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Ph.D. Educational Studies with a Specialization  
In Educational Leadership

Understanding How Principals Shape Collaborative School Cultures

A Dissertation Presented

By

Kerri L. Sankey

Submitted to the Graduate School of Lesley University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

March 2017

# Understanding How Principals Shape Collaborative School Cultures

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Graduate School of Education

Lesley University

Ph.D. Educational Studies

Educational Leadership Specialization

## Approvals

*In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.*

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## **DEDICATION**

To my loving husband, Derek. You have taught me that leadership takes on many forms, you are a true leader at heart. Thank you for your unending encouragement and support.

To my daughters, Lilly and Emily. A little more than 17 years ago, I was faced with an unexpected life changing challenge. At that time, I was unsure of what to do, or what the future would hold. I quietly made a promise to myself to work hard, make the best of all I had, and to be the best role model I could be for you. The two of you are truly a gift and your presence has given me the courage to persevere and ultimately, reach this goal. I hope that I too, inspire you.

To my parents, thank you for believing in me, even when I had a hard time believing in myself.

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## ABSTRACT

The issue of school improvement is complex, and although reform initiatives have emanated from positive intentions for schools, many have been detrimental to school culture. Collaborative school culture has been cited as an essential element of school improvement; thus, a need exists to better understand how principals perceive and shape collaborative school cultures. This study examined leadership approaches and workplace conditions critical to the development of collaborative school cultures. The importance of the principal's role in shaping collaborative culture is often noted in the literature. Using a sequential mixed methods explanatory research approach, the study consisted of two phases that employed quantitative and qualitative measures. Massachusetts' principals (1,773) were contacted by email to participate in an on-line survey, with 261 principals completing the survey, resulting in a response rate of 15%. Ten telephone interviews were conducted after survey results were analyzed. The data analysis generated six key findings. Finding #1 showed eight school level factors that contributed to collaborative culture. School level factors included involving teachers in decision-making and providing opportunities to share ideas through dialogue and planning. Finding #2 articulated principals' desire to effect change; it emerged because of principals' perceptions of collaborative culture in their schools. Finding #3 identified six leadership indicators that have a strong influence on collaborative culture. Indicators ranged from valuing teachers' ideas to protecting planning and instructional time. Finding #4 validated the importance of school specific personal leadership qualities and practices. The leadership qualities principals reported most often were empathy and vulnerability, and leadership practices include setting expectations, building relationships, and empowering teachers. Finding #5 established teams, time, and professional development were three organizational factors that contributed to collaborative culture, while

Finding #6 identified teacher resistance as an inhibitor to collaborative culture. Overall, these findings demonstrate principals' perceptions led to specific practices they believe foster collaborative culture. Recommendations are delineated for principals and higher education institutions. Future research recommendations suggest further study of principals' self-awareness, leadership practices, and focus on specific subgroups in relation to collaborative culture.

*Keywords:* principals' perceptions, personal qualities, school leadership practices, teachers' workplace conditions, collaborative school culture, school improvement.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I am an elementary school principal at a suburban elementary school of approximately 706 K-2 students. I have been a teacher, a fine arts coordinator, and an assistant principal. During my 25 years as an educator, I have worked with many principals and experienced many changes. These experiences have shaped my beliefs about principal leadership, teachers' workplace conditions, and school culture. I have learned that principal leaders who are self-aware, thoughtful in their leadership practice, and supportive in establishing collegial workplace conditions, foster collaborative culture. In addition, these principals are most successful in promoting change. During my professional career, I have come to know that collaborative cultures support change and lead to more effective schools. A vast body of educational literature has enriched my beliefs and underscores the important role of principal leaders establishing collaborative culture (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

The effects of historical, large-scale change (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975) and federal reform initiatives have informed this study by documenting the importance of context and collaboration. While it is clear that large-scale change and federal mandates affect school districts, it is noteworthy that these changes eventually affect teachers and students in classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fullan, 2010; Tucker, 2012). Understanding the importance of leadership, teachers' workplace conditions and collaborative culture, therefore, is paramount. Organizational behavior theory (Johns, 2009) provides a definition of context that helps to ground our understanding of collaborative culture. Johns (2009) defines context as, "situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables" (p. 386). This rich definition of context makes it possible to understand how leadership, workplace conditions, and culture work

together. More importantly, leaders must be perceptive to the interactions and conditions in schools to establish conditions that foster a collaborative culture. In the next section, I describe an example of a structure that was implemented in my school to support collaborative culture.

Response to Intervention, known as RTI, is a federal mandate. This mandate requires that schools provide tiered intervention to students over a period of time and document their progress. As I school principal, I have managed this mandate, by ensuring that a collaborative structure exists for the purpose of solving student problems. Our school's Student Support Team or SST is an example of a collaborative team structure that is designed to meet the requirements of RTI. The Student Support Team identifies students who struggle, collects data, and meets with teachers, administrators, and other school support staff to design a plan of action to assist these students.

The SST is one example of what literature (Dufour & Eaker, 2008) refers to as a professional learning community (PLC). PLCs are defined as educators committed to working collaboratively in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve (Dufour & Eaker, 2008). PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators. The SST in my school was implemented with clear protocols for participation and collaboration. In addition, it draws upon the shared expertise of participants. Our school's SST has collaborated to create intervention plans for approximately 15 students this year. We meet on a regular basis to ensure that our team vision for how the SST should function remains consistent. In addition, members have participated in professional development to support the SST process. My hope is that the SST process will result in long-term instructional changes. Our SST has demonstrated to staff that certain organizational structures engender collaboration

and produce positive results for students.

We know that establishing a collaborative culture does not come without challenge. One SST member stated, “Think about how long it takes for a paradigm shift to take place.” Her comment was relevant since we know that teacher resistance can be an inhibiting factor in establishing a collaborative culture. Despite this obstacle, improving school culture benefits students and teachers (Seymour Sarason, 1996). More specifically, establishing a clear vision and effective collaboration are two important elements in establishing school cultures that function as professional learning communities (Dufour & Eaker, 2002).

There is a growing body of research that amplifies the importance of the principal’s role in shaping school culture (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005). Although the literature suggests that culture plays an important role in overall school improvement, there are challenges related to how culture is defined within different school contexts.

Why is it that countries such as Finland, Singapore, South Korea, China, and Japan have effectively created educational systems that result in high student achievement on a large scale (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fullan, 2010; Tucker, 2012)? These countries, like the United States, are affected by economic and political agendas. Yet, these countries have been able to overcome the barriers that often prevent educational innovations in moving to scale because they have created a unified or collaborative culture that respects education, recognizes and honors cultural differences, and utilizes a systems approach.

Educational research has determined the importance of collaborative culture. Whether trying to manage federal mandates or effect sustainable large scale change within a school district, collaborative culture is essential for educational leaders to be successful. Therefore, I

chose to investigate the perceptions that principals have, the leadership approaches they take, and the workplace conditions that they report in their respective schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue of school improvement is complex (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005; Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitch, 2010). Historical research focused on large-scale reform provides a foundation for understanding the need for collaborative cultures in schools. Following Tyler's work (Bullough, 2007), researchers (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975) substantiated the effectiveness of school reform by focusing on improving school conditions. Their findings revealed the dynamic of context and the importance of negotiation, flexibility, and adjustment on the part of all educators involved in the change process (Honig, 2006, p. 107) and led to the phrase, "mutual adaptation" (Honig, 2006, p.106). This phrase was coined to describe the need for educators to assess, reflect, and collaborate in making decisions around implementing change that is specific to their school context.

The RAND Study's (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975) major area of focus was to understand how innovations surrounding educational change are carried out within the setting of a school. The RAND Study was based on many of the same assumptions about schools that still exist today, namely, that schools in the United States would benefit from new methods that could reach all learners, that these new methods could be federally funded at the school level, and that no changes were necessary at the district level for these changes to be effective. The RAND Study's findings identified three factors of innovative projects in schools: centrality, complexity, and consonance. These factors called attention to the need for future research to explore closely the context in which schools exist and the specific learning needs of teachers and students.

The RAND Change Agent Study's (1975) discovery of centrality, complexity, and

consonance challenged the study's main assumptions. These factors, however, are significant in that their definitions imply the need for many of the same features and conditions required for a collaborative culture. Centrality, complexity and consonance are further described in this section.

Centrality was defined as the connection of educational goals to the vision of the district. This connection determined the degree to which change would be sustainable. Complexity was defined as the degree to which innovations required extensive teacher training versus meeting teachers' daily instructional needs within their classrooms. Consonance was defined as the degree to which the values of the goals of the innovations resonated with teachers' values (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975).

Implementation strategies such as adaptive planning, staff training within the local setting, development of local materials, and establishment of critical mass participation resulted in significant teacher change. Despite the large-scale nature of the educational programs The RAND Change Agent Study sought to assess, the findings of the study indicated the individual importance that teachers' will and motivation played in embracing these reforms (McLaughlin, 1998). The RAND Change Agent Study's findings around centrality, complexity, and consonance challenged its initial assumptions by providing key evidence in support of the need to establish collaborative cultures in schools.

While the RAND Study's findings suggested the need for collaborative cultures in schools, school leaders are ultimately responsible for setting the conditions in which a collaborative culture can occur.

*The Samuels' Report* (2010) that summarized the expansive Wallace Study (2003) examined the traits of effective school principals. Samuels noted the Wallace Study revealed

that successful principals set conditions and take actions that enabled teachers to be better instructors, and that high student achievement is linked to collective leadership. The key conditions and actions identified by The Wallace Study included the establishment of an instructional climate through the principal setting a tone or culture that would support continuous professional learning.

A second set of actions, referred to as instructional actions, involved principals taking explicit steps in engaging with individual teachers about their professional growth. Samuels also noted that the Wallace Study revealed that elementary principals “demonstrate more instructional leadership behaviors than their peers at secondary levels” (p. 3). The Wallace Study also cited that secondary schools, particularly high school principals, delegated instructional leadership tasks to department chairs.

Samuels also suggested that there are specific organizational behaviors inherent in elementary and high school settings. This study seeks to reveal how these challenges are met by investigating principals’ perceptions of school context factors and the conditions they set that foster school-based collaborative professional learning. The establishment of collaborative school cultures represents a critical departure in how future reforms may be implemented. Rather than top-down reforms that focus on external, federally funded supports, educational leaders can shape change by more closely examining the specific needs of teachers and students, and the context in which schools exist.

Because collaborative cultures emerge in various ways that are specific to the context of schools, this study sought to illuminate how school principals perceive the culture of their schools and how they shape their practices and workplace conditions to support a collaborative culture. Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature the influence of principal leadership,



teacher workplace conditions, and current understandings of school culture with specific regard to collaborative school culture.

### **Purpose of This Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate school principals' perceptions of how school context (Johns, 2006) affects the emergence of a collaborative school culture. This study focused on understanding how principals perceive their schools' culture and how these perceptions shape their leadership approaches as well as the establishment of psychosocial and organizational workplace conditions that foster a collaborative culture. The following four questions guided my study:

1. How do principals perceive collaborative culture in their schools?
2. To what degree do principals believe their leadership practices influence collaborative culture?
3. What organizational and psychosocial workplace conditions do principals associate with a collaborative school culture?
4. What barriers do principals identify in establishing collaborative cultures in their schools?

### **Significance of This Study**

There is a great deal of research to date that supports the positive role of collaborative culture in schools, yet little is known about how principals perceive their school's culture and how these perceptions shape their leadership approaches and how they establishment of psychosocial and organizational workplace conditions. Furthermore, "school culture" is defined in many ways and the variety of school contexts makes the identification of one specific set of practices that support a collaborative culture difficult. As a result, this study sought to delineate

key understandings about how school principals perceive and understand the cultural context of their schools and how they implement leadership approaches and workplace conditions that support a collaborative culture.

### **Method**

A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was used for this study. The mixed methods design incorporates both quantitative and qualitative phenomenological strategies. The phenomenological approach is centered on generating meaning based on the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2014). The phenomenological strategies used in the study align with a constructivist worldview. The intent of the constructivist worldview is that the researcher makes sense of the meaning that others have about the world (Creswell, 2014).

The rationale for choosing the mixed methods design emerged from the literature review conducted as part of this study. The literature review examined three major areas: leadership approaches, workplace conditions, and school culture. The review provided support for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods data collection approaches. I determined, following a review of the literature, that a mixed methods explanatory sequential design would provide the best variety of data and a depth of understanding, based on its two-phase design.

Creswell's (2014) explanation of the mixed methods approach provides a rationale for choosing a mixed methods design. He asserts that the use of the two-phase mixed methods approach allows the researcher to collect quantitative data during phase one. Phase one was initiated using a rigorous, random quantitative sampling method. Random sampling is described as giving "each individual in the population an equal probability of being selected" (Creswell, p. 158). Purposeful selection was then used for the second qualitative phase. During purposeful selection, participants were chosen to participate in telephone interviews. The interview protocol

was designed to gather more in-depth data that could explain the results of the survey. Creswell states that “the overall intent of this design is to have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results” (p. 224).

Phase One of this study consisted of the use of a quantitative, closed-response survey, which was a modified version of the School Culture Survey designed by Gruenert and Valentine (1998). The purpose of the survey was to gather demographic data to help categorize the perceptions that principals reported about leadership and collaborative school culture. The demographic information collected described respondents’ gender, age range, years as a teacher, years as a principal, type of school, and number of students their schools serve. The survey also gathered principals’ initial perceptions of collaborative culture and leadership influences principals attributed with shaping a collaborative culture. The results of Phase One informed the researcher’s choice of interview participants for Phase Two. Phase Two sought to gather qualitative data that would help to explain the results of the survey in greater depth.

Phase Two was qualitative in nature and consisted of an interview protocol which was developed based on the results of the survey. The interview protocol was designed to generate a deeper understanding of the perceptions measured in the survey and the lived experiences of the study participants. This portion of the study embodied the phenomenological approach, which Creswell describes as focusing on “understanding the lived experiences of individuals around a phenomenon” and on the selection of individuals “who have experienced the phenomenon and they are asked to provide data often through interviews” (Creswell, 2013, p. 122). The phenomenological approach relies on the meaning derived from the perceptions and experiences of the principals who participated. In summary, this mixed methods explanatory sequential

study used a survey instrument and interview data across a range of levels, from elementary to high school.

