups came back in with their input, we had chart paper from one end of the media center wrapped entirely around the media center on the book—and I walked in there and thought how are we going to ever? Okay, I have failed at this process; this is not going to work. In one way it was the most powerful visual because it demonstrated that everybody had a voice in what we thought was important.

The leader has to be comfortable in the middle of this tension with the knowledge that “you’re going to try to shape a new culture and create a new culture, but it’s not going to be completely up to me how this vision plays out.”

Barbara falls more clearly on the community-based vision side of the fence, knowing that the development of what she calls the “social contract” among the educators in the building is crucial. That collaborative process comes first, and while one may say that is her vision, the nuts and bolts of what the vision looks like each year changes with that contract.

I mean, I might have a vision, but it doesn’t matter if I have one and it is not shared by everybody that is out there doing the day-to-day and really in the trenches, working with the kids. So I think you definitely need one, but it is not enough for the

leader to have vision. The vision has got to be shared with everybody that is in the organization, at least in the school business.

In her experience of vision, the content of the vision itself is secondary to the process of developing this social contract and the vision inherent within those ways of working together. And, vision comes only from a principal willing to trust the educators to craft that contract and vision to serve students best. Only then can the principal have confidence that it is “ingrained, and everybody in the staff will just live it, walk it and talk it.”

Perhaps Ethan summed up well that the choice between leader-based and community-based leadership that “so much has to be driven and determined by where you are as that school at that time and your needs—and the leader is in tune with that.” There may be times, places, and leaders where a community-based or leader-based vision may be the better choice, yet it still falls upon the principal to know which is which.

Framework 2: Vision and Change

On one level, the discussion of whether vision changes or remains constant may be a semantic one, related to how one defines vision in the first place. On the other hand, the way that principals think about the malleability of vision highlights different aspects of their experience of the phenomenon. The questions are perplexing: Should vision change over time? Does a principal’s vision change from school to school? Is vision constant, rooted in timeless wisdom, or is in malleable, changing with the current influences?

Each of the principals reflects the duality of this question in some ways. Ethan once again poses the question nicely in reflection:

Do you make the vision so comprehensive in its motivation that it really doesn't change that much over time? It is timeless; you see what I'm saying? I think you would hear people express different views on that, is that vision that motivating thing that this is where we are striving for to continue to go to new heights? How long-term do you shape your vision?

Ethan vacillates comfortably between understandings of vision that seem to find root in permanence, and those that evolve. At one point, he clearly sees the value in something written and concrete:

Should it be written? Yes, I think it should be. I think it should be something very tangible in regard to that that you can put your hand on, you can read, you can roll off the tongue, you can say—might not be word for word—but you are able to in a nutshell capture the true spirit of the vision of which, where you are trying to go. And I think if people are not able to talk about it, then I don't think people have internalized it.

Yet, he also clearly understands the malleability of vision and its necessity to change as the school changes

It may be, depending on the culture of your school and what works best for your particular group and clientele and your leadership style, it might be that the vision does need to be tweaked every so often based on the needs. . . I think there are different stages in the life of your school based on program needs, based on student achievement needs, and what have you that will often dictate when and where you revisit that vision.

There is a duality to vision, as evidenced by Ethan's changing yet unchanging view of vision that experienced principals may simply have to be comfortable with.

Vision can be seen, perhaps in capital letters, as something large and not connected to the current time, circumstances, or school. In this sense, vision is somehow in the core of the principal or the school. As Oscar says, the vision stays constant while the application changes:

I think that my main vision is the same wherever I go, because I want what's best for all children: for all children to be successful. But the types of children or the groups of children that you're working with in your community have different needs, and so therefore it takes a different street to get to downtown. If my vision is downtown, I may have to go on a detour to get there—you know, I may have to go a different route—but I think it's still the same vision. It's just how we get there is a little bit different.

The vision itself remains at the core, but, as Barbara relates, "How you went about rallying everybody around the vision and moving everybody forth might change, depending on the lay of the land." Principals with this understanding of vision might be likely to think of the vision in the 'long-term' understanding that Ethan explained above.

For Sandy, the development of a vision mirrors a principals' own internal pathway of learning and adult development, and it necessarily must change over time:

I think it will continue to evolve some but what I find myself thinking more about is just, I don't know. Part of it is influenced by social forces, I guess, and the reality of our world, and as you get older you think about things a little differently, things that

concern me, what I see happening in our society, so those play in. Things I'm thinking about now aren't so much about my instructional vision for the school as much as it is what I think is important to teach kids about civics and that they have an obligation beyond themselves.

This idea of vision is one that must necessarily change, but it changes more with the development of the individual leader instead of the changes in the school or educational environment.

A principal with more of a leader-based genesis of vision is more likely to own the responsibility for determining whether a vision must change. As Oscar explains, when it is clear to the leader that the results you set out to get are not being realized, it is the principal who needs to look at changing the vision. "I think you know when it changes when you're not getting the results that you set out to get." In this sense the principal's understanding of genesis is directly related to the question of change.

I've got to be able to visualize that and see that and kind of have my pulse on the community and on the school and know, "Okay, this used to be what we needed to do, but you know what now? We need to connect a different dot, because the population has changed or something has changed."

If a leader is more inclined towards community-based vision, the vision itself is less likely to change because it is owned and designed by the community involved. As Barbara explained, "The school community developed that vision and the real heart of who you are and what you are about is not going to change because it is yours."

Some make the distinction between the vision and the process used to develop or make that vision come to reality. Dan sees that the process or environment may change, but some core values stay the same, regardless of surrounding factors.

It changes. I guess that is where the process changes because the school keeps changing but I think the picture stays pretty constant to me—once we figure out what that picture is. And it is going to be different for others, for other schools in other places. But I think the picture stays pretty constant for us, for me right now. You know it is all students. We've had a change of population over the last decade or so. We have a lot more challenging students, higher free and reduced, behavior issues, all of those types of things. But you know we still want all of our students to be successful. All. And it is trying to embed that in everybody that we are here for all students, you can't run off any students. It is just—we can't afford to write off any students. So I guess to me that vision stays pretty, that picture stays pretty clear because I think there are probably only a couple of outcomes that you want an education; I want all of our kids to be successful.

Perhaps the instructional methods change, or the teaching team changes, or the superintendent changes, but this doesn't necessarily mean the vision changes. Many might agree that on one level, the vision a principal has for his or her school doesn't differ that much from principal to principal. "I think that probably the vision that I have for my kids here is probably similar to a lot of principals' visions and a lot of schools' visions, they want their kids to be successful, they want them to be learning, growing, you know both mentally, intellectually, socially, physically," and many principals might agree.

In the end, most of the principals would probably find some understanding from Ethan when he says, after exploring the possibilities, “I don’t know that I have a position one way or the other that it should always stay the same and be engrained in stone for years and years.” While principals may disagree, with others or internally, about whether a vision should be written, should be changed, should be steadfast, the principals in this study seemed comfortable stating that vision could change and be steadfast at the same time depending on the definition and understanding.

Framework 3: Manasse’s Four Components of Vision

Manasse’s work on the four interacting components of vision (1986) begins with his understanding that vision concerns “Determining the direction of an organization” (p. 152). For a principal to manage this process there is an interaction of four different components of vision: organizational, future, personal, and strategic. Manasse’s work is rare in its attempt to break down the components that factor into the skills of a visionary leader.

Organizational vision “involves the comprehensive picture of the existing system within its environment” (Manasse, 1986, p. 155), and revolves somewhere between the concepts of systems thinking and solid management. Of the four components Manasse discusses, this one found the least favor among principals as they discussed vision. While one could certainly conceive of an approach to vision that applies most directly to making sure the organization functions smoothly, most of the conversations about management fit more closely with Manasse’s other three components.

For example, when Barbara speaks of her social contract as “a kind of a systematized way that you interact when you have a group of people,” this is more correctly seen as

strategic vision. And as Sandy speaks of the importance of “establishing the school-wide procedures for doing things,” she is doing this for reasons more directly related to personal vision. Organizational vision, or “understanding how action in one area may affect other, seemingly unrelated areas” (Manasse, 1986, p. 154), is undoubtedly important to leadership and management, but did not find its way into the principals’ discussions about vision to the extent that Manasse might suggest it could.

Manasse’s second component of vision, future vision, was readily apparent in the thinking about vision. Future vision, “a comprehensive picture of how an organization will look at some point in the future,” is a combination of “both rational/analytic and intuitive processes” (Manasse, 1986, p. 157). All the principals touched on this component of vision in one way or another, ways this view of vision might be the most traditional and accepted concept. Ethan explained it as follows:

I do think it’s a vehicle by which you can help bring people together to chart a path of direction of where you eventually see a school in the future. Kind of something to strive for. And I think underlying that it serves as a vehicle for alignment, serves as a vehicle for motivating, serves as a vehicle for demonstrating purpose.

Meanwhile Dan sees his role as “trying to encapsulate it in small ways so that everybody can understand that yes, we are working towards that vision so we are making this happen in the future.”

This component of future vision “requires a leap of imagination that cannot be totally supported by forecasts of figures” (Manasse, 1986, p. 158). This “moral imagination” was something the principals were generally comfortable with, which is interesting in light of the

increasingly data-focused arena of school leadership. Oscar spoke most eloquently and directly about future vision when he explained,

When I'm at the front of the building and I look all the way down at the end of the hall and there's a door down there, and I'm saying, "That's where my focus is.

That's my goal, to get my children all the way down there, and I know what that goal is." . . . Sometimes you're the only one that can see that door, and so other people all along the way are telling you, "No, that's not going to work."

The future vision requires creativity, inspiration, and a level of self-confidence that comes easy to the successful principals profiled here.

Each principal showed that she or he were comfortable with this aspect of future vision in some way or another, but, as Ethan pointed out, this is an area where unsuccessful principals often struggle:

I think in a way you do kind of have to paint a vision of what you see the potential for your school and for your students and where you want to see them because I think that immediately demonstrates that a commitment to the school, a sense of leadership, a presence that you have. It shows some real purpose and substance and depth and meaning. Because all too often I think sometimes you hear when you say, "Well, why wasn't that person as effective there," or, "Were you not pleased with that particular individual," and you'll hear them say, "He had no vision for us. He had no vision for our school and no direction for our school."

Ethan, as the only one in the sample who now supervises other principals, sees the value in future vision and the gaps that can be created when future vision is not present. Of the four

components of Manasse's vision, this one is the most public and the most noticeable when absent from a principal's leadership.

Manasse's third component, personal vision, enables leaders to "identify their own personal resources and position themselves to play to their strengths" (Manasse, 1986, p. 160). Inherent in this self-awareness is the parallel skill of recognizing how to use the personal strengths of others to "hire team members to fill in the gaps," to "identify, mobilize and coordinate complimentary skills and resources" (Manasse, 1986, p. 160).

Manasse's personal vision could be favorably compared to "emotional intelligence," profiled by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) as the intersection of personal awareness and leadership. Sometimes this personal vision is an awareness of individual weakness, as when Oscar describes, "Sometimes I get so excited and then I start thinking, you know, 'Oscar, you need to slow down a little bit because you're way out here'" A principal who excels with personal vision is keenly aware of his own flaws, and compensates and controls for them as much as possible. Or, when Barbara describes dealing with disappointment, she exemplifies her own personal vision. She says in frustration, "I would just get upset about it maybe and close my door and cuss to myself, but I would never let them know," and her personal vision is front and center.

Other times, this personal vision exhibits itself in a keen awareness of the personal strengths of those on the team and how those can work best together. When Sandy discusses the need for "doing professional reading together and we're going to be ongoing learners, and that also means you've got to be a risk taker, it requires you are in a school environment where there is an atmosphere of trust, and it is safe to take risks," she is keenly aware of

personal vision. Her approach to hiring is perhaps the most direct example of personal vision in action, recognizing the intersection of the personal and the professional:

So as I've really looked at hiring teachers, it's almost more important who they are as a person than the repertoire that they have. If who you are as a person is aligned with that, then we can teach you everything you need to know. And we're doing a lot with workshop teaching, which you really have to be a kind of teacher that believes in classroom community, that really wants to foster independence in kids, and wants a classroom environment where kids talk to each other, and they're doing a lot of thinking and talking about their reading and writing.

As she recognizes the centrality of personal vision in her own self-knowledge, she also recognizes that the personal interactions of her staff are intricate and worthy of a principal's attention. Inattention to the emotional and relationship aspects of teaching and learning are detrimental to personal vision.

When Dan openly shares his struggles and frustrations with his staff, or when Barbara emphasizes the way that staff interacts with each other, they are each working firmly within the realm of personal vision, emphasizing the emotional and interpersonal factors that play into reaching a goal. Personal vision comes down to knowing yourself as a leader, and Sandy crystallizes this concept by saying, "it's more important, not that you really have an explicit vision that you can name off, but that you're reflective about and you really know yourself, and you take time think about what you believe and what you're passionate about."

The final component of strategic vision pulls these first three together, "connecting the reality of the present (organizational vision) to the possibilities of the future (future

vision) in a unique way (personal vision)” to meet the needs of the school (Manasse, 1986, p. 162). This is where leaders manage the change process, from the small day-to-day decisions to the larger setting of priorities and pathways to action. For some, this comes to skill in the use of metaphors, as Ethan describes:

I kicked off the whole year by looking at, talking about the core, the core of our business. And I used the geode, a geode as an example about what is on the outside we don't know and it can look rough and then you find going by may not know what is on the internal part of it and what we value. And I sliced the geode in half and saw the gems and the beauty of the geode as the core and how when you start looking in the internal part of it, what is it that we hold true about our kids, about our instruction, about our school, that all form those gems of beliefs and gems of value that we hold? And so I used that symbol kind of as the core with the different layers.

Vision can be the thing to bring all the pieces together, and keep everyone understanding the place of small pieces in the larger picture. Oscar explains, “One of the things that I've learned is that the more that you can bring people back to the vision, then the more they're more likely there to understand what it is they're doing now to try to accomplish that vision.”

Conversations about strategic vision build community and set a common path for Sandy, who explained

If we're a school community, what does that really mean, what obligation do we have to one another as adults and students, and together, because a lot of it goes back to when I say my vision, there is a philosophy under that.

This holistic approach to vision is at one time the most complex approach to vision, and one that could be used to encapsulate much of the job of the principalship. This can be, as Ethan described, “anything that you can do that symbolized and kind of consistently reinforces the message, whether it be as simple as on your stationery or your newsletter or your, some segment of your staff meetings.” Strategic vision compels the principal and the school to “continually clarify their person, future and organizational vision” (Manasse, 1986, p. 163) and is a component that all of the principals touch upon as they think about vision.

Framework 4: Ylimaki’s Archetypal Roles of the Visionary Leader

Rose Ylimaki’s bold 2006 study, *Toward a new conceptualization of vision in the work of educational leaders: Cases of visionary archetype*, proposes that our understanding of leaders is framed by archetypes, most particularly the visionary archetype which pulls together what she calls the “four ways of seeing: intuition, perception, insight and vision” (Ylimaki, 2006, p. 629). At a fundamental level, Ylimaki’s visionary leader focuses on “telling the truth,” as that is the primary thing that people want from their leaders to inspire and move them forward. (Ylimaki, 2006, p. 630). She arranges each of these ways of seeing for the visionary leader around the metaphor of a bridge, and her framework is an interesting way to look at the ways in which principals think about vision.

The first archetype, “Telling the truth of local change efforts – the view from stepping stones on the river,” focuses on the “pragmatic and more substantive issues” related to change, allowing a leader to “see the next step and construct vision” with a focus on the ground floor reality of the situation (Ylimaki, 2006, pp. 634-635). Dan is speaking from the stones in the river when he says humbly that, “School can run without me. It can’t run

without kids and it can't run without teachers. I know I am a support position. That is where the important stuff is being done in the classroom." The recognition that Sandy must exemplify vision in "the kinds of things we're going to be doing in the classroom, the collaborative planning you're going to be doing, and here's what my literacy coach is going to be doing," that focus on the step-by-step progress of vision building is key. To be a visionary leader in this archetype, the principal must know, respect, and work within the path that the community walks, like when Ethan regularly asks his staff, "Help me understand what you mean by that. What evidence in our school supports that?" to better know the view from the stepping stones. Each of the principals here wove this archetype into their understanding of vision, as necessity for visionary leadership.

Ylimaki's second archetype, "telling the truth of external change efforts – the view from the bridge," finds leaders intent upon "finding common ground among seemingly competing internal ideas and external policies" as the "bridge between competing visions," (Ylimaki, 2006, p. 640). This visionary archetype takes the ground floor understanding and respect of the first archetype and combines it with the broader perspective of external forces. Dan works hard to communicate to his staff that

We are not just our own little island. We are part of the bigger organization. We are part of the bigger family. So of course if you know, accountability is a big part of superintendent's plan then part of our vision is that I want everybody to understand that we will do the symbolic things and get it right.

When Sandy found her school facing federal sanctions for low performance, she worked to help her staff realize the positive power of those external forces while recognizing the emotions and nuances of the work the staff had done.

Each year we were stepping closer and closer into Title I school improvement, and what I would always tell my colleagues is, “We made a lot of changes, but it’s a lot easier to make those changes when you have that external thing put on you.” Change is always hard but it was easier because we didn’t have a choice.

This visionary archetype forges connections between the reality of the work being done and the pressures and misunderstandings of those outside the organization. This leader can bring those two worlds together and make them coexist in a way that takes the organization forward. With this focus, as Ethan says, vision becomes “a vehicle for alignment, serves as a vehicle for motivating, serves as a vehicle for demonstrating purpose” to those within and outside the school walls.

The third archetype, “telling the truth for the marginalized in change efforts – the view from the heart,” shifts the focus to a leader’s “higher moral purpose” and sense of social justice as one of motivators for school leadership (Ylimaki, 2006, p. 640). Barbara speaks of this higher purpose when she explains, “I wanted to do something, not just be a principal but be a principal that made a difference in a school for some kids.” Over time, Sandy has found herself seeing more of the “view from the heart” in her leadership, as she strives to connect kids with more than just basic skills, but connection to civic values:

What I find myself thinking more about is . . . part of it is influenced by social forces, I guess, and the reality of our world, and as you get older you think about things a

little differently, things that concern me, what I see happening in our society, so those play in. Things I'm thinking about now aren't so much about my instructional vision for the school as much as it is what I think is important to teach kids about civics and that they have an obligation beyond themselves.

More than other principals, Oscar spoke within his vision of the calling he felt to be a principal focused on the experiences of the marginalized. "I'm not making a lot of money, so I do consider this to be a service effort as well, and my way of giving back, and so I kind of dedicate my life to doing this and give my all every day." He elaborates that it is his role as a leader to keep those perspectives central:

Because sometimes we forget, and it's normal because we get used to our social norms and what we deal with on a regular basis, or how we were raised, and we figure, "Well, all children should come to school like that. My mama helped me with my homework; why wouldn't their mama?"—but you don't understand or you just don't think about all the kinds of different circumstances.

This archetype of the visionary leader is perhaps the most unusual when compared to the rest of the literature on vision, but it does connect directly with the experiences of school principals, perhaps more than with other forms of leadership. The moral component of school leadership is never far from the surface in any vision, but with this archetype it is foremost and crucial.