### **Limitations/Delimitations**

The Modified School Culture Survey was administered to 1,773 principals in public K-12 schools across Massachusetts. There were 261 responses. Massachusetts principals operate under a single governmental structure, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The DESE imposes certain guidelines and mandates on schools that may differ from other states therefore, administering the survey in Massachusetts only was a potential limitation. My interest in comparing similarities and differences in how the organizational, human, and social structures function in grades K-12 guided my selection of participants.

Ten telephone interviews were conducted with survey respondents who indicated a willingness to participate. Telephone interviews were conducted because they were the most convenient way to gather data. No face-to-face interviews or site visits were conducted. I purposefully selected interview candidates that represented some of the subgroups that did not respond as frequently on the survey.

The survey and telephone interviews were administered within a few months of one another beginning in August of 2015. Because we know that collaborative culture can shift and change at any time, the period during which data were collected could have been a potential limitation.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Context.** Johns (2006) defined context as the “situational opportunities and constraints that affect the meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables” (p. 386).

**Mutual Adaptation.** Berman and McLaughlin (1975) coined this term to describe the unique interaction that resulted from individuals interpreting and implementing reforms within their specific school contexts (as cited in Honig, 2006, p.106).

**School Culture.** Deal and Peterson (1990) defined school culture as:

the invisible taken-for-granted flow of beliefs and assumptions that gives meaning to what people say and do. It shapes how they interpret hundreds of daily transactions. This deeper structure of life in organizations is reflected and transmitted through symbolic language and expressive action. Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time (p.7).

**Organizational Workplace Conditions.** Johnson (2006) asserted organizational workplace conditions or features create a context within which teachers work by defining “teachers’ formal positions and relationships with others in the school” (p. 2).

**Psychosocial Workplace Conditions.** According to Johnson (2006), psychosocial workplace conditions or features connote effects, including how teachers experience their work, how motivated and committed they are towards their work, and what opportunities they have for learning and growth.

## Chapter Outline

The dissertation consists of five chapters that demonstrate the investigation of how K-12 public school principals perceive and understand the context of their schools and how their understandings affect collaborative school culture.

**Chapter One.** Chapter One provides an example of an organizational structure that supports collaboration and discusses the historical importance of collaborative culture. The statement of the problem and purpose of the study provide the reader with a research-based

rationale and clarifies the context for the problem investigated in this study. The research questions and overview of the study design are included to explain how the study unfolds.

**Chapter Two.** This chapter consists of a review of the literature. The introduction of the literature review will examine three bodies of literature. The first section includes literature that describes the influence of principal leadership. This research also reveals the effects that leadership and teacher workplace conditions have on teachers' overall motivation and commitment; therefore, research and literature representing principals' behaviors, approaches, and strategies within three promising leadership models is examined. The second section of this review presents research about teacher workplace conditions. The second section also identifies social and organizational workplace conditions and investigates themes related to the impact that these conditions have on teachers' psychosocial affect. The third section provides literature pertaining to current understandings of school culture, how it can be measured, and the barriers that exist. This review ends with a summary of the major findings of the literature presented and the foundation for the proposed study.

**Chapter Three.** Chapter Three presents the methodology used for this study. The overall design is a sequential mixed methods approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative strategies. This approach is grounded in the phenomenological worldview. The study was carried out in two phases using two instruments. Phase One used the Modified School Culture Survey and Phase Two used a self-designed telephone interview protocol. The chapter describes both the methods used to identify participants as well as the methods used to collect and analyze data during both Phase One and Phase Two. Finally, Chapter Three discusses issues of trustworthiness, presents the limitations and delimitations of the study, and concludes with a summary.

**Chapter Four.** Chapter Four presents an analysis and interpretation of the data collected based on the surveys and interviews conducted. The chapter consists of an introduction followed sections that are organized according to four Research Questions. The sections present data pertaining to each question and conclude with findings. A Chapter Summary concludes the chapter.

**Chapter Five.** Chapter Five provides a summary and conclusion for this research. This final chapter restates the purpose of the study, reviews the research questions, and describes the methodology. The sections are organized according to the six findings of this study. These sections include theoretical and practical implications as well as recommendations for principals, educational leaders, and higher education. Recommendations for further research are suggested and a final reflection ends the chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provided a theoretical basis for the study “Understanding How Principals Shape Collaborative Culture in Their Schools.” A review of research and related literature examined three major areas: (1) the influence of principal leadership, (2) teacher workplace conditions, and (3) current understandings of school culture. The review examined principals’ leadership practices in schools in order to discern how these practices influenced teacher workplace conditions and shaped collaborative school culture.

The influence of principal leadership is discussed in the first section. The section begins by establishing a context for the importance of understanding how principals shaped culture in their schools. Educational literature defined the problem and created a foundation of common understanding by citing the impact of past and current school reforms. Research on the role of effective principal leadership demonstrated that a relationship existed between leadership’s core practices and a collaborative school culture (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). This research also revealed the effects that leadership and teacher workplace conditions have on teachers’ overall motivation and commitment; therefore, research and literature representing principals’ behaviors, approaches, and strategies within three promising leadership models was examined.

The second section of this review identifies social and organizational workplace conditions and investigated themes related to the impact that these conditions have on teachers’ psychosocial affect, specifically the social and structural characteristics of teacher workplace conditions and how these characteristics related to school culture.

Finally, the third section presents literature on school culture, how it can be measured and what barriers exist. This review ends with a summary of the major findings of the literature



presented and how the literature provides a foundation for this study. This literature review is intended to provide an understanding of the benefits of principal leadership on teachers, workplace conditions, and school culture.

### **The Influence of Principal Leadership**

The role of principal leadership is multi-faceted and has become more challenging in response to a changing educational landscape. School principals are faced with buffering the forces of federal mandates and managing day-to-day operations within their schools, all while ensuring increases in student achievement (Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitch, 2010). Strong school leadership is essential for student success and is second only to good teaching (Anderson, Leithwood, Louis & Walhstrom, 2010; Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitch, 2010). There is widespread research supporting the benefits effective school leaders have on teaching conditions and collaborative school culture (Blase & Blase, 1999; Leithwood, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005).

### **The Essential Role of Principal Leadership**

Improving education for all students is a challenging task (Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitch, 2010). External federal mandates, such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB), promised to improve education by mandating annual testing, publicly reporting academic progress, and increasing teacher qualifications. Despite NCLB's good intentions, scholars (Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitch, 2010) questioned the impact of federal mandates on school leadership, teacher workplace conditions, and culture in schools.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) mandated underfunded changes, such as restricted teacher qualifications and standardized testing in schools. Meier and Wood (2004) predicted that NCLB's strict testing requirements would require a 28% budgetary increase (p. xi). They also

reported that NCLB's teacher restrictions imposed limitations on the number of subject areas teachers could be certified in. Under NCLB, teachers could only obtain certification in their subject area of expertise. These authors noted that NCLB's teacher restrictions posed major challenges for sparsely populated rural areas, as these areas relied on hiring teachers with multiple subject certifications. Not only were these restrictions burdensome, the standardized tests NCLB imposed became a barrier for certain student subgroups. More specifically, the student subgroups that were most negatively affected were those with learning disabilities and cognitive impairments. The standardized tests mandated by NCLB lacked alternative testing methods for these students and posed a threat to learning, equity, and local control in schools (Meier & Wood, 2004). As a result, NCLB's underfunded limitations on teacher restrictions and testing had an unanticipated impact on teacher workplace and school culture (p. 96).

Ravitch (2010) added to Meier's and Wood's (2004) criticism of NCLB and deemed NCLB's strict requirements unrealistically flawed. Ravitch emphasized that NCLB required *all* [emphasis added] students be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014 (p. 102). While Ravitch agreed with NCLB's intent to improve learning for all children, she noted that, in the years since 2002, no state had attained that goal. Ravitch blamed the limited growth in student achievement on NCLB's negative consequences.

Ravitch (2010) argued that a narrowed curriculum and so-called teaching to the test were among the many negative consequences that NCLB caused. She asserted that these negative consequences affected culture and resulted in a "compliance-driven regime" (p. 103). Ravitch stated that such regimes undermined school leadership, instructional practices, and teachers' positive problem-solving efforts. Compliance-driven regimes hindered schools by recreating the negative teaching and learning conditions that schools worked so hard to overcome (p. 103).

Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) proffered that strong school leadership could balance the negative force of external mandates. They articulated seven claims about strong school leadership and implied that school principals were responsible for shaping teacher workplace conditions and school culture. Their claims are elucidated in the following seven statements: (1) school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning; (2) almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices; (3) the ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices--not the practices themselves--demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work; (4) school leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions; (5) school leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed; (6) some patterns of distribution are more effective than others; and (7) a small handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness (pp. 27-28). The seven claims of Leithwood et al. amplify the importance of strong leadership in schools.

Principal leadership literature establishes common themes related to fostering collaborative school cultures (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005). Additionally, this literature makes clear the effect that school culture has on student achievement (p. 47). Marzano et al.'s meta-analysis of the past thirty-five years of school leadership research identified 21 leadership responsibilities and their correlations to student achievement, noting that, of the 21 leadership responsibilities, culture is implicit or explicit in many theories about leadership (p. 47). They reported that effective culture is a critical tool, especially for principals who are looking to foster change in their schools (p. 48).

The meta-analysis of Marzano et al. (2005) revealed that certain leadership behaviors led

to shared beliefs, increased staff well-being, and a sense of community. These leadership behaviors included the development of a shared vision and purpose and the promotion of cohesiveness among staff. The researchers solidified the sentiments of earlier research by adding that the degree to which leaders shaped culture relied upon fostering beliefs and building community (p. 48).

Leithwood et al. (2008) claimed that strong leaders embodied certain personal traits and utilized a repertoire of basic leadership practices and skills. These leadership practices and skills, when used effectively, encouraged staff involvement in the leadership process, resulting in improved student learning (pp. 27-28). Effective leaders applied these practices and skills in response to their school environment by demonstrating their ability to influence staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions, rather than allowing the context of the school to dictate what their practices should be.

The results of the TELL Mass Survey (2012) substantiated earlier claims (Marzano et al., 2005; Leithwood et al., 2008) by revealing that successful leaders and teachers helped ensure that all students can learn. The TELL Survey clearly showed that leadership and positive teaching conditions provided opportunities for teachers to be supported and empowered. These conditions have been, and continue to be, essential to creating schools where teachers and students can be successful.

Berman and McLaughlin (1975) reported decades ago that effective leadership and essential workplace conditions are needed for good education to result. The RAND Change Agent Study evaluated the effectiveness of external mandates on schools, which resulted in key findings that linked leadership and school contextual factors (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975). Berman and McLaughlin (1975) also found that specific school contextual factors impacted the

interpretation and implementation of school reforms. These researchers coined the phrase “mutual adaptation” (as cited in Honig, 2006, p.106) to describe the unique interaction that resulted from individuals interpreting and implementing reforms within their specific school contexts. Berman and McLaughlin noted that when certain dynamic factors were linked with mutual adaptation, these factors became paramount in how change shaped schools. They implied that context, negotiation, flexibility, and adjustment linked individual educators to the setting or context (as cited in Honig, 2006, p. 106).

Mutual adaptation was an unexpected finding that resulted from The RAND Study (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975). This concept, however, has remained relevant decades later. More recently, Johns (2006) investigated the relationship between individuals and their contexts and the impact that context had on human behavior. His proposed definition of context consisted of “situational opportunities and constraints that affect the meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables” (p. 386).

The interplay of context and mutual adaptation provides the foundation for this study. Individuals are constantly negotiating and adjusting to opportunities and barriers that arise in schools (Johns, 2006). School principals in turn, are charged with reducing barriers and fostering a sense of community that further provides learning opportunities for teachers in schools (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975; Johns, 2006).

Current literature has emphatically supported the idea that school principals who foster collaborative cultures and emphasize-accountability shape opportunities that lead to school improvement (Anderson, Leithwood, Louis, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Meier & Wood, 2004). In addition, Leithwood and Riehl (2003) learned that principals who emphasized shared goals and collaboration enhanced consistency and accountability for teachers.

From their findings, they developed a working definition of leadership that incorporated two main functions: providing direction and exercising influence (p. 2).

In a report to The Wallace Foundation, Anderson, Leithwood, Louis, and Wahlstrom (2010) elaborated on Leithwood's and Riehl's (2003) concept of leadership by making a clear connection between leadership and the school environment. More specifically, Anderson et al. indicated that the work of providing direction entailed managing people and cultivating leadership. They concluded that these responsibilities were crucial in exposing and developing capacities leading to a safe, hospitable school climate and overall school improvement (p. 4).

It is clear that effective leadership is dependent on principals' abilities to manage and influence people within the context of their schools (Anderson et al., 2010; Berman & McLaughlin, 1975; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Little, however, is known about the practices leaders use to influence teachers or the cultures in which these practices take place.

Data reported in the TELL Mass Survey (2012, p. 5) indicated that there were gaps in how principals and teachers perceived workplace conditions that influenced how culture was shaped within their schools. The Survey also showed that differences in perceptions could affect day-to-day operations of schools and overall improvement planning (p. 5).

In summary, research (Anderson, Leithwood, Louis, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) determined that effective principals are instrumental in school improvement efforts. In addition, Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) argued the important role of the principal in supporting teacher collaboration and accountability. Marzano et al. (2005) and Leithwood et al. (2008) identified specific themes about leadership that provide a framework for examining how leadership works to build school culture. A meta-analysis (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005) revealed that leaders were responsible for creating shared beliefs, increasing staff well-being, and

building sense of community, while a review of leadership literature (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008) revealed how leaders' behaviors, practices, and skills encouraged professional involvement and influenced staff motivation and commitment.

The next section presents literature that focuses on how leadership affects teachers and builds culture. According to Leithwood et al. (2008) four leadership practices have had considerable effects on teacher performance: (1) building vision and setting direction, (2) understanding and developing people, (3) redesigning the organization, and (4) managing the teaching and learning program (p. 29). Moreover, when these core practices are incorporated into key leadership models, the overall result is an increase in teacher motivation and commitment.