Ylimaki presents the final archetype, "forging a new path through the woods – a leader's view of the future" as a traditional view of the visionary leader, and one rooted not in "truth-telling" but in an individual perspective shared with the community. Ylimaki is not

impressed with this approach, but it does fall in line with much of what Bennis and Nanus hold exemplify in their original concept of vision (1985, 1989; Nanus, 1992). It also may be true that in our broader culture, people look towards these traditional leaders in our ideal presidents, coaches, governors, and community leaders. There is a longing in archetypal leadership for the hero that can show the one true course of action. Ethan explains the necessity for a leader to sometimes be able to hold and see the “path through the woods,” depending on the needs of the particular school:

So I think a byproduct of it interpreted by that is people really see this level of presence and this level of leadership and this capability and this skill for someone to be able to really set out there to have this direction, to chart the path for where we want to be at this horizon, you know, out on the horizon, for our school.

Some of the principals, like Dan, recognized the need for this future vision, as a need for the principal to present “a picture that everybody can see in their mind of what it looks like.”

And Oscar mentions the need to maintain confidence in your belief in the “door at the end of the hall” coupled with the humility to always question that your vision may be incorrect. But many of the principals in the study might agree with Ylimaki that to trust wholeheartedly in the principal’s view of the future could be treacherous and would undermine the other three archetypes explained here to which each might be drawn.

Ylimaki’s framework is unique in that it looks not so much at the principal’s actions and vision, but at what the community looks for and needs from its leader. This is informative for the principal in terms designing an approach to vision and leadership that takes into account not only the dynamics of the school and its situation, but the various

cultural expectations of leaders that will be subtly at play in the judgment of a principal and his or her effectiveness. Archetypes of leaders are powerful in forming impressions of success or failure, and each of the principals in this study had some connection with this understanding.

The Principals' Vision Essentials

Through imaginative variation I have worked to apply a variety of perspectives on the different principals' understanding of vision, some from the literature (Manasse, 1996; Ylimaki, 2006), and some from my own creation. At the end of the day, however, I return to the individual experiences of the principals and their understanding of vision, and find that with each there is a central or "essential" experience most closely connected to their understanding of the phenomenon of vision. These essentials do not embody the complete complexity of their understanding of vision; in contrast, by speaking of their understanding of vision in terms of the "essential" I hope to apply the power of simplicity to the understanding of a complex phenomenon. These essentials are quite different from each other, and show, perhaps more than the other frameworks applied, how differently principals can approach vision and find success. When these principals talk about vision, this essential is the idea that keeps coming back again and again.

Sandy's Essential: People and Learning Together

"I just feel like, knowing what I know now, I didn't know anything back then - I didn't know anything!" It is this ironic knowledge, this comfort with the lifelong learning that comes with school leadership that is at the core of Sandy's vision. When she talks of vision, she returns to the belief that there is much to be learned at every stage of her

professional growth and that to grow she needs to ensure through thoughtful hiring that she is surrounded by good people to learn alongside. Her vision revolves around the essential of hiring the right people and creating environments where they can learn from each other. Inherent in this essential is a need to lead a school where an environment exists to be reflective and learn with other professionals. “It’s more important, not that you really have an explicit vision that you can name off, but that you’re reflective about and you really know yourself.”

Oscar’s Essential: Belief in “The Door at the End of the Hall”

“I tell my staff that when I’m at the front of the building and I look all the way down at the end of the hall and there’s a door down there, and I’m saying, ‘That’s where my focus is. That’s my goal, to get my children all the way down there, and I know what that goal is.’” Oscar’s vision is rooted in the principal as the one who must believe and encourage others to believe in the distant but reachable goal. Inherent in this essential must be confidence and faith that the vision that the principal sees is the right one, and the humility to know when to examine and change course. The principal provides metaphorical leadership through this “door at the end of the hall,” and he is called upon to ensure that all students are successful in reaching that goal. As school leaders, “we have to be able to see over those barriers or know that we’re either going through the barrier, over the barrier, or around the barrier, but our focus is down there and that’s where we have to make it. And so that’s it. It’s a challenge.”

Ethan's Essential: Facilitating Change to Reach Potential

“You do kind of have to paint a vision of what you see the potential for your school and for your students and where you want to see them because I think that immediately demonstrates that a commitment to the school, a sense of leadership.” The principal, in Ethan’s understanding of vision, is the facilitator of a process that guides the community towards the highest potential of that school. He does this through careful use of metaphor, creating systems through which large groups can collaborate, and providing something to believe in. The principal is simultaneously responsible for painting a picture of the vision and for creating venues and conversations where the school community can paint that vision for themselves. “The more opportunity you have for collaboration, the more opportunity you have for as many people to be involved so that there is shared ownership and, even if not everybody is putting input, shared understanding.”

Barbara's Essential: Trust and the Social Contract

“And every year, the social contract is always the first kickoff thing, no matter how years you have been here, it is always the same as the going through the whole social contract, how it comes about, the philosophy behind it. . . .This is how we do things here, and this is why we do it here, and this is what we believe in.” Essential to Barbara’s vision is development of a social contract among the school community whereby there is agreement upon core values, behaviors and expectations. When she talks of vision, she returns to the social contract and the trust that this agreement allows the community to share. With this core foundation, borne of collaboration on a deep level, the basic vision of every student

making progress towards goals follows naturally. Her role as the principal is simply, “to just hire really, really good people and then trust them 100%.”

Dan’s Essential: Inspiring by Humble Example

“You need to be leading and inspiring people to achieve something great. There are different ways of doing it and I am not saying I have the best way of doing it. I know that, and I am always trying to find better ways.” Essential to Dan’s vision is a commitment to inspiring those around him through words, actions, example, and relationship. He knows that as the principal, his actions are scrutinized and that he needs to walk the talk of everything he says, providing an example where the vision is clear through actions. The principal needs to be focused on inspiring those around him through expressing the vision for the school at every turn, yet always maintaining his personal humility and the awareness that all can improve. “I talk to everybody. It has got to be everybody. I am trying to live (the vision) out so that when they see me, you know, I want them to think about it.”

Synthesis of Major Findings

Throughout this study, I have resisted the temptation to draw general conclusions or comparisons between the principals and perspectives they share. The true value of phenomenological research is that it gives a clear understanding of, in this case, five separate phenomena without clouding those understandings with generalization. In this synthesis, however, I want to draw together some themes and ideas that flow from the five understandings of vision presented in the findings.

This chapter has presented five different frameworks for understanding vision: genesis of vision, whether vision changes or remains constant, Manasse’s four components of

vision, Ylimaki's archetypal roles, and the essentials of individual vision. Two of these came directly from the research, while the other three were frameworks that I developed myself throughout the course of my research. In the end, I find the frameworks of genesis, Ylimaki's archetypes, and the essentials to be the most useful and effective in understanding vision. The issue of whether vision comes from the principal or from the community proved vexing for many of the principals interviewed, and I believe the tension between two competing approaches would continue to challenge a thoughtful principal throughout experiences and schools. Ylimaki's archetypes were unique in their metaphorical approach, and proved to be applicable to a moral component of vision that may have been lacking in the other frameworks. Finally, the essentials proved to be excellent snapshots of five very good places to start in crafting a vision. A novice or veteran principal could start with any of these essentials, or combine them to form a strong foundation for their own approach to vision. Each framework gives a different lens through which to look at the phenomenological experience, and each gives its own particular value to the overall understanding of the phenomenon.

While there are no definite common themes or agreements among all five of the principals here, there are a handful of common ideas that come from a plurality that are worth discussing. First, in Manasse's framework, each of the principals focused more upon the future, personal, and strategic vision rather than organizational vision. This could lead us to believe that in these five effective principals, they see the management portion of leadership as separate from vision, or they manage systems to the point that they don't see them in the mix of something as complex as vision. Secondly, each of the principals shared

common themes and thoughts around use of metaphor, humility, a sense of humor, and the necessity of dealing with change. Finally, there was a sense of lifelong learning expressed by each principal, as they each were quick to recognize lessons learned along the way and the continuous improvement that comes with utilizing vision for a school. To attempt broader generalizations beyond these would be antithetical to the pursuit of a phenomenological study, but these themes seem prominent enough to suggest as common.

It may be far too easy, or perhaps very appropriate, to conclude with something as mundane as the somewhat morbid adage, “There are many ways to skin a cat.” It is very clear that these five principals have very different approaches to vision, yet have each been extremely successful in leading their school communities. If here we have learned that there are five distinctly different ways to use vision effectively, I don’t think the research here can point to the “wrong” way to use vision. It may be that with further study of five or fifty principals in a similar way that one could find exponentially more understandings of vision, but if the goal of this study was to find some general lessons for effective understandings of vision, the study did not accomplish that. It did, however, provide five exemplars within which students of the principalship can learn more about how vision can be understood and used in the work of a principal.

Summary of Chapter

In Chapter IV, I have presented the textural descriptions of the five principals in the study, followed by application of some of the frameworks from the literature as perspectives on those phenomena. I also presented the “essentials” of the phenomenon of vision in each of the five principals, crystallizing a complex concept into a simple core concept for each

principal's understanding of vision. In Chapter V, I will discuss potential future uses for this study, speculate upon policy implications, and pose questions for future research related to the phenomenological understanding of vision.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

In Chapter IV, I presented some of the frameworks from the literature as lenses through which the individual principals' understanding of vision could be viewed. I also presented the 'essentials' of the phenomenon of vision in each of the five principals, examining a snapshot of a crucial element of each principals' understanding of vision. Finally, I drew some conclusions about common themes and generalizations that could be drawn from the understandings of vision explored. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings, explore potential future uses for this study, speculate upon policy implications, and pose questions for research related to the phenomenological understanding of vision in the principalship.

Discussion of Findings

In the Literature Review discussed in Chapter III, I attempted to whittle down the voluminous writings and research around the concept of vision into four general categories: Genesis of Vision, Forms of Vision, Cultivation of Vision, and Irrelevance of Vision. In this section, I will show the ways that the findings of this research fit within or fall outside of the current body of research in each of these areas.