### **Three Models of Leadership**

The following subsections discuss three models: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and integrative leadership. These leadership models contain essential strategies aimed at building collegial relationships and improving teachers' instructional approaches.

**Instructional Leadership.** Instructional leadership has been defined as a careful blend of classroom instructional supervision of staff, and curriculum development (Blase & Blase, 1999). A major benefit of this leadership model is the opportunity it provides principals in understanding and developing teachers (Leithwood et al., 2008). Principals who utilized the talking strategies embedded within this model engaged in discussions with teachers about classroom practice and provided direct assistance to teachers through staff development and action research. A major caveat, however, is principal-directed instructional leadership lacks

essential global leadership strategies, such as creating a shared vision and building community (Leithwood et al., 2008; Marzano et al., 2005).

Despite the emphasis on global leadership strategies, two significant practices were associated with the instructional leadership model. Talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting professional growth were effective leadership strategies that promoted reflection and enhanced classroom instruction (Blase & Blase, 1999).

Blase and Blase (1999) used an open-ended questionnaire to extract qualitative data. Their analysis of the data revealed six talking strategies that effective principals used to promote reflection. The strategies they discovered included (1) making suggestions, (2) giving feedback, (3) modeling instruction, (4) using inquiry, (5) soliciting advice and opinions, and (6) giving praise (p. 359). The talking strategies demonstrated how principals provided individualized support and intellectual stimulation to teachers.

In addition, the dialogue between principals and teachers increased teacher learning, performance, professional practice, and critical reflection (Blase & Blase, 1999). Blase and Blase (1999) noted that the dialogue between principals and teachers consisted of feedback, making suggestions, and soliciting opinions and advice. The teachers in the study viewed principals' leadership practices as positive when they engaged with them in such dialogue.

One teacher in the Blase study commented on the personal benefits of feedback: "My principal's visits make me feel that I'm seen as a valuable individual. I'm more motivated to teach better and to investigate better ways of teaching. His visits encourage me to get input from others and to have an open mind" (p. 361). Blase and Blase (1999) concluded that principals who used the six talking strategies successfully promoted dialogue with teachers and enhanced teachers' perceptions of leadership. The overall benefits of dialogue resulted in teachers'



increased feelings of motivation, satisfaction, self-esteem, efficacy, security, and support and an atmosphere of trust and respect (Blase & Blase, 1999).

Promoting professional growth, a second major theme was characterized by enhanced relationships and collaboration among teachers. Promoting professional growth relied upon an atmosphere of trust and respect (Blase & Blase, 1999). Although Blase and Blase (1999) did not explicitly identify conditions needed for promoting professional growth, teachers' support was dependent on a safe atmosphere that encouraged risk-taking.

The researchers asserted that promoting professional growth emphasized the study of teaching and learning, developing coaching relationships, encouraging and supporting the redesign of programs, and implementing action research (p.363). Successful principals promoted professional growth when they employed strategies that emphasized teaching and learning, supported collaboration, and developed coaching relationships (Blase & Blase, 1999). Leithwood et al. (2008) amplified these strategies further by linking them with redesigning organizations--what successful principals do as part of their core leadership practice.

In addition, principals who modeled a philosophy of teamwork and facilitated relationships within their schools benefitted from an increase in teacher leadership and overall motivation (Blase and Blase, 1999). One teacher described the impact that collaboration had on her own motivation (Blase & Blase, 1999). She stated that she was better able to meet students' needs and goals because of the support she received from her collaborative team (p. 364). In addition, this teacher stated that she was also able to remain focused on agreed-upon plans and instructional pacing of lessons.

Blase and Blase (1999) noted that these benefits led to a richer professional dialogue

between teachers and promoted a sense of safety and trust. These outcomes set the stage for reciprocal learning opportunities inherent in promoting professional growth.

Specific, principal-led strategies that encouraged teacher reflection and professional growth resulted in increased teacher motivation, collaboration, and trust (Blase & Blase, 1999). More recent studies (Leithwood et al. (2008); Marzano et al., 2005) indicated the importance of principals creating a shared vision and building community, two features that Blase and Blase (1999) had not discussed. The next leadership model, transformational leadership, attempts to provide a broader leadership lens by including other staff in the leadership process.

**Transformational Leadership.** Whereas Blase and Blase (1999) made clear the positive effects that principal-led strategies had on teachers' overall motivation, commitment, and trust, Sheppard (1996) had earlier claimed that instructional leadership could also be transformational. Sheppard's transformational leadership model differed in that he emphasized principals' and teachers' shared leadership roles and their common vision and commitment towards improvement.

Sheppard's model echoed Leithwood's et al.'s (2008) assertions about strong school leadership since it emphasized principals' strategies that focused on building vision and setting direction. Sheppard's model highlighted two additional benefits that were reported by Leithwood et al., motivating teachers and creating group goals.

Instructional leadership, according to Sheppard (1996), could be conceptualized as narrow or broad. Narrow conceptions of instructional leadership were inadequate because they focused too heavily on principals' actions related to classroom supervision, teaching and, learning and implied that teachers were passive followers working to meet goals set by principals

(Sheppard, 1996). Sheppard asserted that the lack of teachers' involvement in creating shared goals resulted in limited or stifled creativity, innovation, and professionalism (p. 326).

Broad conceptions of instructional leadership emphasized collaboration and acknowledged limitations posed by a narrow conception of instructional leadership (Sheppard, 1996, p. 326). Sheppard (1996) considered the broader model to be transformational since it included principals and teachers taking equal leadership roles resulting in more than just the principals' influence on classroom instruction (p. 328). The broader model also influenced collaborative culture.

Despite the influence of a broad instructional leadership model, Sheppard (1996) noted some limitations. Broad instructional leadership could only influence culture when teachers experienced appropriate leadership behaviors (p. 328). Sheppard's warning further substantiated the earlier findings of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), who learned that the perceptions and beliefs of followers were considered important only when leadership was interactive (as cited in Sheppard, 1996, p. 329). Sheppard concluded that when appropriate leadership behaviors were demonstrated within effective schools, teachers accepted and bought into innovation and change, resulting in transformation (p. 329).

Two questionnaires were used to collect qualitative data on leadership behaviors and school-level characteristics at the elementary and secondary level (Sheppard, 1996). The sample size was 1,200 teachers representing elementary and secondary schools. Sheppard received 624 responses, 317 from the elementary level and 307 from the secondary level. Using this data, a framework consisting of three models was created: teacher commitment, professional involvement, and innovativeness. The three models allowed him to determine which instructional leadership variables were statistically significant, given the context within which

they existed.

Four leadership practices emerged from Sheppard's (1996) study that increased teachers' commitment and morale: (1) visibility, (2) communication of school goals, (3) provision of incentives for learning, and (4) promotion of professional involvement; but Sheppard warned supervision and evaluation, in certain circumstances, impeded teacher commitment. Sheppard realized that as teacher commitment increased, less directed supervision was required (p.337).

Sheppard (1996) also found that framing school goals was a significant variable at the elementary level, noting that, at the high school level, framing school goals appeared to be the most significant leadership variable. He explained that the secondary level called for more direction from the principal for innovation, creativity, and acceptance of new ideas to be shared across various departments and content areas. This finding suggested that different school contexts influenced the leadership variables that teachers identified as significant. Promoting professional development was the strongest leadership variable identified at the elementary and secondary levels (Sheppard, 1996). Professional development correlated with building teacher commitment especially when it was teacher-driven, involved coordinating curriculum, and focused on monitoring student progress required less direct engagement of principals (p. 338).

The findings suggested that no one discrete set of leadership behaviors resulted in school effectiveness (Sheppard, 1996). Instead, a transformational leadership model called attention to the need for principals to be mindful of their behaviors especially within certain school contexts or settings. Sheppard asserted that transformational principals could effectively shape a culture where teachers were committed, professionally involved, and innovative (p. 340).

An earlier study (Leithwood & Jantzi 1990) about transformational leadership investigated how principals worked with staff to develop shared meaning and purpose.

Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) believed that building shared meaning with staff facilitated collaborative cultures in schools. They asserted that transformational school leaders have an important role in establishing norms that influenced staff and promoted collaborative cultures:

A transformational leader helps build shared meaning among members of the school staff regarding their purposes and creates high levels of commitment to the accomplishment of these purposes. These leaders foster norms and beliefs among staff members about the contribution one's colleague may make to one's practices. They also encourage openness to new ideas and practices based on their own merits. (pp. 254-255)

Leithwood's and Jantzi's (1990) qualitative research involved interviews with twelve school principals. During these interviews, the authors noted the influence that principals' reflections and actions had on school culture. Principals reported that specific leadership behaviors contributed to a collaborative culture. These behaviors included (a) fostering staff development; (b) sharing leadership and responsibility with others; and (c) engaging in frequent communication about norms, beliefs, and values. They concluded that principals who facilitated strong interpersonal relationships among staff influenced the development of collaborative cultures. In addition, they learned that school principals also expressed their cultural values symbolically (p. 269) by publically recognizing the work of staff and students. These findings further supported the researchers' claim that transformational strategies assisted in the development of collaborative culture.

Leithwood and Jantzi asserted further that collaborative cultures not only led to teachers' shared understandings of purpose and practice, but also it enhanced their problem-solving capacity (p. 276). The next section examines the effects of a third promising leadership model: integrative leadership. The benefits of the integrative leadership model are that it synthesizes

significant leadership characteristics from both the instructional and transformational leadership models. The combination of these characteristics is attributed to building collaborative school cultures.

**Integrative Leadership.** The findings of earlier research (Blase & Blase, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Sheppard, 1996) were substantiated by Marks and Printy (2003). These researchers coined the term integrative leadership to describe the combination of key instructional and transformational leadership characteristics:

The theory of action underlying this model holds that the efficacious principal works simultaneously at transformational and instructional tasks. As a transformational leader, the principal seeks to elicit higher levels of commitment from all school personnel and to develop organizational capacity for school improvement. As an instructional leader, the principal collaborates with teachers to accomplish organizational goals for teaching and learning. (p. 377)

Marks and Printy (2003) argued that instructional and transformational leadership models alone fell short of their integrative leadership conception. Transformational leadership, according to Marks and Printy, provided only intellectual benefits such as teacher empowerment and decision-making support, aimed at organizational innovation (p. 371). Instructional leadership, on the other hand, appeared too “hierarchical and procedural” (p. 371) and lacked the empowering and supportive qualities that transformational leadership provided.

The integrative leadership model (Marks & Printy, 2003), however, emphasized shared leadership and collaboration. Their model included principals and teachers actively collaborating about curriculum, instruction, and assessment (p. 371). In addition, principals within this model sought ideas, insights, and expertise from teachers for the purpose of school

improvement. Marks and Printy (2003) noted that principals combined leadership behaviors and established conditions necessary for collaboration by empowering and supporting teachers. The combination of leadership behaviors, approaches, and strategies that characterized this model resulted in principals becoming “leaders of other instructional leaders” (p.371). They added that collaboration between principals and teachers was critical; because teachers know their students and how they learn, requiring them to have discretionary authority to make curricular and instructional decisions. The researchers also noted that when leaders encouraged teachers and used behaviors that were perceived as appropriate, teacher commitment was enhanced (p. 393).

Hallinger (2003) agreed with Marks’ and Printy’s (2003) point regarding the relationship between collaboration and organizational improvement, adding that shared leadership had to be sustainable for leaders themselves (p. 345) and that principals who shared the complexities of leadership responsibilities with others were less likely to experience burnout (p. 345). Hallinger noted that the integrated leadership model elicited high levels of teacher commitment and professionalism, resulting in schools becoming organizations that learn and perform at high levels (p. 345).

The preceding research (Blase & Blase, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sheppard, 1996) elucidated several important considerations for school principals regarding leadership behaviors, approaches, and strategies. While it seems that models of instructional leadership (Blase & Blase, 1999) and transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990) offer many strategies to increase teachers’ professional behavior, these models alone may not have met all the demands required of schools today (Marks & Printy, 2003). Marks and Printy (2003) and Hallinger (2003) suggested that an integrative leadership model

resulted in the best opportunities for increased teacher commitment, professional involvement, sustainable leadership, and overall school improvement.

The three leadership models discussed previously clearly have significant effects on teachers and schools. While leadership appears to be a major, primary influence on schools, it is not the only factor that shapes teachers' workplaces. Within the context of school and classroom workplaces, there are psychosocial and organizational conditions that also impact teachers' motivation and commitment, affect student learning, and indirectly influence school culture (Leithwood, 2006, p. 5). The next section amplifies the current thinking about teacher workplace conditions and the effects that these conditions have on teachers' motivation and commitment.

### **Linking Leadership with Teacher Workplace Conditions**

Effective principal leadership and its influence on teachers has been identified as the most significant school level workplace condition (Emerick, Hirsch & Reeves, 2007; Leithwood, 2006; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Moreover, research and literature has indicated that effective leadership is the greatest determinant of successful schools (Johnson, 2006; Leithwood, 2006; McLaughlin, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1989). The strategies, behaviors, and approaches used by school principals not only shape teacher workplace conditions but also affect teacher motivation and commitment, influence school culture, and ultimately student learning (Leithwood, 2006).

In addition to leadership, there are other school level features and conditions that shape teachers' workplaces. Johnson (2006) defined teacher workplace conditions as a collection of features that create a context for an individual teacher's work. The features she identified are categorized as: (a) psychosocial, (b) organizational, (c) educational, (d) physical, and (e) political. The section that follows will focus specifically on psychosocial and organizational



features, the effects of these features on teachers, and how they influence collaborative school culture.

### **Psychosocial Conditions**

According to Johnson (2006), psychosocial features signify effects, including how teachers experience their work, their motivation and commitment towards their work, and the opportunities they have for learning and growth. Organizational features create a context within which teachers work by defining “teachers’ formal positions and relationships with others in the school” (Johnson, 2006, p. 2).

Similarly, Leithwood (2006) conducted a study in which he recognized the need for school principals to understand the impact that both psychosocial and organizational workplace conditions had on teachers’ sense of well-being within their schools (p.8). He reported that school principals who were successful in shaping both school-level conditions also influenced culture. Leithwood’s (2006) findings reiterated the findings of earlier research conducted by McLaughlin (1993) and Rosenholtz (1989).