Genesis of Vision

In the literature in regards to the question, "Where does vision come from?" the key point of contention within the field and among practitioners revolves around whether the

vision is a leader-based vision or a community-based vision. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus (1985) were the primary champions of the heyday of the concept in the 1980's, and their perspective on vision was clearly leader-based. Note the second person pronoun usage in the following passages where Nanus (1992) summarizes the genesis of vision, focusing on individual energy rather than collaborative:

(Vision) occurs to a well-informed, open mind, a mind prepared by a lifetime of learning and experience. . . .Your values as a leader guide your selection of a vision in a variety of ways. . . . Sometimes a powerful intuition and drive in the hands of a strong leader are all that is needed. (pp. 36-38)

When Nanus does discuss the involvement of the community, it is clearly in the supportive role as he suggests leaders have the option to “encourage inputs from all your colleagues and subordinates, involve them in the visioning process, and let them know how much you appreciate them” almost as an afterthought (p. 38).

In this study, there were a few examples of this leader-based vision, but a clear sense that most principals understood the expectation of leader-based vision existed among some constituents. Of the principals studied here, Oscar was the only one who spoke directly about the vision as leader-based, as he put responsibility on himself as principal to know the ‘door at the end of the hall’ and that “if you’re the only person that can see that door, you’ve got to have enough confidence to keep pushing.” This perspective comes closest to the Nanus’ (1992) description of the combination of foresight, imagination, judgment, and “a healthy dose of chutzpah” necessary to develop vision (p. 34). Others recognized the importance of the principal as the holder of the vision and taking some sort of guiding role in

developing, but did not come close to the kind of leader-based genesis that Bennis and Nanus represent.

While many researchers and writers in recent years have focused on the collaborative skills necessary to implement a community-based vision (Barth, 2001; Deming, 1982; Fullan, 1993; Kouzes & Posner, 1995), Thomas Sergiovanni perhaps most clearly represents the centrality of community-based vision for the success of a principal and a school.

Sergiovanni (2005) recognized the leader-based perspective that Bennis and Nanus represent and clearly delineates where his perspective differs:

Indeed, leaders who are remiss in expressing and articulating a vision, in communicating values and dreams they hold dear, miss the very point of leadership for the school. However, the vision of a school must reflect the hopes and dreams, the needs and interests and values and beliefs of teachers, parents, and students as well. In the final analysis it doesn't matter so much what the principal believes; it is what the school stands for that counts. (pp. 7-8)

There are few clearer points of disagreement in the literature on vision as this point, where leaders digress on their beliefs about whether a vision comes from the mind of the leader or the collective beliefs of the organization being led.

It is in the area of Genesis of Vision that this study comes closest to a definite finding of agreement from this qualitative study of five principals. When they talked about vision, most often they came back to vision that came from the community they serve. Barbara seems to almost quote the above Sergiovanni reference when she explains:

I mean, I might have one, but it doesn't matter if I have one and it is not shared by everybody that is out there doing the day-to-day and really in the trenches, working with the kids. So I think you definitely need one, but it is not enough for the leader to have vision. The vision has got to be shared with everybody that is in the organization, at least in the school business.

And when principals, like Sandy, recognize the centrality of the principal in the process, they are quick to clarify that the core of the vision comes from the community, recognizing that "It could be that you set the vision but you get your staff, your community, to identify the core values that support that vision." And Oscar, who might be the closest to leader-based in his understanding of vision, also honors the important role of the community: "I think that most principals probably already have a vision for their schools and for where they think they should take the kids, but I do think that the community and then the people that you work for, they have parts in that too." These principals, whether by intuition or as a reaction to the changing views of vision in research and policy, fall relatively comfortably on the side of community-based vision when they talk about vision.

Forms of Vision

There is not the same level of consensus or agreement among these principals on the various forms of vision that have been discussed in this study and the literature. Surprisingly little of the literature attempts to specify the different forms of vision that a principal could zero in on, and the two most useful studies discussed earlier were the frameworks from Manasse (1986) and Ylimaki (2006) which attempted to describe forms of vision by looking at components of vision and the archetypal symbols which underlie forms of vision. Deal

and Peterson (1994) similarly distinguish the differences by describing the “tension around the expressive and technical aspects” (p. 9) of the work of leadership, specifically noting the dual roles of principals as “engineers versus artists” (p. 7).

In Chapter IV, I discussed the ways that the frameworks presented by Manasse and Ylimaki found their way into the thoughts of the principals around vision. Manasse (1986) divided his components of vision into organizational, personal, future and strategic vision and each of these are found in the myriad perspectives shared by the principals here. Likewise, as Ylimaki (2006) pinpointed the archetypal ways of “telling the truth” from local change, external change, the marginalized in change, and forging new paths (p. 269). Suffice it to say here that there are elements of each of these forms to be found intertwined in most of our principals, with no one perspective finding a general excess or deficit of reference or focus in the minds of the principals.

Cultivation of Vision

In the review of the literature in Chapter III, I pointed to four key areas where vision, once initially developed, can be cultivated in a school culture: reflective practice, collaborative culture, learning organization, and school rituals. If we were to look for an answer from this study and the five principals included about which of these are most instrumental in cultivating vision, the answer seems to be “all of the above.” While they recognize the importance of each of these means of cultivating vision, they have varied success in utilizing each approach.

The habit of reflective leadership is possibly most clearly articulated by Roland Barth (2001) when he explains that “reflection contributes to the refinement of subsequent action

and to the building of a repertoire of professional craft knowledge” (p. 74). Each of the principals here seemed very comfortable with the reflective exercise of being interviewed for this study, and it was clear that reflection was part of their work. However, none of the principals spoke about reflection as a part of their daily work, and only some spoke of a purposeful, regular effort to include reflection in the work of themselves or their staff.

Sandy, in preparing to open a new year-round school asked openly

I want to build in a reflective culture but one of my colleagues said to me, year-round is hard, you never get to reflect. There’s no ‘Friday’s the last day,’ feeling. . . so how do you keep that going with the pace of kids constantly here, teachers in and out, how do you institutionalize that?

And Barbara was the only one to mention any semblance of a structure to compel personal reflection when she described a summer tradition where she would,

Clean out my files, and I would clean out my drawers, and then I would, you know, also take time to read a couple of books and just try to make myself take at least a half day to do some reflection, to do some study and to do some just professional kind of things and think about how do I want to kick off next year.

While many expressed the time-bound reasons why reflection is difficult, noticeably absent in principals’ effort to instill habits of reflection in the staff was any purposeful, regular habit of reflection in the principals themselves.

The importance of collaboration among the school community as a means to sustain and strengthen vision comes across in most if not all of the literature around vision in some capacity. Lawrence Lezotte may be the most well-known early advocate of the importance

of collaboration around vision, and he restates its importance in his 2006 *Stepping Up* when he reminds us that “Research shows, again and again, that in effective schools – schools where all students learn the essential curriculum – administrators and teachers understand the importance of collaborative culture” (p. 104). Not to oversimplify, but there was not a principal in this study who did not emphasize the importance of collaboration in developing, nurturing and sustaining the vision in the school. The principals certainly differed in the way they spoke about this collaboration and the ways in which this collaboration happened. Ethan suggests that new principals begin with a root conversation around values and “that is where you begin to have that collaboration. What is it that, what are the values that we hold as a school community, a school family that will help us achieve this vision?” The sort of exercises and conversations he and other principals had both as directed by the district or state and initiated by their own leadership, help to refine and sustain the vision. All the while, Sandy expresses the reality that there may be much more that can be done in encouraging true collaboration around vision: “As much as we talk about collaborative work and Professional Learning Communities and the way we want to do business, we’re not there, we’re really not there.” As with the above discussion of reflection, even the most successful principals know that there is a chasm between the ideal state of collaboration around vision they aspire to and the reality of their current success.

The general concept of collaboration has been elaborated and possibly improved upon with Peter Senge’s concept of the learning organization (1990) and more recently in Rick DuFour’s extensive descriptions of the Professional Learning Community (1998) in educational circles. Essentially these approaches specify that collaboration must mean more

than simple conversations, but must extend to creating true learning experiences for stakeholders, usually around vision or data. The principals in this district had all been trained directly by Rick DuFour in recent years, so the concept of the Professional Learning Community was certainly present in their landscapes, and they incorporated the idea of learning in the cultivation of vision to varying degrees. This observation duly noted, it is interesting that none of the principals spoke more than tangentially about the work of the learning organization or Professional Learning Communities when they talked about vision. Some, like Sandy and Barbara, spoke about the importance of learning together and collaboration in their work of bringing the vision to reality, but even there, the language of these two frameworks didn't guide the discussion. When prompted or asked directly, they certainly can relate these terms and language, but it isn't crucial to the conversation and to their own experience of the phenomenon of vision.

Finally, the importance of school rituals and traditions comes up in the literature about vision, most notably in the work of Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson. (1999) Many of the principals looked at the rituals and traditions of their school as a place where vision finds its form and also allows itself to evolve. As noted earlier, Barbara's use of the tradition of the development of the social contract at the start of the year both creates and sustains her vision rooted in trust and collaboration. Ethan's use of the geode metaphor to start one of his year's work is an excellent example of a ritual discussion that gave life to the vision for that entire year, and the ritual of returning to the metaphor at subsequent staff gatherings allowed the vision to evolve. And Dan sees his own presence, example and actions as a sort of community focal point that gives a metaphor for those involved with the school to coalesce

around; his very actions and example as the principal can serve as the metaphor around which the vision evolves. Each of these principals seemed to appreciate the power of symbols, rituals and traditions in cultivating and sustaining a vision that works for a school community.

Irrelevance of Vision

In the Literature Review, I presented what could be considered an outlier opinion, represented by Alexander Wiseman (2005) that postulated that to see principals as driven by vision is unnecessarily glamorizing the role of the principal, when in reality a principal is first and foremost a manager. The subjects of this study all saw vision as something worthy of their attention, and something close to the core of their role as principals and leaders. I think all would agree that vision is far from irrelevant in their work.