McLaughlin (1993) and Rosenholtz (1989) learned that leadership was critical in establishing the social norms and fostering interactions that led to collaborative relationships and positive workplace cultures. These researchers investigated the organizational behavior of teachers by examining their psychosocial states within the context of the school setting. McLaughlin (1993) emphasized that schools had implied norms that allowed them to be viewed as “workplace communities” (p.99), while Rosenholtz (1989) noted that schools were places where teachers constructed practice and professional efficacy in a social setting.

Johns’ (2006) organizational behavior theory more recently substantiated McLaughlin’s (1993) and Rosenholtz’ (1989) workplace community constructs. His theory provided a

theoretical foundation that further explained the workplace community concept. Johns' advanced his definition of context, a term he used to reinforce the connection between workplace conditions, teachers' motivation and commitment, and school culture. He defined context as, "situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables" (p. 386). Johns' theory has suggested that teacher workplaces not only provide a context for the interplay of conditions affecting teachers' motivation and commitment, but also shape teachers' collegial relationships and instructional practice.

The research and related literature that follows (Emerick, Hirsch & Reeves, 2007, Rosenholtz, 1989; TELL Mass Survey, 2012), creates a context for understanding the psychosocial effects of workplace conditions on teachers. These efforts are intended to validate the need for principals to foster norms and conditions that shape culture in their schools.

One landmark study (Rosenholtz, 1989) determined the importance of school culture, teacher workplace conditions, and the relationship between social structure and daily function and productivity (p.2). Rosenholtz (1989) learned that teacher workplace conditions, such as shared goals and opportunities for teacher collaboration and learning, as well as school culture, were related to teachers' feelings of certainty and commitment. She noted that teacher certainty and commitment was enhanced in learning enriched cultures and diminished in learning impoverished cultures.

Because teachers' workplace conditions were so significant (Rosenholtz, 1989), school districts in the United States today continue to survey teachers to assess the psychosocial and organizational effects that workplace conditions have on instructional practice and overall school performance. North Carolina (Emerick, Hirsch, & Reeves, 2007) and Massachusetts (TELL

Mass Survey, 2012) are among the states that have recently surveyed their teaching force and determined that certain conditions lead to increased teacher commitment and retention and increased overall performance.

Researchers (Emerick, Hirsch, & Reeves, 2007) reported that certain teacher workplace conditions created an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. These factors included leadership that consistently supported teachers, collaborative decision making, and a commitment to school-wide shared vision (p. 1). They noted that these conditions strongly correlated with overall student performance at all levels. Their analysis of the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey data revealed that 66% of North Carolina educators reported trust and mutual respect as essential workplace conditions. Twenty-two percent of teachers reported that they were looking to move to different schools, citing that their own schools lacked the same atmosphere (Emerick et al., 2007).

Trust and mutual respect also affected teacher turnover and overall school performance (Emerick, Hirsch, and Reeves, 2007). In North Carolina, two-thirds of the teachers in schools that had the lowest teacher turnover rates reported that trust was a factor in their retention. Meanwhile, only half of the teachers in schools with the highest turnover rates reported that trust played a role in their commitment to their school. Consequently, 20% more teachers in North Carolina's highest achieving schools reported trust and mutual respect as compared to those schools at the lowest level of student performance. Emerick, Hirsch, and Reeves (2007) concluded that leadership, collaboration, and commitment to a school-wide vision were strongly related to trust and mutual respect in schools. Similar factors were discovered in a survey administered in schools across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The TELL Mass Survey (2012) sought to reveal the status of teacher workplace conditions in relation to teacher effectiveness. Over 50% of teachers across the state of Massachusetts completed the TELL Mass survey. Approximately 42,400 educators representing 1,100 schools and 200 school districts revealed that overall, they were satisfied with the conditions in their schools. In fact, more than 4 out of 5 teachers reported that they wanted to remain in their current school, while only 2% reported that they wanted to leave education in the future.

The responses of educators throughout Massachusetts (TELL Mass Survey, 2012) echoed similarities with the findings in The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (2007). Like the North Carolina survey, The TELL Mass (2012) survey indicated that certain workplace conditions led to teacher retention and effectiveness. The conditions identified in the Mass TELL Survey included (a) support from school leaders and parents, (b) instructional support and practice, (c) opportunities for professional development, (d) clear communication, and (e) teacher empowerment.

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (2007) and the TELL Massachusetts Survey (2012) illustrated the influence of teacher workplace conditions on teacher retention and overall school performance. These surveys revealed that workplace conditions such as collaboration and opportunities for professional growth and learning were, and remain, important to teachers. These conditions, however, depended upon certain rules or norms of engagement on the part of principals and teachers (Alvy & Robbins, 2004; Little, 1982).

Rosenholtz (1989) investigated how teachers' social interactions were shaped by workplace conditions and how the nature of these interactions indirectly affected culture. She learned that certain workplace conditions both positively and negatively affected aspects of

teacher learning, certainty, collaboration, and commitment. These findings remain significant even today as principals' work to meet complex educational challenges. Themes from the research of Rosenholtz (1989) and others (Danetta, 2002; Drago-Severson, 2012; Kwakman, 2003; Little, 1982; MA & MacMillian, 1999; Munthie, 2001; Newmann, Rutter, & Smith, 1989) are discussed next. These themes include teacher (a) learning, (b) certainty, (c) collaboration, and (d) commitment. They indicate important considerations for principals intending to shape workplace conditions and culture in schools today.

**Teacher Learning.** Rosenholtz (1989) investigated opportunities for teacher learning in two types of school cultures: "learning impoverished" and "learning-enriched" (p. 208). She learned that teachers in learning impoverished schools lacked common purpose and maintained a sense of self-reliance mainly because they lacked opportunities for collaboration. In learning enriched schools, however, Rosenholtz reported that continuous teacher improvement was the norm and cited that principals fostered collaboration between more and less successful teachers to improve instructional practice.

Drago-Severson (2012) elaborated on Rosenholtz's (1989) teacher learning concept by investigating how specific leadership practices resulted in school cultures that supported teacher growth. Drago-Severson's findings echoed those of the TELL Mass Survey (2012) and the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (2007). Nine leadership practices included (1) treating teachers as individuals and attending to their different needs and preferences, (2) building informal structures to bring adults together to reflect and socialize, (3) having conversations around meals to make time for collaboration, (4) promoting the school mission by creating opportunities for teachers and other adults to reflect on how the mission connects to daily life and classroom practice, (5) encouraging teamwork with time for teachers to work in

teams on a regular basis, (6) rewarding teachers in new ways by building on their intrinsic motivation for learning (7) honoring teachers' strengths, (8) valuing and modeling respect for all in the schoolhouse, and (9) growing the school as a community center strengthened collaboration and teachers' commitment to a school wide vision (p. 22). Drago-Severson attributed these essential practices and their effects as necessary ingredients for the development of a learning oriented climate. In addition, leadership practices and a learning oriented culture assisted teachers in making sense of their experiences by adding to what Rosenholtz (1989) defined as a "technical knowledge base" (p. 5). Teachers' sense making also led to increased certainty about their practice.

**Teacher Certainty.** The concept of teacher certainty was operationalized by connecting teachers' knowledge of instructional skills and procedures with student outcomes (Rosenholtz, 1989). Teachers in "non-routine technical cultures" (p. 106) consistently acquired new knowledge about their teaching practice when they worked in "learning-enriched cultures" (p. 106). According to Rosenholtz, new knowledge-enabled teachers to better meet the diverse needs of their students.

Teacher uncertainty, however, resulted when teachers worked in schools that were "learning-impooverished" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p.4). These schools were regarded as having "few well-established techniques" and lacked "codified technical knowledge to help teachers meet students' widely varying needs" (p.4). Rosenholtz (1989) explained further that teacher uncertainty was exacerbated by the isolation and self-reliance that existed in learning-impooverished schools. She added that teachers who worked in impooverished schools became part of a "routine technical culture" (p. 4) that regularly utilized whole group instructional strategies to cover large amounts of curriculum rather than adding to their repertoire of

instructional skills. As a result, teachers in routine technical cultures lacked the skills needed to solve the learning challenges of unpredictable students. This lack of skill, in turn, led to teachers feeling uncertain about their practice (Rosenholz, 1989). Rosenholtz concluded that teachers' sense of certainty was dependent on the positive feedback, encouragement, and inspiration they received from principals in their schools.

Teachers' level of certainty and uncertainty was also related to their age, experience, gender, qualifications, and school type (Munthe, 2001). Teacher certainty was described as "a perception of one's own ability to make appropriate decisions in uncertain situations or to be able to deal with the inherent uncertainties of teaching" (Munthe, 2001, p. 358). The study conducted by Munthe (2001) consisted of a 300-item questionnaire distributed to 1153 elementary and junior high school teachers across 46 municipalities in Norway. The study revealed that elementary teachers and female teachers had the highest levels of certainty, whereas male teachers and those in junior high settings had the lowest. In addition, teachers up to the age of 30 were more uncertain than teachers ranging in age from 31 to 50 and those who had been in the profession for 20 years or more experienced increasing feelings of uncertainty.

Munthe's explanation of this unexpected finding was that veteran teachers' uncertainty could have been related to their willingness to make instructional changes, thus making it more difficult to relate to students who required differed approaches.

While shared decision-making and collaboration were attributed to teacher certainty (Rosenholtz, 1989), Munthe (2001) asserted that the benefits of collaboration led to greater teacher certainty: "As colleagues sift and winnow strategies, ideas, and materials, and cull from them those most likely to enhance the quality of their classroom instruction, they also deliberate, evaluate, suggest, and modify their own classroom practices" (p. 73).

The concept of teacher certainty, or efficacy was studied further within a high school setting (Newmann, Rutter, & Smith 1989) by focusing on teachers' relationships to the school as a workplace (p. 222). Newmann et al. (1989) learned that teachers' sense of efficacy or certainty increased when they had learning opportunities and principals provided support. Teacher certainty emanated from the knowledge they gained from their colleagues' courses and innovative spirit (p. 235). These researchers asserted that teacher learning increased certainty, technical knowledge, and teachers' ability to coordinate curriculum. These results ultimately improved teacher instructional effectiveness and reduced the social isolation that may have contributed to feelings of inadequacy (Neumann, Rutter, & Smith, 1989).

**Teacher Collaboration.** Principals in Rosenholtz's (1989) study fostered collaboration by making leadership a collective responsibility. Collective leadership in turn assured professional engagement on the part of teachers (p. 62). Other authors, however, have noted that collaboration did not occur without an implied set of "rules" (Alvy & Robbins, 2004, p.21) or norms (Little, 1982). Little (1982) investigated situation-specific teacher interactions and noted that norms of collaboration were shaped according certain school cultures.

During a focused ethnographic study, Little (1982) identified norms of interaction that supported collegiality and collaboration in schools. Certain norms, or unspoken rules, accompanied individuals' interactions and emerged through observations and interviews over a 19-week period (Little, 1982). Little noted that the elementary and secondary schools in the study had cultures that could be characterized according to their level of involvement in professional development programs. As well, teacher interactions were characterized based on situation-specific portrayals (Little, 1982). The researcher noted that teachers' interactions were categorized and shaped according to the range, frequency, focus and concreteness, relevance, and



reciprocity in which these interactions took place. The overall cultures of the schools also influenced teachers' interactions. In high involvement schools, the situation-specific interactions were habitual and stable. In schools with little involvement teacher interactions were rare, "there were relatively few occasions and relatively few placed during the course of the school day where teachers find themselves in one another's presence" (p. 333).

Based on observations and interviews, Little (1982) discovered four key interactions or norms that appeared critical for teacher professional development and overall improvement of school culture. These norms included (1) teacher engagement in observations, (2) conversation about instructional practice, (3) collaboration, and (4) teacher learning (p. 331).

The four key interactions also fostered collegial practice among teachers (Little, 1982). Collegiality among teachers was critical because it provided specific support for observation, discussion, and critique of classroom instructional practice. Collegiality also encouraged teachers to share efforts in creating curriculum and to shape instructional improvements. These cooperative practices determined the degree to which teachers and schools were deemed successful or unsuccessful (Little, 1982).

In addition, the opportunities and locations provided for teacher interactions also influenced teachers' feelings about their work (Little, 1982). Teachers perceived support for visible continuous learning on the job when appropriate opportunities and locations were available for professional interaction. Moreover, teachers' feelings of safety and self-respect were enhanced when instructional practice was the focus of their interactions (Little, 1982).

Despite these successes, teachers' interactions that focused on instructional practice did not come without risk (Little, 1989). During interactions about instructional practice, teachers used more descriptive and analytic language which exposed their levels of competence about

technical knowledge and pedagogical skills. According to Little, this exposure created more demand for professional competence and more self-esteem. These demands, in turn, required further support and clear sanctions for participation, especially where threatening and non-threatening situations may arise.

Teacher interactions were moderated by the degree to which discussions were relevant, reciprocal, and inclusive of participants' ideas (Little, 1989). Little concluded that within the successful schools, even where smaller groups explored new options for teaching on their own, the groups were mindful of the consequences these new ideas may have on the overall group.

More recent research findings (Harris Interactive, 2009) corroborated Little's (1982) research. In their report, *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success*, Harris Interactive (2009) reported that both teachers and principals shared the belief that student and school success is directly related to collaborative school environments. Harris Interactive defined collaboration as the commitment to a shared purpose, a continued relationship, and a unified team with different experiences. They maintained that the combination of these factors resulted in greater outcomes than could be accomplished individually (p. 10). Their study revealed that collaboration occurred in both elementary and secondary schools (Harris Interactive, 2009). In addition, teachers and principals reported higher levels of shared leadership, trust and job satisfaction in schools where collaboration was more frequent.

The most frequent types of collaborative activities included teachers meeting in teams, principals empowering teacher leadership, and pairing new teachers with more veteran teachers (Harris Interactive, 2009). These activities resulted in teacher learning, increased accountability and successful progress towards meeting school goals.

Most importantly, collaboration resulted in increased trust and improved school culture (Harris Interactive, 2009). Teachers and principals in highly collaborative schools differed from others in their attitudes and beliefs about the role of collaboration. Within these schools, 51% of teachers and 71% of principals attributed trust as directly related to collaboration. In addition, 68% of the teachers in these schools reported higher levels of job satisfaction overall.

**Teacher Commitment.** Workplace conditions also affected teachers' job satisfaction, especially commitment (MA & MacMillan, 1999). Teacher commitment and job satisfaction were related to the degree to which an individual could identify with the school or organization (MA & MacMillan, 1999, p.39). The researchers reported that teachers who were satisfied with their jobs felt positive about their pedagogical knowledge and how it affected the students they taught (p.40). Teachers' perceptions of meaningful, organizational involvement were a key factor in maintaining teachers' commitment to school (p. 40).

Additional research revealed workplace factors that affected teachers' participation in professional learning and their commitment to student achievement (Dannetta (2002; Kwakman 2003). Dannetta (2002) and Kwakman (2003) attributed organizational conditions that supported professional learning to increased teacher commitment, teacher learning, student performance and school improvement.

Principals created meaningful, organizational involvement by providing professional learning opportunities that were participative, social, and collaborative (Kwakman, 2003). Kwakman's (2003) study investigated workplace conditions from two key perspectives: a professional development perspective, which called upon teachers to proactively direct and arrange their own learning and a cognitive psychological perspective, which highlighted the important role of staff developers who provided learning for teachers (p. 151). These

perspectives demonstrated the relationship between opportunities for professional learning and the social organizational effects on teachers. In addition, the professional development perspective thrived in learning settings, such as professional communities, and further enhanced teachers' commitment and job satisfaction (Kwakman, 2003).

Teachers, according to Kwakman (2003), needed to be professional learners seeking to acquire new competencies that would enable them to facilitate students' learning. Teachers' professional learning also needed to be active, constructive and context-bound (Kwakman, 2003). These findings echoed the sentiments of earlier research by McLaughlin (1993).

In addition, teacher professional development was needed to prepare teachers for new student learning approaches (Kwakman, 2003). One challenge in implementing teacher professional development was that traditional approaches often contradicted findings related to models of effective learning. Kwakman (2003), therefore, focused on the effectiveness of job-embedded professional development and how workplace factors promoted or inhibited teacher's workplace learning.

The findings of Kwakman's (2003) study were grouped into four learning oriented categories: (1) reading for professional knowledge, (2) experimenting with new instructional methods, (3) reflecting on practice, and (4) collaboration. These categories, along with three professional learning principles -- participatory learning, social learning, and collaboration -- defined workplace conditions related to individual and collaborative teacher learning (p. 166). Kwakman (2003) asserted that providing social and cultural support to teachers during the learning process was an important teacher workplace condition.

Organizational and professional commitment also enhanced teachers' dedication to student learning (Dannetta, 2002). Organizational commitment was defined as the "belief and

acceptance of organizational goals and values” (Dannetta, 2002, p. 145) and professional commitment as “a positive affective attachment to one’s work” (p. 145). Professional commitment improved student performance since this type of commitment meant that teachers were dedicated to helping students learn regardless of ability and background (p. 145).

Danetta (2002) used a stratified sample of fifteen secondary school teachers to identify organizational and personal factors that influenced teachers’ commitment to student learning. Data were collected using interview questions and a survey. The data analysis revealed that there were as many as 22 factors related to teachers’ commitment to student learning.

The aim of Dannetta’s (2002) study was to construct the most extensive list of factors related to teachers’ commitment to student learning. Three groups of factors were discovered; organizational factors, personal factors, and student background factors that had important implications for principals. Dannetta asserted that principals were directly responsible for as many as 11 of 22 factors. This implication was significant since it informed principals of the factors they can control while also influencing teachers’ commitment to student learning. Dannetta’s findings corroborated earlier findings (Leithwood, Menzies, & Jantzi, 1995) and were substantiated by Kwakman (2003). The researchers concurred that organizational, professional learning, and student performance factors were attributed to teacher commitment.

The research discussed previously clearly indicates the benefits that teacher learning, certainty, collaboration, and commitment have on student performance and overall school culture, especially when paired with positive and appropriate leadership practices. What has not been identified are the organizational conditions that foster these teacher effects and lead to a positive school culture. What follows is a discussion of organizational conditions and how they provide a setting for effective, collaborate teachers’ work.

## **Organizational Conditions**

According to Johnson (2012), “teachers are the single most important school-level factor in students’ learning (p. 107); and although teachers are critical in determining student success, the organization in which they work is also significant. Teachers and their workplace contexts need constant attention to sustain student success. Johnson (2012) promulgated that leaders needed to attend equally to teacher quality and organizational improvement. Johnson’s sentiments about teachers and their workplace contexts echoed the findings of Marzano et al. (2005): leaders shaped school culture by fostering beliefs and building community. This section explores the organizational resources and structures that exist in schools and how these conditions influence culture.

Research has identified that leadership and organizational conditions are essential in building schools that function as interdependent organizations (Johnson, 2012; Leithwood, 2006; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996). Interdependent organizations rely upon the combination of organizational conditions, such as resources and structures. Organizational resources and structures that are connected to schools’ vision and mission have the power to influence collaboration and enhance culture (Johnson, 2012). In addition, organizational conditions such as leadership, social networks, and professional development have resulted in increased teacher effectiveness and retention (Kraft & Paypay, 2014). Kraft and Paypay (2014) reported that strong organizational environments resulted in meaningful peer collaboration, increased teacher retention, and a positive culture (p. 495). Given the importance of these findings, the following research provides a deeper understanding of how resources and structures work to improve teacher effectiveness, student learning, and overall school culture.

**Resources.** Principals in high performing schools manage and develop three primary

resources to create a positive environment: the schools' people, time, and money (Miles & Frank, 2008). Miles and Frank (2008) learned that there was an indirect connection between how resources were managed and allocated, and school culture. The researchers documented that effective resource allocation is related to the ethics, morals, and values that school leaders internalize and believe are important (p.21).

Miles and Frank (2008) offered three recommendations for principals looking to manage and develop people, time, and money:

1. Integrating significant resources for well-designed professional development that provides expert support to implement the school's core instructional design;
2. Designing teacher work schedules to include blocks of collaborative planning time effectively used to improve classroom practice; and
3. Enacting systems that promote individual teacher growth through induction, leadership opportunities, professional development planning, evaluation, and compensation. (p.24)

Their recommendations are substantiated by additional research focused on people, time, and money.

**People.** Human resources and teacher quality outweighed other resources in relation to ongoing school improvement (Miles & Frank, 2008, p. 23); furthermore, school leaders who focused on building teacher capacity rather than reducing class size saw improvements in teacher quality and instruction. Two aspects that contributed to teacher quality in schools were hiring and organizing staff and professional development. Miles and Frank (2008) contended that successful school leaders strategically assessed students' and staffs' needs in the hiring, and organizing of new staff. The researchers also learned that job-embedded professional

development that occurred within teachers' work day strengthened teachers' capacity and overall effectiveness. Miles and Frank determined that principals who hired, organized, and provided professional development with the school's vision and philosophy in mind reaped the greatest results in overall teacher improvement and student performance.

A school's vision and philosophy also needed to be considered while building teacher capacity, especially since the social context of teaching and learning mattered most to teachers (Johnson, 2012). The social context, according to Johnson, consisted of the school's culture, the principal's leadership, and a teacher's relationships with colleagues. Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, Luppescu, and Sebring (2010) corroborated the value that Miles and Frank (2008) and Johnson (2012) placed on human resources, the social context, and teacher quality. Bryk et al. (2010) argued:

Schools are complex organizations that consisted of multiple subsystems. Each subsystem involves a mix of human and social factors that shape the actual activities that occur and the meaning that individuals attribute to these events. These social interactions are bounded by various rule, roles, and prevailing practices that, in combination with technical resources, constitute schools as formal organizations [...]. All organizations depend on the quality of their people and their ability to work together. (p. 45-54)

The researchers identified and investigated four subsystems in schools: (1) the professional capacity subsystem, (2) the school learning climate, (3) parent, school, and community ties, and (4) the instructional guidance subsystem (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 51). They used a layer-cake metaphor to describe the dependency that these subsystems had on one another. The professional capacity subsystem was measured more extensively than the others and emerged as the most essential organizational subsystem. The professional capacity



subsystem contained the following elements: the quality of human resources, quality of professional development, normative dispositions, and professional community (pp. 54-55). These supports embodied teachers' skills, beliefs, dispositions, and work arrangements within schools. Bryk et al. (2010) reported that the four elements of professional capacity were mutually reinforcing in promoting both individual and collective teacher growth (p. 56). In addition, leadership and the other three subsystems contributed to teachers' likeliness to remain in collaborative schools with supportive administration. While research has punctuated the importance of human resources and teacher quality, time is also a significant resource that principals must manage strategically.

**Time.** Bryk et al. (2010), and Louis, Kruse, and Marks (1996) learned that professional community in schools was significantly impacted by the amount of time teachers had for planning and collaboration. Findings of the MetLife Teacher Survey (2009) corroborated their findings. According to the MetLife Teacher Survey, over 1000 teachers were surveyed and only one quarter (24%) reported having three hours per week for collaboration with colleagues. Slightly more than half of the teachers in the MetLife Survey reported having two hours or less per week for collaboration.

In a report from the Center for Teaching Quality, Emerick, Hirsch, and Reeves (2006) identified time as a critical condition necessary for student success. Time was determined as the condition that was considered least in overall planning by school principals. According to these researchers, more than half of the teachers surveyed received less than three hours of non-instructional time, while more than 75% of teachers had less than five hours of non-instructional time. Time was even less available at the elementary level, where 63% of teachers had less than three hours of non-instructional time (Emerich, Hirsch, & Reeves, 2006). While most teachers

surveyed in high schools believed they had enough non-instructional time, only one third of elementary teachers reported similarly.

Some principals were creative in how they addressed the need for more time, despite statistics regarding the detriments of non-instructional time on collaboration (Emerick, Hirsch, & Reeves, 2006). According to the report from the Center for Teaching Quality, principals delegated the task of finding time to teachers. Although there were no monetary resources provided for increased time, principals reported that more time was the result of better creative planning on the part of teachers.

**Money.** Miles and Frank (2008) reported that there is little research that examines the ways that school leaders allocate funding within their schools. They found that a small body of research appeared to focus on overall school funding and student achievement. Miles and Frank acknowledged that within this research, both high and low-performing schools were found at all funding levels. Odden and Archibald (as cited in Miles and Frank, 2008, p.13) further concurred with the findings of Miles and Frank and documented that within typical, traditional schools, the percentage of funding spent on instruction, administration, and student support remained consistent across the categories.

Highly effective schools allocated financial resources differently than traditional schools (Darling-Hammond & Miles, 1998). These schools also utilized strategies that differed from strategies used in traditional schools, according to Darling-Hammond and Miles (1998). The researchers' resources were reallocated to personalize student-teacher relationships and provide teachers time to collaborate in the five schools they studied and were more creative than traditional schools in the steps taken to free up already existing resources. Traditional schools, on the contrary, allocated more resources than necessary toward their programs and practices.

Despite the differences in how resources were allocated at highly effective and traditional schools, principals in all five schools demonstrated a variety of allocation strategies.

Additionally, the strategies the principals used remained focused on improving programs and practices in schools (Darling-Hammond & Myles, 1998).

One example of a school that reallocated funding transitioned from a “pull out” (Darling-Hammond & Myles, 1998, p. 11) student service model to a more integrated approach. This transition resulted in more available funds because fewer staff were required. This integrated model also benefitted students by strengthening their sense of inclusion in the larger school setting. This model also benefitted students by de-stigmatizing the services that they received and strengthening their sense of inclusion the larger classroom, thus benefitting the overall school culture.

Darling-Hammond and Myles (1998) found that principals across all five schools implemented similar strategies that included the following six principles: (1) reduction of specialized programs to create more individual time for all, (2) more flexible student grouping by school professionals, (3) structures to support more personal relationships, (4) longer and more varied blocks of instructional time, (5) more common planning time, (6) creative definition of staffing roles and workday (p. 15). Darling-Hammond and Myles reported that, in addition to strengthening relationships and finding time for collaboration, the changes these principals made created the opportunity to realign resources to the overall school vision. The reallocation of resources and alignment of resources to the school’s vision demonstrates that what principals value influences the overall school culture.

Finally, Darling-Hammond and Myles (1998) learned that reallocating funding could foster the development of organizational structures that would further enhance personalized

environments for students and collaborative planning time for teachers. They noted that the development of effective, organizational structures was dependent on the integration of people, time, and money, the primary resources that principals must manage effectively to benefit schools.

**Structures.** There are many kinds of organizational structures aimed at teacher learning and improvement that incorporate opportunities for professional development, time for collaboration, individual growth, and professional community (Miles & Frank, 2008). The teamwork that emerges because of these structures is supported further by social learning theory (Wenger, 1998).

Three examples of organizational structures that foster teamwork and collaboration include instructional rounds (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009), lesson study (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992), and professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have emerged as the most widely adopted of these organizational structures. PLCs bring together organizational elements, such as human capital, social networks, and opportunities for job-embedded professional development. In addition, research (Gallimore, Ermeling, Goldenberg, & Saunders 2009; Stoll, Bollam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2009) on professional learning communities emphasized the formation of teacher teams, a structure that supports collaboration and increases teacher capacity.

**Professional Learning Communities.** In their review of literature on PLCs, Stoll, Bollam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2009) discussed the benefits of teamwork and building teacher capacity. They defined capacity as a blend of teachers' internal feelings and organizational structures:

Capacity is a complex blend of motivation, skill, positive learning,

organizational conditions and culture, and infrastructure and support. Put together it gives individuals, groups, whole school communities and school systems the power to get involved in and sustain learning over time. (p. 221)

While there is abundant research about the benefits of PLCs, the PLC concept and its many benefits are not new. Bullough's (2007) inquiry into the origins of professional learning communities demonstrated that PLCs are rooted in the Eight-Year Study, led by Ralph Tyler in 1934. Bullough promulgated the benefits of teacher teamwork and collaboration, an unexpected outcome of the Eight-Year Study:

As schoolteachers more and more found themselves called upon to participate in policy discussions and program reform, administrators began to grapple with the implications of democracy as a guiding philosophy of education. Teacher study groups and curriculum councils became common practices, with decentralization of authority and new responsibilities delegated to teachers. (p. 171)

Bullough (2007) reported that Ralph Tyler's innovative leadership began when he was appointed to lead the Committee on Evaluation in 1934. The purpose of the committee was to facilitate collaboration and gather and discuss data that could be useful in informed decision-making. This work was structured using several study-sponsored meetings and six-week-long summer workshops. Tyler and others leading the commission questioned how teachers would work together to solve situation specific problems. To accomplish this, Tyler and his staff encouraged experimentation and research on implementation to emphasize the value of validity over reliability about these data. Tyler later referred to these efforts as action research (Bullough, 2007).