However, it does bear mentioning, that the word “vision” itself is not as common or as central in the writings about school leadership as it once was. In the heyday of vision during the 90’s, the concept of the visionary principal was to be found throughout the literature on the principalship, as has been shown through the review of the literature. How does one explain, then, that in Marzano, Waters and McNulty’s *School Leadership that Works* (2005), he and his colleagues summarize a meta-analysis of “69 studies involving 2,802 schools, approximately 1.4 million students and 14,000 teachers” (pp. 10-11) to determine a “research-based” list of “Responsibilities of the School Leader” that does not mention vision? (pp. 42-43) Marzano, Waters and McNulty use terms like “Focus,” “Ideals/Beliefs,” “Optimizer,” and “Situational Awareness,” all of which could connect with the various understandings of vision expressed here. But it is notable that Marzano, a

seemingly popular researcher in current dialogues about leadership, has not seen vision as integral to effective school leadership.

I speculate that on a surface level, this may simply be a semantic argument, and that the word vision has merely been replaced by similar terms. However, the actual reality may be deeper, as the job of the principal could have changed in the wake of No Child Left Behind, a focus on data, and the broadening responsibilities placed upon the principal. As a principal's intuition and personal vision is replaced by the call to base decisions on data, research, and increasingly controlling federal and state guidelines, it could be that vision might not be that important any more. Vision is most necessary when there are numerous paths to be chosen and the principal has the autonomy to choose them. When the path is dictated by data or mandate, we may call upon our principals to be visionary less often. This hypothesis is somewhat pessimistic, and certainly not represented in the thoughts of the principals in this study, but is one that could warrant further study.

Potential Uses of this Study

This study has potential as a tool for new school leaders to think about their own approach to the use of vision in school leadership. Teaching and learning around a concept as fuzzy and intractable as vision is difficult, and many approaches to teaching about vision could fall prey to generalization and simplification. With the frameworks explored here, there are a variety of different ways of thinking about vision that could be useful.

The textural descriptions of the five principals' understanding of vision are rich glimpses inside the mind of a principal. A novice or experienced principal could benefit from comparing and contrasting his or her own potential textural descriptions, looking at

areas of the terrain of vision present or absent from their own. The example of interviewing a practicing principal specifically about the phenomenological understanding of vision is powerful; teaching about school leadership around case studies of phenomenological portraits of vision in action would be a great touchstone for conversations about school leadership. As was discussed in Chapter I, the importance of vision in principal evaluation, public perception, and school effectiveness is well-documented. This study is one step towards improving the quality of principal education we do around this important piece of school leadership.

This phenomenological approach could inform graduate courses focused on ethics in the school principalship. As with any position of power, the public is from time to time subjected to school administrators who fail to understand the ethical and moral components of school leadership. Is there some way in which studying the use and misuse of vision could lead to better training of principals in the ethical territory of the principalship? Yilmaki's archetypes are unique in their decidedly moral approach to the understanding of vision, and while most principal credentialing programs have ethics courses as part of their work, it is in the design and implementation of vision that ethics meet the practical work of the principalship.

In the end, I might direct a novice principal first towards the textural descriptions and the principals' essentials. In these elements, a student of leadership will find crystallized the essential nature of the way these principals think about vision, and a close study of these essentials has given me the most food for thought in my own leadership. If nothing else, this study has provided what I think would be a model for future case study work or study of

individual successful leaders. New and experienced leaders could use this as a model of reflective practice, compelling a self-study of their own textual descriptions of their own phenomenological understanding of vision as well as pinpointing their own essentials of vision. Once a leader understands her or his own essential, a study of the five essentials shown here could prompt valuable professional growth as comparisons could point the way to gaps in understanding vision.

Policy Implications

The educational landscape has changed greatly since I did my initial preliminary study of principals and vision in 2000. Discussions of vision were prominent in educational leadership literature, and the centrality of the principals' vision was of great concern to policy makers. In the interim, No Child Left Behind has changed the terrain considerably. The ways in which we measure school and principal success have become increasingly quantitative, and more often than not, tied directly to standardized test scores. In addition, the unit of measurement is not only the school, but the district and state. Finally, the focus of No Child Left Behind on research-based practice and data-driven systems has taken some of the creativity out of the principalship; principals are called upon to "know" that a strategy or plan will work, rather than inspiring and creating systems to move forward.

This has led, in my mind, to a devaluing of the very concept of vision in the principalship. As standards are raised, research-based methods are prioritized, and sanctions lie on the horizon for schools that take risks and fail, the role of a principal focused on creating, inspiring, and leading a school on a vision based, in some part, on intuition and creativity has less of a place. As districts and states exert more control over curriculum and

school management decisions, the place for a visionary principal to be creative continues to shrink. As the next wave of principal retirements approaches, schools are more and more focused on training principals to be effective managers, data analysts, and to meet the bottom line. While none of these are antithetical to visionary leadership, there is a level at which these worlds can collide, and do collide in the day to day work of the principal. As policy is designed to support principals in the future, there should be recognition that strong leadership involves cultivation of vision, not simply following through on the vision fabricated from a hodgepodge of research, data, and directives.

The principals studied here were successful, I believe, because of their visions, not because of the directives of research-based strategies and their allegiance to the results of standardized tests. This change in the principalship should either be addressed in the design of the principalship, or some steps should be taken to honor the visionary capabilities of a principal who knows his or her school well and can facilitate a vision for success. Perhaps there is wisdom in a re-thinking of the different kinds of creative vision that might evolve in this era of school leaders, similar to Sergiovanni's archetypes of artists, craftsmen and technocrats, suggested in *Strengthening the Heartbeat* (2005):

Artists view leadership as *vision*, which transfers ideas into goals. Craftsmen view leadership as *design*, which transfers ideas into things. And technocrats view leadership as a *script* that transfers ideas into rules, steps and procedures. . .

Leadership as vision, design and script are all needed to make things work in schools. Thus the issue is not whether any of the three should be included or not, but how and where they should be distributed in a school or school district. (pp. 168-169)

As the role of principals shifts clearly to focus upon the technocrat and, to a lesser extent, craftsman, there needs to be attention paid to the third and equally crucial archetype of artist in the principalship. If this form of vision is discounted, a key element of effective leadership will be weakened.

Questions for Further Research

This study raises a number of intriguing possibilities for future research, as the opening of the principals' mind to phenomenological inquiry leads to more questions than answers. Below are potential research questions that flow from this research:

1. How does a principal rectify the conflict between a principals' vision and the vision of the district or state?

Each of the principals in this study commented at some point about the tension between school-based vision and the vision that comes from the district, state or federal guidelines. The principal faces decisions daily that force him or her to balance the commitment to the personal or school vision with the bureaucratic aspect of the role. At a fundamental level, the principal is an administrator in the true sense of the word, in that role to administer the policies set at a higher level. Yet there is such a high value placed upon individual vision, and when these come into conflict, the principal must decide when to compromise and when to put the school's vision above the mandate. There is rich phenomenological work to be done in dissecting how a principal navigates these decisions, both in pragmatic and moral domains. It is in these decisions that a principal can be characterized as 'visionary' or 'follower,' 'maverick' or 'good soldier,' and to look more closely at these decisions could be quite informative and enlightening.

2. *Can visionary leadership be taught? What strategies are effective in taking a leader 'lacking vision' to one who uses vision well?*

A fundamental assumption of principal licensing programs must be that there is something to be taught in studies of leadership and vision. A more perplexing question for research might be whether the nuances of effectively utilizing vision in leadership can be *learned* as well as taught. While many of the principals in this study commented on how their approach to vision has changed over time, there were certainly examples to be seen of how some basic assumptions of leadership are deeply ingrained, which begs the question of whether an ineffective use of vision could be corrected or changed. Many might agree that vision comes close to that category of leadership skills that a leader either has or doesn't. If phenomenological research is informative in understanding, it would be enlightening to see if this sort of learning, or any kind of learning, could make a principal lacking in vision improve in some tangible way.

3. *To what extent is the phenomenological understanding of vision a result of the district or state approach to school leadership? To what extent is the phenomenological understanding of vision a result of the training of the principal?*

Related to the previous question, a variety of experiences and training can lead to a principal's use and understanding of vision. Principals who come through formative years in a district with strong site-based decision-making systems might have a very different sense of vision than one that only knows a school system where fundamental questions of leadership are answered at the superintendent rather than the principal level. This balance of decision-making power ebbs and flows in most districts, but it would be interesting to see if different

school systems or schools of education leadership tend to produce leaders of different focus under the frameworks discussed here. This research could possibly be connected to school system effectiveness in some way, perhaps resolving one of this study's underlying questions as to whether visionary leadership matters in some quantifiable way.

4. Can vision be effectively measured in quantitative terms?

In an era of increased reliance upon data-driven decision making in school leadership, a study focused upon an admittedly head-in-the-clouds approach to the phenomenological research of vision and the principalship could be justly criticized as much ado about nothing. Where is the quantifiable proof that vision matters? As noted in Chapter III, there is scant research on the quantifiable effect of visionary leadership on student achievement or school effectiveness beyond general observations that it has an effect. I hesitate to say that this sort of research is necessary to validate the study of vision in the principalship, but at the same time I fear that if something as valuable as vision is not justified by quantitative data, it might lose out in those envisioning principal training programs in lieu of increased focus upon data, policy, or management professional development. In the *No Child Left Behind* era, quantitative data rules the day, and to continue to commit resources to learning and teaching about vision, there might need to be more quantitative explorations of the necessity of vision to justify its inclusion in the curriculum of principal training.

5. What systems are effective in nurturing visionary principals?

Once the research suggested above is conducted, the work could begin on truly assessing the coursework, professional development, and systems that nurture vision in the principalship that results in positive outcomes. This work has simply not begun, while there

are many programs in place that promote leadership. The KIPP schools, for example, promote as a key aspect of their success the one-year institute of principal training that form the foundation of the leadership at those schools; this intense training includes graduate business management courses and a direct instruction in a kind of leadership that should be similar from one school to the next. (Matthews, 2005). On the other end of the experience spectrum, the National School Leaders Network focuses on developing visionary leaders through monthly collaborative seminars among experienced principals, structured around a seminar format that “nurtures, encourages, supports and sustains school leaders” (National School Leaders Network, 2008). As these and countless other principal leadership development approaches strive to support principals and secure funding, the demand for quantitative research to back the investment will grow. Research rooted in quantifying the value of these and other approaches to nurturing leaders could prove necessary to securing the place of vision-based learning about leadership in professional development.

If the mark of a good study is that it opens the door to further research, then this has certainly been successful, as the landscape ahead for research into phenomenological understandings of vision and its effect on principals and schools is rich.

Summary

This study took on an expansive goal: to attempt to understand on a phenomenological level what principals think about when they think about vision. It has given a deep understanding of five minds in school leadership and shown how the concept of vision works in the daily work of the principal. It has brought together some of the literature on school leadership to attempt to explain how these frameworks can increase understanding.

In the end, a phenomenological study looks for no overarching truths, but may need to be content with a summation of vision as intangible and amorphous as that offered by Roland Barth in his 2001 *Learning by Heart*:

A vision is a kind of moral imagination that gives school people, individually and collectively, the ability to see their school not only as it is but as they would like it to become. It is an overall conception of what educators want their school to stand for, a map revealing how all the parts fit together and, above all, just how the vision of each individual is related to the collective vision of the organization.

A precondition for constructing an authentic, collective vision is that each school educator must come to grips with his or her own personal vision . . . A school's vision must then somehow emerge from the primal ooze of these many personal visions. (p. 204)

How this “primal ooze” evolves into a vision that is successful for the principal and the school is open to the myriad approaches, philosophies, and frameworks that have been presented here.

The role of the principal is crucial to the success of a school, and many a school has risen or fallen on the shoulders of a principal with a great vision, or one who lacked vision. With so much riding on the success of a principal and his or her effective use of vision, the conversation has only begun about what approaches to vision are most effective, how vision is best used, and what can be done to train our future principals as effective visionary leaders.

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Appendices

Appendix A: ELCC Standards

Educational Leadership Constituents Council (ELCC)

Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership

Standard 1:

Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a district vision of learning supported by the school community.

Standard 2:

Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by promoting a positive school culture, providing an effective instructional program, applying best practice to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff.

Standard 3:

Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by managing the organization, operations, and resources in a way that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Standard 4:

Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by collaborating with families and other community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Standard 5:

Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairly, and in an ethical manner.

Standard 6:

Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Standard 7:

Internship. The internship provides significant opportunities for candidates to synthesize and apply the knowledge and practice and develop the skills identified in Standards 1-6 through substantial, sustained, standards-based work in real settings, planned and guided cooperatively by the institution and school district personnel for graduate credit.

Appendix B: North Carolina Standards for School Executives

Philosophical Foundation for the School Executive Standards

The following points underlie this work:

- ☞ Today schools must have proactive school executives who possess a great sense of urgency.
- ☞ The goal of school leadership is to transform schools so that large-scale, sustainable, continuous improvement becomes built in to their mode of operation.
- ☞ The moral purpose of school leadership is to create schools in which all students learn, the gap between high and low performance is greatly diminished and what students learn will prepare them for success in their futures, not ours.
- ☞ Leadership is not a position or a person. It is a practice that must be embedded in all job roles at all levels of the school district.
- ☞ The work of leadership is about working with, for and through people. It is a social act. Whether we are discussing instructional leadership, change leadership or leadership as learning, people are always the medium for the leader.
- ☞ Leadership is not about doing everything oneself but it is always about creating processes and systems that will cause everything to happen.
- ☞ Leadership is about the executive's ability to select and develop a strong executive staff whose complementary strengths promote excellence in all seven functions of leadership identified in this document.
- ☞ The concept of leadership is extremely complex and systemic in nature. Isolating the parts of leadership completely misses the power of the whole. It is not just knowing what to do, but why to do it, how to do it and when to do it.
- ☞ Within a school district there are nested leadership systems (local boards of education, central office, school, and classroom). For the organization to be successful these systems must be aligned and supportive, and function as a team.
- ☞ Leadership is about setting direction, aligning and motivating people to implement positive sustained improvement.
- ☞ Leaders bring their "person" to the practice of leadership. Matching the context of leadership to the "person" of the individual is important to the success of the leader.

Intended Purposes of the Standards

The North Carolina School Executive Standards have been developed as a guide for principals and assistant principals as they continually reflect upon and improve their effectiveness as leaders throughout all of the stages of their careers. Although there are many influences on a school executive's development, these standards will serve as an important tool for principals and assistant principals as they consider their growth and development as executives leading schools in the 21st century. Taken as a whole these standards, practices and competencies are overwhelming. One might ask, "How can one person possess all of these?" The answer is they can not. It is, therefore, imperative that a school executive understands the importance of building an executive team that has complementary skills. The more diversity that exists on the team the more likely the team will be to demonstrate high performance in all critical function areas. The main responsibility of the school executive is to create aligned systems of leadership throughout the school and its community.

In addition, these standards will serve other audiences and purposes. These standards will:

- ☞ Inform higher education programs in developing the content and requirements of school executive degree programs;
- ☞ Focus the goals and objectives of districts as they support, monitor and evaluate their school executives;
- ☞ Guide professional development for school executives;
- ☞ Serve as a tool in developing coaching and mentoring programs for school executives.

Organization of the Standards

Each standard is formatted as follows:

- ☞ **Standard:** The standard is the broad category of the executive's knowledge and skills;
- ☞ **Summary:** The summary more fully describes the content and rationale of each Standard;
- ☞ **Practices:** The practices are statements of what one would see an effective executive doing in each Standard;
- ☞ **Artifacts:** The artifacts are evidence of the quality of the executive's work or places where evidence can be found in each Standard. Collectively they could be the components of a performance portfolio. The lists of artifacts are not meant to be exhaustive.
- ☞ **Competencies:** Although not articulated there are many obvious competencies inherent in the practices of each critical leadership function. This document concludes with a list of those competencies which may not be obvious but that support practice in multiple leadership functions.

The Seven Standards of Executive Leadership and Their Connection

The seven critical standards used as the framework for the North Carolina School Executive Standards are borrowed from a Wallace Foundation study, *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School Principalship* (2003). Unlike many current efforts that look at all of the things principals "might" or "should" do, this study examined what principals actually do. As such, it is grounded in practice, exploits story and narrative, and supports the distribution of leadership rather than the "hero leader."

North Carolina's Standards for School Executives are interrelated and connect in executives' practice. They are not intended to isolate competencies or practices. Executives' abilities in each standard will impact their ability to perform effectively in other standard areas. For example, the ability of an executive to evaluate and develop staff will directly impact the school's ability to reach its goals and will also impact the norms of the culture of the school. School executives are responsible for ensuring that leadership happens in all seven critical areas, but they don't have to provide it.

The seven standards and their practices are:

Standard 1: Strategic Leadership

Summary: School executives will create conditions that result in strategically re-imagining the school's vision, mission, and goals in the 21st century. Understanding that schools ideally prepare students for an unseen but not altogether unpredictable future, the leader creates a climate of inquiry that challenges the school community to continually re-purpose itself by building on its core values and beliefs about its preferred future and then developing a pathway to reach it.

The school executive practices effective strategic leadership when he or she

- ✎ Is able to share a vision of the changing world in the 21st century that schools are preparing children to enter;
- ✎ Systematically challenges the status quo by leading change with potentially beneficial outcomes;
- ✎ Systematically considers new ways of accomplishing tasks and is comfortable with major changes in how processes are implemented;
- ✎ Utilizes data from the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey in developing the framework for continual improvement in the School Improvement Plan;
- ✎ Is a driving force behind major initiatives that help students acquire 21st century skills;
- ✎ Creates with all stakeholders a vision for the school that captures peoples' attention and imagination;
- ✎ Creates processes that provide for the periodic review and revision of the school's vision, mission, and strategic goals by all school stakeholders;
- ✎ Creates processes to ensure the school's identity (vision, mission, values, beliefs and goals) actually drive decisions and inform the culture of the school;
- ✎ Adheres to statutory requirements regarding the School Improvement Plan;
- ✎ Facilitates the collaborative development of annual school improvement plans to realize strategic goals and objectives;
- ✎ Facilitates the successful execution of the school improvement plan aligned to the mission and goals set by the State Board of Education;
- ✎ Facilitates the implementation of state education policy inside the school's classrooms;
- ✎ Facilitates the setting of high, concrete goals and the expectations that all students meet them;
- ✎ Communicates strong professional beliefs about schools, teaching, and learning that reflect latest research and best practice in preparing students for success in college or in work;
- ✎ Creates processes to distribute leadership throughout the school.
- ✎ Creates with all stakeholders a vision for the school that captures peoples' attention and imagination
- ✎ Creates processes to distribute leadership throughout the school.

Artifacts:

- ✎ Degree to which school improvement plan strategies are implemented, assessed and modified
- ✎ Evidence of an effectively functioning, elected School Improvement Team
- ✎ NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey
- ✎ School improvement plan, its alignment with district and state strategic priorities, and a plan for growth on items of concern as evidenced in the NC TWC Survey
- ✎ The degree to which staff can articulate the school's direction and focus
- ✎ Student testing data

Standard 2: Instructional Leadership

Summary: School executives will set high standards for the professional practice of 21st century instruction and assessment that result in a no nonsense accountable environment. The school executive must be knowledgeable of best instructional and school practices and must use this knowledge to cause the creation of collaborative structures within the school for the design of highly engaging schoolwork for students, the on-going peer review of this work and the sharing of this work throughout the professional community.