Tyler's Eight-Year Study (Bullough, 2007) revealed that reforms involving teacher development were reliant upon conditions that support teacher growth (p. 174). Bullough documented the similarities that PLCs shared with the work of teachers during the study led by Tyler. Among these similarities, the following five factors emerged as important dimensions from the Eight-Year Study: (1) supportive and shared leadership, (2) shared values and vision, (3) collective learning and application of the learning, (4) supportive conditions, and (5) shared personal practice (p. 174). These dimensions would later provide the framework for PLCs. In addition, cultural features, including a foundation of trust and building relationships among teachers, was critical to the development of PLCs (Bullough, 2007).

While Bullough's inquiry revealed that PLCs have historical roots that remain important today, Dufour and Eaker (1998) popularized the establishment of PLCs in schools. PLCs were considered organizational structures that supported a strong culture for teacher learning and improvement because they provided "the most promising strategy for sustained substantive school improvement" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. xi). Dufour and Eaker (1998) defined PLCs as an environment created by educators "that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone" (p. xii).

The findings of the research that McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) conducted echoed similar tenets regarding what Dufour and Eaker (1998) believed were important regarding PLCs:

In a vibrant learning community, teachers' practice and standards for students' learning are more in sync, in marked contrast to the variability one finds along the corridors of many American schools. Practice, traditionally teachers' private domain, moves into the public space of the learning community. As practice is "deprivatized" common understandings and expectations for practice promote coherent practices within and

across grade levels. Teachers will be hampered in their efforts to integrate new ideas into their practice and deepen their work if their school operates on a contrary course or according to different professional norms. (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 7)

Gallimore, Ermeling, Goldenberg, and Saunders (2009) expanded the PLC knowledge base by investigating school-based inquiry teams. Four operational conditions were critical to sustain teacher learning teams and foster collaboration: job-alike teams, trained peer facilitators, the use of inquiry-focused protocols, and stable settings (Gallimore, Ermeling, Goldenberg, & Saunders, 2009). In addition, certain “learning team framework elements” (p. 548), such as goals, indicators, assistance, and leadership were characteristic of school based inquiry teams. The teamwork and collaboration that resulted, according to Gallimore et al. (2009) improved student performance and refocused teachers on their own practice rather than relying on the influence of external factors.

Despite the popularity (Dufour & Eaker, 1998) and importance of establishing PLCs, some researchers (Hord & Sommers, 2008) cautioned that “the professional learning community label has preceded the concept” (p. 2). Hord and Sommers (2008) warn that PLCs sometimes “miss the mark” (p.2) in terms of their purpose. While the intention of PLCs was to create the opportunity for collaboration and reflection, PLCs sometimes focus on managerial issues rather than strategies that directly impact achievement. Hord and Sommers (2008) contended that it is the ongoing support and careful study of relevant subject matter that distinguishes PLCs. In addition to clearly defining the purpose of PLCs, other researchers (Cranston, 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Sigurdardottir, 2010) warn that establishing PLCs is made more complex because of varied definitions of PLCs. The varied definitions make improving teacher and student learning difficult (Cranston, 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Sigurdardottir, 2010).

Secondly, principals are left to define PLCs on their own, adding to the lack of clarity in defining PLCs.

The lack of clarity in defining PLCs stems from the fact that they exist in a variety of settings, each with its own unique climate and culture (Hord & Sommers, 2008). School-based professional learning communities span grade levels, academic departments, and whole schools (Hord & Sommers, 2008). While these settings may possess their own climate and culture, one commonality exists that is agreed upon by many authors (Cranston, 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Sigurdardottir, 2010), and that is, that professional learning communities provide a “social life” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 5) for the transmission of information, creating new understandings for teachers through discussion and reflection. The social life that PLCs provide can be explained further by social learning theory (Wenger, 1998).

**Social Learning Theory.** Although there are many varied definitions of PLCs, social learning theory (Wenger, 1998) provides a frame of reference for understanding PLCs. Social learning theory provided a foundation for communities of practice, a concept closely related to PLCs. Communities of practice emerged through the collaborative work of Lave and Wenger in 1991 (as cited in Wenger, 1998). Wenger explained that communities of practice involved groups of individuals with a common concern or passion for something they do that learn how to do it better through regular interaction. This concept solidified the importance of organizational structures that could support teacher collaboration. Wenger contended later that communities of practice also represented “the social fabric of learning organizations” (p. 253). He discerned that communities of practice rested on four assumptions:

1. We are social beings.
2. Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises.



3. Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world.
4. Meaning—our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful—is ultimately what learning is to produce. (Wenger, 1998, p. 4)

In addition to these assumptions, he believed learning as participation was the primary focus of this theory. Social participation as a process of learning hinged on the following elements:

1. Meaning: a way of talking about our ability, individually and collectively.
2. Practice: a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.
3. Community: a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence.
4. Identity: a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and created personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities. (Wenger, 1998, p. 5)

Wenger believed that communities of practice existed everywhere: at home, in schools, at work, and in recreational activities. He also believed that individuals belong to several communities of practice at one time. This concept has implications for individuals working together in schools. Wenger explained that individuals, communities, and organizations are interconnected, adding that learning, contributing, and refining are integral to the effectiveness and sustainability of communities. The same could be said about principals, teachers, and students working together in schools. Individuals engage and contribute to the community with the hope of creating meaningful practices that add to the overall value of the school.

Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning, the work of Dufour and Eaker (1998), and Bullough's inquiry into the Eight-Year Study and PLCs (2007) provide rich foundation for understanding the importance of teamwork and collaboration, two overarching characteristics of PLCs. This work also implies the important role culture plays in the establishment of PLCs.

Schools' inattention to culture has been a major flaw in past efforts to improve schools (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. xvii). Dufour and Eaker (1998) suggested four recommendations for principals working to shape culture (1) articulation of shared values, (2) creation of structures that facilitate reflective dialogue, (3) communication of symbolic stories, and (4) attention to celebration (p. xvii). They also articulated that organizational structures and culture must be considered equally and that building a positive culture is hard work and needs constant attention. PLCs that blend organizational structure with culture, creating the best climate for improvement (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

In summary, the research and related literature discussed within the psychosocial and organizational workplace conditions sections provide some important points for principals to consider as they work to shape culture in their schools. Schools provide a context for the social interactions and professional learning opportunities that take place between principals, teachers and students (Johnson, 2006; Rosenholtz, 1989). The interactions that take place and the environment in which they occur have certain psychosocial effects on teachers, therefore, it is critical for principals today to understand the psychosocial effects that workplace conditions have on teachers.

Research (Drago-Severson, 2012; Johnson, 2006; Rosenholtz, 1989) has demonstrated that specific workplace conditions (such as supportive leadership practices, opportunities for collaboration, and the creation of a learning-oriented climate) affects teachers' motivation and

commitment towards their work. Workplace conditions also contribute to teachers' sense of community, certainty, and willingness to learn and collaborate with others (Johnson, 2006; Rosenholtz, 1989).

There are many features that ultimately influence the culture of a school (Johnson, 2006). Workplace conditions such as people, time, money, and structures that emphasize teamwork and collaboration, must be strategically managed by principals to achieve successful outcomes in their schools (Miles & Frank, 2008). Principals who successfully manage resources and organizational structures in their schools reap benefits including increased teacher-student relationships, teacher learning, and overall school improvement (Kraft & Paypay, 2014). These benefits are enhanced further when principals attend to their schools' vision and mission simultaneously (Johnson, 2006).

The vast research on PLCs provides understandings about the situation-specific setting in which principals' and teachers' work. PLCs offer promise by providing a structure that strategically unifies people, time and resources. PLCs can also build overall capacity and engender trust among participants. These attributes of PLCs, in turn, contribute to the formation of a positive school culture.

In conclusion, positive school cultures are the result of thoughtful, supportive leadership and workplace conditions that attribute to the motivation and commitment of staff. The behaviors and social interactions that teachers exhibit through their interactions with others ultimately shape culture in schools (Hongboontri, 2014). For principals to be effective, they must be able to read and understand the cultural conditions in their schools (Johns, 2006). Their perceptions about school culture will inform their decisions about how they establish the conditions

necessary to further shape school culture. The next section presents research and related literature that seeks to inform principals about certain aspects of school culture.

### **Current Understandings of School Culture**

The final section of this review discusses the significance of school culture, how it is defined and measured, and the barriers that prevent establishing a positive school culture and begins by punctuating the key role of the principal in developing strong cultures.

The principal's role in shaping collaborative school culture is critical for continuous school improvement (Habegger, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). According to Habegger (2008), a positive school culture underlies many of the components of successful schools. Principals build positive school cultures by empowering teachers, having professional dialogue, and valuing students and the community (Habegger, 2008). In addition, principals must also establish workplace conditions that support shared norms and teacher collaboration (Rosenholtz, 1989). Because of the intangible nature of school culture and the many varied definitions, the literature that follows presents some school culture definitions that have evolved over time.

### **Significance and Definitions of School Culture**

School leadership literature (Blase & Blase, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003) strongly asserted that effective principals employed leadership practices that fostered professional norms and collaboration. The combination of these conditions increased teacher and student learning and indirectly shaped school culture (Danetta, 2002; Kwakman, 2003; Newman, Rutter, & Smith, 1989).

Despite the identification of conditions that shape culture, there are many varied definitions of the concept that historically came to the fore in the 1960s. Scholars have offered definitions of school culture that range from simple to complex. According to Bower (1966),

school culture is "the way we do things around here" (as cited in Deal & Peterson, 1999, p.3). A few years later, Geertz (1973) claimed that school culture is a web of significance in which we are all suspended (as cited in Deal & Peterson, 1999, p.3). Still others (Deal & Kennedy, 1982) asserted that school culture consists of shared beliefs and values that knit a community together.

At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Stoll (2000) claimed "school culture is one of the most complex, and important concepts in education" (p. 9). Other scholars (Schein, 2010; Deal & Peterson, 1999) noted that the unconscious operational nature of school culture makes it difficult to define. Everyday life in schools can be characterized through the identification, observation, and understanding of underlying feelings and mores that permeate the school environment. Deal & Peterson (1990) describe this cultural phenomenon in the following passage:

This invisible taken-for-granted flow of beliefs and assumptions gives meaning to what people say and do. It shapes how they interpret hundreds of daily transactions. This deeper structure of life in organizations is reflected and transmitted through symbolic language and expressive action. Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time. (p. 7)

The explanation of school culture by Deal and Peterson (1990) appeared to focus on social interactions between individuals. While more recently, Hongboontri (2014) added that culture consisted of the combination of individuals, their interactions and the environment. Hongboontri asserted that school cultures are "unique and distinctive" (p.66) and are created by people considered part of a school context that includes principals actively establishing a vision for their school.

Hongboontri's conception of school culture is substantiated by earlier research conducted by Scott, Jaffe and Tobe (1993). Scott et al. asserted that elements of school culture were shaped

by the vision, values, and beliefs demonstrated through day-to-day interactions and relationships within a school. The researchers believed that principals could understand their schools' culture through its history and founding essence and that opportunities, threats, and environmental factors influenced how culture was shaped.

According to Hongboontri (2014), principals have identified phenomena that impact school culture. These factors include individuals, instructional practices, and organizational structures that provide the setting for teachers' work. The complexity of these phenomena make school context unique and complex. As a result, principals face challenges in shaping culture within their schools (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Defining and shaping school culture is essential, however, especially since school culture impacts ideas about how teaching and learning are manifested in the classroom (Elmore, 1996).

Leadership, individuals, and context influence school culture. School culture in turn, indirectly influences teachers' work within schools (Elmore, 1996). Organizational behavior theory adds to the understanding of school culture by providing a broader insight about how individuals function within an organization and the meaning that they create as a "workplace community" (McLaughlin, 1993, p. 99).

Schein (2010), an organizational theorist, expanded upon definitions of school culture by enhancing previous definitions of school culture. Schein asserted that school culture consists of "patterns of basic assumptions that can be invented, discovered, or developed by a group as it learns to cope with problems" (p. 6). Culture, according to Schein, emerged from the interactions between individuals and asserted that these patterns of cultural assumptions are considered valid over time and are then taught to new members as the way to perceive think and

feel in relation to those problems. These assumptions and perceptions are shaped further by the school environment, or context (Hongboontri, 2014; Scott, Jaffe, &Tobe, 1993).

Earlier in this chapter, Johns (2006) defined context as “situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables” (p. 386). Johns noted an existing gap that researchers in the organizational behavior field have not fully addressed: the impact that culture can have on individuals and groups within an organization. As a result, he contended that opportunities and constraints are shaped by both the cultural and organizational complexities within organizations.

One perspective that Johns offered about context, based on his definition, was that context represent a “force field” or “tension system” (p. 387) that is comprised of opportunities and constraints. The organizational behavior and functional relationships between variables are dependent upon culture. Within the context of a school, these variables are the teachers, students, and administrators who must navigate the complexities that are brought about by “force fields” and “tension systems” (Johns, 2006, p. 387). The navigation of these is what creates opportunities and/or constraints (Johns, 2006).

Johns (2006) made the case for understanding culture as it related to organizational behavior. His claim was that if researchers do not understand social situations, then they will not understand person-situation interactions. Johns’ claim implied that certain contextual variables impact person-situation interactions. Some other organizational behavior researchers (Capelli & Sherer, 1991) concurred with Johns: “what is unique about behavior in organizations is presumably that being in the organization--the context of the organization--somehow shapes behavior, and it is impossible to explore that uniqueness without explicit consideration of

context” (p.97). This notion of context is informative, especially for school principals working towards creating a collaborative culture in schools. Furthermore, Johns’ assertions about context lead one to believe that principals must be mindful of the context of their schools and understand that the uniqueness of school contexts presents situational opportunities and constraints for staff.