The school executive practices effective instructional leadership when he or she

- ⌘ Focuses his or her own and others' attention persistently and publicly on learning and teaching by initiating and guiding conversations about instruction and student learning that are oriented towards high expectations and concrete goals
- ⌘ Creates an environment of practiced distributive leadership and teacher empowerment
- ⌘ Demonstrates knowledge of 21st century curriculum, instruction, and assessment by leading or participating in meetings with teachers and parents where these topics are discussed, and/or holding frequent formal or informal conversations with students, staff and parents around these topics;
- ⌘ Ensures that there is an appropriate and logical alignment between the curriculum of the school and the state's accountability program;
- ⌘ Creates processes and schedules that facilitate the collaborative (team) design, sharing, evaluation, and archiving of rigorous, relevant, and engaging instructional lessons that ensure students acquire essential knowledge;
- ⌘ Challenges staff to reflect deeply on and define what knowledge, skills and concepts are essential to the complete educational development of students;
- ⌘ Creates processes for collecting and using student test data and other formative data from other sources for the improvement of instruction;
- ⌘ Creates processes for identifying, benchmarking and providing students access to a variety of 21st century instructional tools (e.g., technology) and best practices for meeting diverse student needs;
- ⌘ Creates processes that ensure the strategic allocation and use of resources to meet instructional goals and support teacher needs;
- ⌘ Creates processes to provide formal feedback to teachers concerning the effectiveness of their classroom instruction;
- ⌘ Creates processes that protect teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their instructional time;
- ⌘ Systematically and frequently observes in classrooms and engages in conversation with students about their learning;

Artifacts:

- ⌘ School improvement plan
- ⌘ NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey
- ⌘ Student achievement data
- ⌘ Dropout data
- ⌘ Teacher retention data
- ⌘ Documented use of formative assessment instruments to impact instruction
- ⌘ Development and communication of goal-oriented personalized education plans for identified students (ESOL, exceptional children, Level I and Level II children)
- ⌘ Evidence of the team development and evaluation of classroom lessons

Standard 3: Cultural Leadership

Summary: School executives will understand and act on the understanding of the important role a school's culture contributes to the exemplary performance of the school. School executives must support and value the traditions, artifacts, symbols and positive values and norms of the school and community that result in a sense of identity and pride upon which to build a positive future. A school executive must be able to "reculture" the school if needed to align with school's goals of improving student and adult learning and to infuse the work of the adults and students with passion, meaning and purpose. Cultural leadership implies understanding the school as the people in it each day, how they came to their current state, and how to connect with their traditions in order to move them forward to support the school's efforts to achieve individual and collective goals.

The school executive practices effective cultural leadership when he or she

- 36 Creates a collaborative work environment predicated on site-based management that supports the "team" as the basic unit of learning and decision-making within the school and promotes cohesion and cooperation among staff;
- 36 Communicates strong ideals and beliefs about schooling, teaching, and professional learning communities with teachers, staff, parents, and students and then operates from those beliefs Influences the evolution of the culture to support the continuous improvement of the school as outlined in the school improvement plan
- 36 Systematically develops and uses shared values, beliefs and a shared vision to establish a school identity that emphasizes a sense of community and cooperation to guide the disciplined thought and action of all staff and students
- 36 Systematically and fairly acknowledges failures and celebrates accomplishments of the school and staff
- 36 Visibly supports the positive, culturally-responsive traditions of the school community
- 36 Promotes a sense of well-being among staff, students and parents
- 36 Builds a sense of efficacy and empowerment among staff that result in a "can do" attitude when faced with challenges
- 36 Empowers staff to recommend creative 21st century concepts for school improvement

Artifacts:

- 36 Work of Professional Learning Communities within and tangential to the school
- 36 Documented use of the SIT in decision-making throughout the year
- 36 NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey
- 36 School improvement plan
- 36 Teacher retention data
- 36 Student achievement data
- 36 Awards structure developed by school

Standard 4: Human Resource Leadership

Summary: School executives will ensure that the school is a professional learning community. School executives will ensure that processes and systems are in place that results in the recruitment, induction, support, evaluation, development and retention of a high performing staff. The school executive must engage and empower accomplished teachers in a distributive leadership manner, including support of teachers in day-to-day decisions such as discipline, communication with parents, and protecting teachers from duties that interfere with teaching, and must practice fair and consistent evaluation of teachers. The school executive must engage teachers and other professional staff in conversations to plan their career paths and support district succession planning.

The school executive practices effective human resource leadership when he or she

- 36 Provides structures for the development of effective professional learning communities aligned with the school improvement plan, focused on results, and characterized by collective responsibility for instructional planning and for 21st century student learning;
- 36 Models the importance of continued adult learning by engaging in activities to develop personal knowledge and skill along with expanded self – awareness;
- 36 Communicates a positive attitude about the ability of staff to accomplish substantial outcomes to improve their efficacy;
- 36 Creates processes for teachers to assume leadership and decision making roles within the school that foster their career development
- 36 Creates and monitors processes for hiring, inducting and mentoring new teachers and other staff to the school;
- 36 Uses the results of the Teacher Working Conditions Survey to create and maintain a positive work environment for teachers and other staff;
- 36 Evaluates teachers and other staff in a fair and equitable manner and utilizes the results of evaluations to improve performance;
- 36 Provides for results-oriented professional development that is aligned with identified 21st century curricular, instructional, and assessment needs, is connected to school improvement goals and is differentiated based on staff needs;
- 36 Continuously searches for the best placement and utilization of staff to fully benefit from their strengths;
- 36 Is systematically and personally involved in the school's professional activities.

Artifacts:

- 36 School improvement plan
- 36 NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey – with special emphasis on the leadership and empowerment domains
- 36 Copy of master school schedule documenting the time provided for individual and collaborative planning for every teacher
- 36 Number of National Board Certified teachers
- 36 Teacher retention data
- 36 Number of teachers pursuing school executive credentials, National Board Certification, or advanced licensure in their teaching areas
- 36 Records of school visits for the purpose of adult learning
- 36 Record of professional development provided staff and an assessment of the impact of professional development on student learning
- 36 Mentor records, beginning teacher feedback, and documentation of correlation of assignment of mentor to mentee
- 36 Copies of professional growth plans
- 36 Student achievement data

Standard 5: Managerial Leadership

Summary: School executives will ensure that the school has processes and systems in place for budgeting, staffing, problem solving, communicating expectations and scheduling that result in organizing the work routines in the building. The school executive must be responsible for the monitoring of the school budget and the inclusion of all teachers in the budget decisions so as to meet the 21st century needs of every classroom. Effectively and efficiently managing the complexity of every day life is critical for staff to be able to focus its energy on improvement.

The school executive practices effective managerial leadership when he or she

- ✳ Creates processes to provide for a balanced operational budget for school programs and activities;
- ✳ Creates processes to recruit and retain a high-quality workforce in the school that meets the diverse needs of students;
- ✳ Creates processes to identify and solve, resolve, dissolve or absolve school-based problems/conflicts in a fair, democratic way;
- ✳ Designs a system of communication that provides for the timely, responsible sharing of information to, from, and with school and district staff;
- ✳ Designs scheduling processes and protocols that maximize staff input and addresses diverse student learning needs;
- ✳ Develops a master schedule for the school to maximize student learning by providing for individual and on-going collaborative planning for every teacher;
- ✳ Collaboratively develops and enforces clear expectations, structures, rules and procedures for students and staff.

Artifacts:

- ✳ NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey
- ✳ School Improvement Plan
- ✳ External reviews, such as budget
- ✳ Copies of master schedules/procedures
- ✳ Communication of safety procedures and behavioral expectations throughout the school community

Standard 6: External Development Leadership

Summary: A school executive will design structures and processes that result in community engagement, support, and ownership. Acknowledging that schools no longer reflect but in fact build community, the leader proactively creates with staff opportunities for parents, community and business representatives to participate as “stockholders” in the school such that continued investments of resources and good will are not left to chance.

The school executive practices effective external development leadership when he or she

- 36 Implements processes that empower parents and other stakeholders to make significant decisions;
- 36 Creates systems that engage all community stakeholders in a shared responsibility for student and school success;
- 36 Designs protocols and processes that ensures compliance with state and district mandates;
- 36 Creates opportunities to advocate for the school in the community and with parents;
- 36 Communicates the school’s accomplishments to the district office and public media in accordance with LEA policies;
- 36 Garner fiscal, intellectual and human resources from the community that support the 21st century learning agenda of the school;
- 36 Builds relationships with individuals and groups to support specific aspects of the learning improvement agenda and also as a source of general good will.

Artifacts:

- 36 PTSA participation
- 36 PTSA meeting agendas, bulletins, etc.
- 36 Parent attendance at school improvement team meetings
- 36 Survey results from parents
- 36 Evidence of visible support from community
- 36 Booster club participation
- 36 Number of school volunteers
- 36 Plan for shaping the school’s image throughout the community
- 36 PTSA membership
- 36 Evidence of business partnerships and projects involving business partners

Standard 7: Micropolitical Leadership

Summary: The school executive will build systems and relationships that utilize the staff's diversity, encourage constructive ideological conflict in order to leverage staff expertise, power and influence to realize the school's vision for success. The executive will also creatively employ an awareness of staff's professional needs, issues, and interests to build social cohesion and to facilitate distributed governance and shared decision-making.

The school executive practices effective micropolitical leadership when he or she:

- 36 Uses the School Improvement Team to make decisions and provides opportunities for staff to be involved in developing school policies;
- 36 Creates an environment and mechanisms to ensure all internal stakeholder voices are heard and respected;
- 36 Creates processes and protocols to buffer and mediate staff interests;
- 36 Is easily accessible to teachers and staff;
- 36 Designs transparent systems to equitably manage human and financial resources;
- 36 Demonstrates sensitivity to personal needs of staff;
- 36 Demonstrates awareness of informal groups and relationships among school staff and utilizes these as a positive resource;
- 36 Demonstrates awareness of hidden and potentially discordant issues in the school;
- 36 Encourages people to express opinions contrary to those of authority;
- 36 Demonstrates ability to predict what could go wrong from day to day;
- 36 Uses performance as the primary criterion for reward and advancement;
- 36 Maintains high visibility throughout the school;
- 36 Maintains open, vertical and horizontal communications throughout the school community.

Artifacts:

- 36 NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey
- 36 Teacher retention data
- 36 Dissemination of clear norms and ground rules
- 36 Evidence of ability to confront ideological conflict and then reach consensus
- 36 Evidence of shared decision-making
- 36 Evidence of use of a decision matrix
- 36 Evidence of a school that operates through teams
- 36 Evidence of distributed leadership

Competencies

A competency is a combination of knowledge (factual and experiential) and skills that one needs to effectively implement the practices. Factual knowledge is simply “knowing” content; experiential knowledge is the knowledge one gains from understanding – it is knowing the when and why. Skills bring structure to experiential knowledge. It is when one can put their accumulated knowledge into a series of steps that – if followed – will lead to practice.

There are many competencies that are obviously inherent in the successful performance of all of the practices listed under each of the seven critical functions of leadership. The principal may or may not personally possess all of these competencies but must ensure that a team is in place that not only possesses them but can effectively and efficiently execute them. Although the principal may not personally possess them all, he or she is still responsible for their effective use in the various leadership practices.

The competencies listed below are not so obvious in the practices, can be applied to multiple practices and are absolutely essential for all school executives to possess to ensure their success. For example, the competency – conflict management is important in Micro Political Leadership, Strategic Planning, Cultural Leadership, and perhaps one could argue that this competency is necessary in all seven Standards. These competencies are listed here to emphasize their importance and to make sure they are incorporated into the development of school executives.

- ✳ **Communication** – Effectively listens to others; clearly and effectively presents and understands information orally and in writing; acquires, organizes, analyzes, interprets, maintains information needed to achieve school or team 21st century objectives.
- ✳ **Change Management** – Effectively engages staff and community in the change process in a manner that ensures their support of the change and its successful implementation.
- ✳ **Conflict Management** – Anticipates or seeks to resolve confrontations, disagreements, or complaints in a constructive manner.
- ✳ **Creative Thinking** – Engages in and fosters an environment for others to engage in innovative thinking.
- ✳ **Customer Focus** – Understands the students as customers of the work of schooling and the servant nature of leadership and acts accordingly.
- ✳ **Delegation** – Effectively assigns work tasks to others in ways that provide learning experiences for them and in ways that ensure the efficient operation of the school.
- ✳ **Dialogue/Inquiry** – Is skilled in creating a risk free environment for engaging people in conversations that explore issues, challenges or bad relationships that are hindering school performance.
- ✳ **Emotional Intelligence** – Is able to manage oneself through self awareness and self management and is able to manage relationships through empathy, social awareness and relationship management. This competency is critical to building strong, transparent, trusting relationships throughout the school community.
- ✳ **Environmental Awareness** – Becomes aware and remains informed of external and internal trends, interests and issues with potential impacts on school policies, practices, procedures and positions.
- ✳ **Global Perspective** – Understands the competitive nature of the new global economy and is clear about the knowledge and skills students will need to be successful in this economy. J

- ⌘ **Judgment** – Effectively reaching logical conclusions and making high quality decisions based on available information. Giving priority and caution to significant issues. Analyzing and interpreting complex information.
- ⌘ **Organizational Ability** – Effectively plans and schedules one’s own and the work of others so that resources are used appropriately, such as scheduling the flow of activities and establishing procedures to monitor projects.
- ⌘ **Personal Ethics and Values** – Consistently exhibits high standards in the areas of honesty, integrity, fairness, stewardship, trust, respect, and confidentiality.
- ⌘ **Personal Responsibility for Performance** – Proactively and continuously improves performance by focusing on needed areas of improvement and enhancement of strengths; actively seeks and effectively applies feedback from others; takes full responsibility for one’s own achievements.
- ⌘ **Responsiveness**--Does not leave issues, inquiries or requirements for information go unattended. Creates a clearly delineated structure for responding to requests/situations in an expedient manner.
- ⌘ **Results Orientation** – Effectively assumes responsibility. Recognizes when a decision is required. Takes prompt action as issues emerge. Resolves short-term issues while balancing them against long-term goals.
- ⌘ **Sensitivity** – Effectively perceives the needs and concerns of others; deals tactfully with others in emotionally stressful situations or in conflict. Knowing what information to communicate and to whom. Relating to people of varying ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.
- ⌘ **Systems Thinking** – Understands the interrelationships and impacts of school and district influences, systems and external stakeholders, and applies that understanding to advancing the achievement of the school or team.
- ⌘ **Technology** – Effectively utilizes the latest technologies to continuously improve the management of the school and enhance student instruction.
- ⌘ **Time Management** – Effectively uses available time to complete work tasks and activities that lead to the achievement of desired work or school results. Runs effective meetings.
- ⌘ **Visionary** – Encourages Imagineering by creating an environment and structure to capture stakeholder dreams of what the school could become for all the students.

Appendix C: Interview Questions of Principals

While the interviews are semi-structured in nature, these questions provided the framework for each of the sessions.

1. Tell me about your vision.
2. What does vision mean to you?
3. How do you define vision?
4. How did you develop your definition of vision?
5. What is your opinion about how a vision should be created?
6. Who is involved in the development of vision?
7. In what ways does your vision differ from the school's or district's mission?
8. How do you determine when and if the vision needs to change?
9. If you work to institutionalize your vision, how do you do this?
10. How, if at all, does vision affect your day-to-day decision-making?
11. Can you give examples of how you use symbolism and school culture to convey the vision?

Appendix D: Letter Requesting Interview

David Ansbacher
Doctoral Student
North Carolina State University
May 2007

(Subject of Interview)

Dear (Subject),

I am writing you to request an interview in connection with a research study of principals and their approaches to vision and leadership. I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at North Carolina State University and a principal in the Wake County Public Schools System.

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways principals understand and use vision as it relates to day-to-day administration and to the overall mission of the school and district. After studying a group of principals and district administrators in previous smaller studies, I am interested in looking specifically at highly successful principals. I have selected a sample of five former Principals of the Year in this district for this study. These interviews may be used for this dissertation and possible future publication. I assure you that your responses and identity will be held in strictest confidence and I will make every effort to disguise the identities of my subjects and the district being studied.

I would appreciate it if you would agree to be interviewed at some time this summer. I would ask for an 60-90 minutes of your time and the possibility of a follow-up interview at sometime in the future. Please e-mail me at dansbacher@***** or call (*****) to arrange a time when we could meet.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation,

Sincerely,

David Ansbacher

Appendix E: District Principal of the Year Criteria

Qualifications

The candidate must be a principal of a North Carolina public school and have at least four years experience as an administrator (years may be a combination of assistant principal, principal and central office experience). In a traditional school setting, a principal is a person designated by a local board of education as the head of a school with 100 or more pupils in average daily membership (ADM) and/or with seven or more full-time, state-allotted teachers. The candidate must hold a valid principal's license.

The candidate can also be a person designated as the school administrator or head master of a non-traditional, charter school, as assigned by the charter school board of directors and governed under the NC State Board of Education.

The candidate must be employed as a school administrator throughout the local and regional selection process. The candidate must also be a practicing school administrator in order to compete for the Wachovia Principal of the Year state title and remain a practicing principal for the entire term the candidate, if chosen the state winner, would serve as an advisory member to the State Board of Education.

Candidates should merit the respect and admiration of students, teachers, co-workers, and parents. They should be active, not only in their schools, but also in their communities where they distinguish themselves as leaders.

Candidates should demonstrate the ability to improve the achievement of students from various backgrounds and with differing capabilities.

Administrative and teaching experience, at both primary and secondary levels, is deemed an asset to the candidate.

A runner-up will be named in case the winner is unable to serve.

Previous state Wachovia Principals of the Year are not eligible to be nominated as candidates.

Expectations and Roles

The Wachovia Principal of the Year will serve in an advisory capacity to the State Board of Education beginning with the July State Board meeting. The state principal is expected to attend and actively participate in state board meetings.

The state Principal of the Year will be expected to chair the state selection committee for the Wachovia Principal of the Year.

The Wachovia Principal of the Year will also receive the following appointments and be expected to serve as an active participant:

State Superintendent's Principals Advisory Committee Board of Directors of the NC Public School Forum - The principal will serve a one-year term following the year he or she is named state principal of the year (September -August).

Numerous speaking engagements and committee service across North Carolina as invited and requested throughout the year.

Selection Process

Each school system may select one principal as its local Wachovia Principal of the Year. The selection procedure at the local level is the responsibility of the local superintendent or designee. The selection must be objective and fair and must assure that all public school principals have access and equal opportunity to be nominated and to compete.

The person chosen as the local Wachovia Principal of the Year represents his or her school system in the regional selection process. The regional selection procedure includes an evaluation of the candidate through a portfolio review and an interview. Eight regional finalists will be named to participate in the state selection process.

The state selection process continues with each regional finalist being interviewed and his/her portfolio reviewed by a state selection committee. Eight on-site school visits of the regional finalists' schools will be conducted by the state selection committee. The Wachovia Principal of the Year will be announced at the spring state luncheon in Raleigh.

Candidates at all levels deserve special recognition for achievement. Local school systems are encouraged to consider various means of recognition, such as: announcements, a luncheon or banquet, media coverage, awards, or other activities.

Local and regional candidates represent their school systems throughout the process. Each candidate should have the support of the LEA during all aspects of the competition, including the portfolio preparation, the interview process, the on-site visit for state selection, adherence to rules and publicity, as well as, moral support.

Regional winners will be asked to chair regional selection committees for the Wachovia Principal of the Year selection process.