While organizational behavior theory has added to the clarity of defining school culture, other research (Drago-Severson, 2012) referenced the interchangeable terms that are sometimes used to describe school culture. Drago-Severson (2012) learned that the principals in her study used the terms climate and culture interchangeably. The terms climate and culture were differentiated based on Drago-Severson’s understanding that climate referred to the environment in a school and culture referred to the norms, values, and beliefs of those within the school.

Drago-Severson (2012) explained further that school climate differs from school culture and that climate represents “perceived environmental factors that impact behavior--and thus may be more amendable to influence and change” (p. 6). While climate appeared to be more malleable, Drago-Severson contended that a balance is needed between the differentiated supports offered to teachers as adult learners and the challenges that are specific to the context. Creating a collaborative, learning culture required principals to recognize that adult learning is developmental and were influenced by the contextual challenges within their schools.

Principals who were successful in helping teachers develop greater interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities resulted in those teachers being better able to manage the complexities of teaching and learning (Drago-Severson, 2012). Drago-Severson’s (2012) findings are suggestive of the need for professional community, one of three conditions needed to build strong school cultures (Louis & Kruse, 2009).



Up to this point, the significance and definitions of school culture have been discussed. The literature presented has provided understandings for principals as they attempt to read and shape culture in their schools and identified six factors that can be used to measure school culture (Gruenert, 2005). Research (TELL Mass Survey, 2012) has indicated that principals view their schools' culture more positively than teachers. Therefore, measuring a school's culture will provide additional data to support principals' initial perceptions and inform steps towards school improvement. What follows is a discussion of one approach to how school culture can be measured.

### **Measurement of School Culture**

Gruenert and Valentine (1998) investigated the relationship between school culture and student achievement across 81 Indiana schools. Their work was built on the premise that the evolution of teacher collaboration with a focus on student learning resulted in both a collaborative culture and student success. Measuring a school's culture was an important first step towards school improvement. Gruenert and Valentine assessed culture using a School Culture Survey they developed. The survey measured six factors of school culture that included (1) collaborative leadership, (2) teacher collaboration, (3) professional development, (4) unity of purpose (5) collegial support, and (6) learning partnership. The collaborative leadership factor measured the degree to which school leaders established, maintained, and supported collaborative relationships with and among school staff. The teacher collaboration factor measured the degree to which teachers engaged in constructive dialogue that furthered the educational vision of the school and the professional development factor measured the degree to which teachers valued continuous personal development and school-wide improvement. The fourth factor, unity of purpose, measured the degree to which teachers worked toward a common

mission for the school. Collegial support examined the degree to which teachers worked together effectively. The sixth factor, learning partnerships, measured the degree to which teachers, parents, and students worked together for the common good of students (Gruenert, 2005, p. 48).

### **Barriers to Collaborative School Cultures**

The major focus to this point has been on understanding and measuring school culture. It is widely known that collaborative cultures result in increased student learning. As leaders work to shape collaborative cultures; however, their work does not always yield positive results (Hargreaves, 1994). Sometimes cultures develop in schools, forming barriers towards developing a positive learning oriented culture (Hargreaves, 1994). He identified characteristics of cultures that are the antithesis of collaborative. Furthermore, he described these cultures as “balkanized” (p. 213) and “contrived” (p. 195), noting that different kinds of collaborative cultures can work to divide groups of teachers into insulated and competing sub-groups within schools. Balkanization is characterized by:

Patterns mainly consisting of teachers working neither in isolation, nor with most of their colleagues as a whole school, but in smaller sub groups within the school community, such as secondary school subject departments, special needs units, or junior and primary divisions within the elementary school. (p. 213)

Hargreaves (1994) also mentioned that balkanized cultures have four additional qualities. These qualities include (1) low permeability, meaning that teachers belong to one subgroup, and what teachers believe in and learn within that subgroup can be vastly different from members of another subgroup; (2) high permanence, described as balkanized sub-groups that are static over time; (3) personal identification that is developed as balkanized groups create identity constructs

specific to their subgroup; and (4) political complexion that relates to the dynamic of power and self-interests within subgroups of teachers. These characteristics support the fact that balkanization has negative educational consequences, especially as “imbalances of power and status between tightly bound groups make it difficult for teachers to reach common agreement in areas that threaten their career opportunities, resources or conditions of work” (p. 215).

Collaboration and collegiality are necessary to overcome balkanized cultures, especially if teachers are to grow as professionals (Hargreaves, 1994). Hargreaves (1994) warned, however, that “contrived collegiality” (p. 208) is a form of collaboration that results when leaders impose unwanted managerial control. Hargreaves explained that, “in conditions of contrived collegiality, teachers’ collaborative working relationships are not spontaneous, not voluntary, not development-oriented, not fixed in time and space or predictable” (p. 195). Instead, contrived collegiality was the result of compulsory, administratively regulated mandates in which teachers were persuaded to work together. The most negative aspect of contrived collegiality was that it was a “safe administrative simulation of collaboration” (p.196) replacing the spontaneity of teacher-generated collaboration.

I believe that it is possible to overcome the barriers that prevent the development of a positive school culture. While obstacles, such as balkanization and contrived collegiality, may seem toxic to a school’s culture, these obstacles are not impossible to overcome. Clearly, there is promise in creating positive cultures that support teacher collaboration and collegiality. Principals may have greater success in shaping a positive culture in their schools when they understand how culture emerges, how it can be measured, and how barriers impede the development of a collaborative culture.

### **Conclusion**

This review of the literature documented the influence that school leadership and workplace conditions have on collaborative school culture. Several studies of various leadership behaviors and approaches demonstrated the effects of these on principal/teacher relationships. In addition, studies on psychosocial and organizational workplace conditions revealed the social nature of the school environment and the effects of this environment on teachers. Well-documented research also discussed the organizational conditions that leaders can shape to enhance a positive culture. Finally, the literature on school culture clarified the concept of culture and identified some of the barriers that principals may face as they work to shape a positive school culture. These three bodies of literature--leadership, teacher workplace conditions, and school culture--provide a foundation for this study and should inspire further inquiry. Such an inquiry could address several essential questions:

1. Is there one type of leadership approach or a combination of approaches that are correlated with a strong school culture?
2. Do different school environments or contexts require different approaches?
3. Which workplace conditions do principals identify as important to the culture of their schools?
4. Which workplace conditions attributed to a collaborative culture do principals feel they are most able to shape?
5. What perceptions do they have about the culture in their schools, and how do they think teachers perceive this culture?

Chapter Three describes a study designed to investigate principals' perceptions about collaborative school culture. Chapter Three will restate the purpose of the study and delineate

the methodology used to uncover principals' perceptions, practices, and workplace factors associated with a collaborative school culture.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to better understand how principals perceive and shape collaborative culture in their schools. More specifically, it examines two key factors--leadership approaches and workplace conditions--with respect to the development of collaborative school cultures in elementary, middle, and high schools. There is a growing body of research indicating the importance of the principal's role in shaping school culture (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005). Although the literature suggests that culture plays an important role in overall school improvement, there are challenges related to how culture is defined within different school contexts.

The issue of school improvement is complex (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005; Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitch, 2010). Although recent reforms were intended to improve student outcomes, reform initiatives such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), have been detrimental to school culture (Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitch, 2010). Collaborative school culture, according to educational literature (Deal & Peterson, 1999), has been cited as an essential element in school improvement.

Researchers (Bullough, 2007; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Drago-Severson, 2009; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Little, 1982; Rosenholtz 1989; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999) have examined the link between leadership, collaborative school culture, and school improvement; the consensus is that social and organizational structures that support productive collegial relationships within schools are two factors critical to establishing a collaborative school culture.

While the need for collaborative cultures in schools is clear, (Anderson, Leithwood, Louis, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Berman & McLaughlin, 1975; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Little, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1989) there is not one consistently accepted definition of school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The vast differences in school contexts make the concept of culture difficult to define (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Schein, 2010).

This study sought to reveal understandings about principals' perceptions of school culture and the relationship between their perceptions and the practices they use to establish collaborative cultures. Through the investigation of leadership approaches and workplace conditions, this study attempted to identify key findings for principals to consider in the development of collaborative school cultures.

Four research questions guided this study:

1. How do principals perceive collaborative culture in their schools?
2. To what degree do principals believe their leadership practices influence collaborative school culture?
3. What psychosocial and organizational workplace conditions do principals associate with a collaborative school culture?
4. What barriers do principals identify in establishing collaborative cultures in their schools?

I served as the “key instrument” (Creswell, 2014, p. 185), or researcher, to address the four research questions that served as the focus of this study. Creswell (2014) elaborates about the role of qualitative researchers in the following statement:

Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data such as interview observations, documents, and audiovisual information rather than rely on a single data

source. Then the researcher reviews all the data, makes sense of it, and organizes it into categories or themes that cut across all data sources. (p. 184-185)

To collect multiple forms of data, this qualitative study used a sequential explanatory mixed methods design grounded in a phenomenological approach. The sequential explanatory mixed methods design is defined as an approach to inquiry that involves collecting quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2014). Creswell explains that the mixed methods design integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem. According to Creswell and Clark (2011), the sequential explanatory design obtains quantitative results and attempts to explain them in more detail, “especially in terms of detailed voices and participant perspectives because little is known about the mechanisms behind the trends” (p. 151).

The design of this study is explained in the sections that follow. An overview of the design, selection of participants, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis used in this study are described in the major sections. The limitations and delimitations of this study, as well as the methods used to establish validity, are also discussed. A summary concludes this chapter.

### **Overview of the Research Design**

A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was used for this study. The mixed methods design incorporates both quantitative and qualitative phenomenological strategies. The phenomenological approach is centered on generating meaning based on the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2014). The phenomenological strategies used in the study align with a constructivist worldview. The intent of the constructivist worldview is that the researcher makes sense of the meaning that others have about the world (Creswell, 2014).

Following the review of literature, I determined that a sequential mixed methods



explanatory design would provide the best variety of data and depth of understanding based on its two-phase design. Many of the studies discussed in Chapter Two relied upon the use of surveys and questionnaires to collect qualitative data.

Creswell's (2014) explanation of the mixed methods approach provides a rationale for the use of this approach. He asserted the two-phase mixed methods approach allows the researcher to collect quantitative data during phase one. Phase One was initiated using a rigorous, random quantitative sampling method to complete the Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D). Random sampling is described as giving "each individual in the population an equal probability of being selected" (Creswell, 2014, p. 158). Purposeful selection was then used for the second qualitative phase (Creswell, 2014). During purposeful selection, participants were chosen to participate in the telephone interviews. The interview protocol (see Appendix E) was designed to gather more in-depth data that could explain the results of the survey. Creswell (2014) states that, "the overall intent of this design is to have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results" (p. 224).

Phase One of this study consisted of the use of a quantitative, closed-response survey, the Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D), designed to gather demographic data to help categorize the perceptions that principals reported about leadership and collaborative school culture. The demographic information collected described respondents' gender, age range, years as a teacher, years as a principal, type of school, and number of students their schools serve. The survey also gathered principals' initial perceptions of collaborative culture within their schools, and it investigated the leadership practices principals attributed with shaping a collaborative culture. The results of Phase One informed the researcher's choice of interview participants for Phase Two, which sought to gather qualitative data that would help to explain the results of the

survey in greater depth.

Phase Two was qualitative in nature and consisted of an interview protocol (see Appendix E). I developed the interview protocol based on the results of the survey. The interview protocol was designed to generate a deeper understanding of the perceptions measured in the survey and the lived experiences of the study participants. This portion of the study embodied the phenomenological approach, which “focuses on understanding the lived experiences of individuals around a phenomenon. Furthermore, individuals are selected who have experienced the phenomenon and they are asked to provide data often through interviews” (Creswell, 2013, p. 122). The phenomenological approach relies on the meaning derived from the perceptions and experiences of principals who participated.

In summary, this mixed method explanatory sequential study used a survey instrument and interviews across a range of levels, from elementary to high school.

### **Participants and Setting**

The participants chosen for phase one of this study were randomly selected from a list of 1,773 public school principals that the researcher acquired by contacting the department of education planning and research at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). According to data obtained from DESE, there are approximately 1800 public schools across the state. These urban, suburban, and rural schools represent three levels: elementary, middle and high school. I used the following process to ensure that a random selection of 250-300 participants, or 14% to 16% of public elementary, middle, and high school principals, were gathered. I emailed all 1,773 principals and invited them to participate in the study. A consent letter (see Appendix B) and a survey link were part of the email. Participants’ willingness to complete the survey resulted in a random selection. Emailing all public-school

principals in Massachusetts resulted in a random sampling of elementary, middle, and high school principals and provided an opportunity to gather a wide variety of perceptual data using a researcher-designed survey.

There were 261 responses to the Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D). Most respondents were females, working in suburban schools, with 250-500 students. They ranged in age from 41-60 with 4-10 years of experience as principals, and had 6-20 years of experience as classroom teachers prior to their administrative roles.

The following efforts were made to ensure the anonymity of study participants and to maintain confidentiality. I coded the survey responses and used initials for interview data. Also, data were kept in a password-protected computer.

### **Instrumentation**

I designed the instruments used for this study, which consisted of a Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D) in Phase One and a telephone interview protocol (see Appendix E) in Phase Two to collect data for this study. This section describes how the instruments were designed.

The Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D) was developed by me and included three sections: a demographic section designed to gather contextual information from participants, a school culture section aimed at gathering principals' perceptions of the six domains of school culture, and a section with 13 Leadership Indicators. There was one open-response question at the end of the survey and one question that asked respondents if they would be willing to participate in a telephone interview.

The demographic section of the Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D) consisted of seven questions. The multiple-choice questions were designed to gather geo-

demographic information about respondents. Respondents were asked to select one answer for each of the following questions:

- Which of the following describes your school: rural, urban, suburban, charter?
- How would you describe the size of your school; less than 100 students, 100-250, 250-500, 500-800, 800-1100, more than 1100?
- What grade levels does your school currently serve; K-12?
- How long have you been a principal at your current school; 1-3 years, 4-10, 11-20, more than 20 years?
- How many years were you a classroom teacher before becoming a school principal: never taught in the classroom, taught less than 5, taught 6-10, taught 11-20, taught more than 20 years?
- Please indicate your age range: under 30 years of age, 30 to 40 years of age, 41-50 years of age, 51-60 years of age, over 60 years of age?
- Please indicate your gender: male, female.

The second section of the Modified School Culture Survey consisted of 28 School Culture Indicators. I obtained permission from Gruenert and Valentine (1998) to use their School Culture Survey (see Appendix C) to collect data for this study and adopted 28 of the 35 School Culture Indicators on the survey. Respondents' perceptions about collaborative culture in their schools were measured using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Gruenert and Valentine's (1998) School Culture Survey (see Appendix C) was selected because it measures key domains of school culture: collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose, and learning partnership. These domains are substantiated by research that was presented in chapter two and

are considered important conditions for the establishment of school culture. Furthermore, the Gruenert and Valentine's (1998) School Culture Survey (see Appendix C) was conducted across eighty-one elementary, middle, and high schools in the state of Indiana and was deemed valid and reliable.

The third section of the Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D) contained 13 Leadership Indicators. I designed eight of the Leadership Indicators based on the findings of research (Blase & Blase, 1999; Sheppard, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990) presented in Chapter Two. Five additional Indicators were adapted from Gruenert's and Valentine's School Culture Survey (see Appendix C). Respondents were asked to rate the 13 Leadership Indicators based on the degree to which they believe they were important for shaping a collaborative culture. Respondents used a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*of little importance*) to 5 (*very important*).

The last question on the Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D) asked respondents to list any additional factors they believed contribute to a collaborative school culture. Finally, I included the option for respondents to indicate their willingness to participate in a follow up telephone interview.

A pilot study was conducted using the survey described earlier. The pilot study included five participants across elementary, middle and high school levels. These participants were not included in the larger study. No modifications were made to the survey instrument based upon the results of the pilot study.

The survey responses informed the development of the questions on the telephone interview protocol (see Appendix E). The use of these varied instruments served to triangulate the data; thus, adding validity to the study. According to Creswell (2014), one can:

Triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes. If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study. (p. 201)

The telephone interview protocol (see Appendix E) consisted of prompts that I read to principals to define school culture, psychosocial and organizational workplace conditions, collegiality, and collaboration. The prompts and questions were designed with the research questions in mind.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Quantitative data were collected during Phase One of this study: the survey phase. The survey was distributed to 1,773 principals via email on August 23, 2015. The email contained a letter of introduction and request for participation as well as a letter of consent (see Appendices A and B). I also provided a Survey Monkey link so that participants could respond to the survey online. The participants were allowed approximately two weeks to reply to the survey with a reminder email sent on August 30, 2015. A total of 261 principals responded to the Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix C).

In addition to completing the survey, 84 respondents indicated a willingness to participate in Phase Two, a follow-up telephone interview (see Appendix E). I emailed 30 respondents and scheduled telephone interviews with 10 principals during the month of December, 2015. Random sampling was used to select participants for Phase One, while purposeful selection was used during Phase Two of the data collection. Because this is a qualitative study, I used “maximum variation sampling” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). This approach consists of “determining some criteria that differentiates the sites or participants, and then selecting sites or

participants that are quite different on the criteria....increasing the likelihood that the findings will reflect different perspectives” (p. 157).

As I have explained, the study consisted of two phases. Phase One introduced the purpose for the Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D) and sought to gather demographic and perceptual information about collaborative school culture and leadership approaches. Phase Two consisted of the telephone interview (see Appendix E), using questions developed following analysis of the survey data. The purpose of the interview was to gather qualitative data that further explained principals’ perceptions about collaborative culture in their schools, leadership practices, and workplace conditions.

Phase One consisted of the random selection of survey participants through the electronic distribution of a consent letter (see Appendix B). The consent letter explained the purpose of the study and sought permission from the study’s participants. The Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D) included two main sections: a demographic section designed to gather contextual information from participants and a school culture section aimed at gathering principals’ perceptions of the six domains of school culture.

Phase Two consisted of open-ended questions developed after the collection and analysis of survey data. The questions asked during a fifteen to twenty-minute telephone interview (see Appendix D) were meant to generate a deeper understanding of the survey outcomes.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Descriptive analysis was used during Phase One to describe the data collected using the survey instrument (Creswell, 2014). Inferential analysis was used to understand the data collected during the telephone interviews (Creswell, 2014).

The data collected via the survey were analyzed using frequency distributions and

measures of central tendency: mean, median, and mode (Salkind, 2008). All survey responses were exported from Survey Monkey and entered into Microsoft Excel. Responses for School Culture and Leadership Indicators were then coded using an ordinal scale (Huck, 2008), meaning that the responses were assigned numbers to indicate an ordered position. Data were transferred to IBM SPSS (2016) where I calculated frequency distribution and cross tabulation analyses. Frequency distribution was used to describe the participants according to the demographic data collected (Salkind, 2008). Using frequency distribution, the percentages of certain participants fell into certain categories according to school location, size, number of years as the principal at that school, school level, number of years as a classroom teacher, age, and gender. In addition, I determined the central tendency, standard deviation, and variance of each item in the survey. Descriptive analysis of the survey results revealed important trends in the data and informed the development of interview questions. Cross tabulation analysis provided the opportunity to analyze School Culture and Leadership Indicators according to six subgroups: gender, age, years as principal, years as teacher, school type, and school size.

In Phase Two of the research, I asked permission to record telephone interviews (see Appendix E) with 10 participants. The recordings were transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word and then password protected. The text was later uploaded into MAXQDA (2016), a qualitative data analysis software program.

I analyzed the interview data using two methods to develop a system of codes: In Vivo coding and descriptive coding. In-Vivo coding is a method of coding that involves using short words or phrases from the participants own language (Salkind, 2013). Descriptive coding requires assigning labels to data that summarize passages in a word or short phrase (Salkind, 2013). I completed three rounds of coding using MAXQDA (2016). The first round of coding



generated 267 codes. Broader categories were identified during the second round of coding. The categories included leadership, culture, and workplace conditions. All 267 codes were clustered under these categories. During the third round of coding, subcategories were identified and themes emerged. These themes are presented and discussed in Chapter Four.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

I am an elementary principal and a former teacher. I have been an educator for 25 years. My experience has shaped my beliefs about leadership, workplace conditions, and culture; therefore I limited my comments during interviews to avoid potential bias. In addition, I addressed ethical concerns about anonymity and confidentiality at the beginning and throughout the interview process. At the beginning of the interviews I explained that our telephone interviews took place in a secure office and all conversations were confidential. I also explained that telephone interviews were being recorded and would later be transcribed and saved on a password protected computer. Participants were reminded throughout that they could opt out of the interview at any time.

Despite my best efforts to clearly understand and later interpret principals' reports, some ambiguity may have occurred. During data analysis, survey data and the themes that emerged were based on the varying perspectives of principal participants, ensuring the validity of this study.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The limitations and delimitations of this study include the size and location of the population that participated, the timeframe for data collection, telephone interview and prompts, and my own bias as a researcher.

#### **Limitations**

There were few external conditions that limited the scope of this study. Some considerations, however, needed to be made to keep the study manageable. The limiting conditions were the size and location, timeframe, participants, and the effect of my own bias on the study.

**Size and Location.** The Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D) was administered to principals in Massachusetts only. As a result, 1,773 principals were asked to participate and 261 responded, representing a 14-16% response rate. This response rate may have been higher if I had included principals from other nearby states to participate in the survey. In addition, I only interviewed 10 principals during Phase Two. This sample size was relatively small and represented only 3% of survey respondents.

Because this study's sample size was small, the perceptual data collected represents only a fraction of the school principals in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The participants in the study currently serve as principals in public schools across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Therefore, the location in which the data were collected is a limitation because there may be aspects of collaborative school culture that are not represented.

**Timeframe for data collection.** Principals were given two weeks to respond to the Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D) and telephone interviews (see Appendix E) were conducted over a four-week period following the analysis of survey data. Because the data were collected over a short period of time, the data may not represent how principals' perceptions of collaborative school culture may change over time.

**Participants.** A major limitation in this study is that it focused only on perceptions that school principals hold about collaborative culture in their schools. No teacher perceptions were solicited.

**Telephone interview and prompts.** Telephone interviews (see Appendix E) were conducted to gather data during Phase Two because of the convenience for participants and myself. This is a limitation because face-to-face interviews at participants' schools may have resulted in more information. In addition to having conversations about collaborative culture, I would have been able to make observations.

The telephone interview protocol (see Appendix E) consisted of prompts that were read to participants before the interview questions. The purpose of the prompts was to define terminology associated with the study. By defining certain terminology, I may have guided what should have been unsolicited responses from the interview participants. There is a possibility that the prompts could have been a limitation since they served to focus participants' responses.

**Personal Bias.** My own bias as the key researcher presents another limitation that could potentially influence the outcome of this study. I currently work as an elementary principal in a public school. My job involves working closely with teachers, an assistant principal, and an assistant director of special education on all aspects related to student achievement as well as operating and managing a school. As a result, I have been mindful of my own subjectivity and bias regarding the influence of leadership and workplace conditions on school culture.

### **Delimitations**

I imposed certain parameters or delimitations on this study to limit the scope and keep the data manageable. The delimiting conditions were the size and location, timeframe, participants, and the effect of my own bias on the study.

**Size and location.** I did not limit the number of principals that I emailed to solicit survey responses, but I did include demographic questions on the survey to determine respondents' background according to gender, age, years as a principal, years as a teacher, school type, school

size, and grade levels served. As a result, I determined the number of participants from each subgroup and compared subgroups to response rates. Data were collected from principals in Massachusetts only, ensuring that only one set of state-wide guidelines and mandates were represented.

**Timeframe for data collection.** I imposed a two-week time frame for survey responses and conducted follow up interviews within two months following the survey. The reason for limiting the amount of time for survey responses was the declining rate of return after a two-week period. I conducted the 20-minute telephone interviews as soon after analyzing the survey responses as possible. I emailed potential interview participants and arranged a time for the interview within two months of the survey to maintain interest on the part of participants.

**Participants.** I was interested in the perceptions of principals only for this study; therefore, I did not include teachers or other staff members in the distribution of surveys or telephone interviews. I gathered a variety of perspectives from principals asking them to provide demographic information about themselves.

**Telephone interview and prompts.** I conducted telephone interviews (see Appendix E) because this was the easiest and most convenient way to communicate with principals who have very busy schedules. In addition, I provided prompts during the telephone interviews to focus participants' responses. I wanted to be sure that they understood certain terminology to respond accurately.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of Chapter Three was to provide a comprehensive overview of the study design and its rationale, beginning with an introduction that explained the purpose of the study, a description of study instruments, data collection, and data analysis. Included in this chapter is a

section that briefly discusses issues of trustworthiness, as well as validity and reliability. The chapter concludes by identifying limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter Four presents and discusses Phase One and Phase Two data and the associated findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how elementary, middle, and high school principals perceive and shape collaborative school cultures. I sought to gain a better understanding of principals' perceptions of their school's culture. In addition, the study sought to uncover practices principals employ to shape a collaborative school culture that aligns with their leadership vision and the needs of the school.

Four Research Questions examined principals' perceptions, actions, and school level forces that hinder or enhance collaborative culture in schools. Research Question One sought to understand how principals perceive the nature of collaboration and culture within their schools. Collaborative culture serves as a vehicle for school improvement. Therefore, it is necessary to understanding principals' perceptions of collaborative culture and how their perceptions influence leadership actions to overcome barriers and foster a collaborative culture. Research Questions Two through Four sought to gather data to explain principals' perceptions, to identify leadership practices, school level conditions, and mitigating factors that inhibit the establishment of a collaborative school culture.

Chapter Three described how the research questions were addressed in two phases. The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological design that involved surveying and interviewing public school principals in Massachusetts. Phase One data were collected using a modified version of Gruenert and Valentine's School Culture Survey (1998). The survey data were analyzed using IBM SPSS software (2016) and descriptive statistics were used to describe the results. Phase Two of the study focused on interviews with 10 principals representing a variety of demographic subgroups. Phase Two data were recorded and transcribed with interview

transcripts initially coded in-vivo and descriptively. Then, a second round of coding using MAXQDA software (2016) illuminated more patterns among the initial codes. The analysis of patterns and the themes that emerged provided substantial insight into principals' perceptions and actions related to collaborative culture.

Results gathered during Phase One and Phase Two are presented sequentially and organized according to Research Questions One through Four. Phase One data were analyzed and described using measures of central tendency. Tables and graphs are used to present the data visually. Phase Two data consists of narrative language and direct statements from interview transcripts that substantiate Phase One data. After analyzing the Phase One and Phase Two data for each research question, findings are presented.

### **Research Question One: How Do Principals Perceive Collaborative Culture in Their Schools?**

As a first step, it is essential to understand what perceptions and beliefs principals have regarding the collaborative cultures within their schools. This is important because principals' perceptions shape their beliefs and may also have an influence on the decisions they make and the practices they employ to foster collaborative cultures. Principals' perceptions about collaborative culture were gathered initially during Phase One using the Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D). A deeper understanding of principals' perceptions and descriptions of their lived experiences regarding collaborative culture were gathered during Phase Two interviews.

#### **Phase One**

The first section of the Modified School Culture Survey gathered respondents' demographic data. The second section of the survey consisted of 28 School Culture Indicators

that offered statements about aspects of collaborative culture. Respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed with indicators using a five-point Likert scale. The last question on the Modified School Culture Survey provided respondents the opportunity to provide any additional factors they believe foster a collaborative culture. The Phase One data collected from these three sections of the survey are presented and discussed.

**Demographic data.** School culture is difficult to define because each school has its own unique traditions, values, and beliefs. In addition, principals possess individual perceptions, levels of experience, and beliefs that influence the nature of collaborative culture. The first section of the Modified School Culture Survey was designed to gather demographic information about respondents that may help to explain how various beliefs, experiences, and school contexts may impact collaborative culture.

Demographic data were collected during Phase One as participants completed the Modified School Culture Survey. These data were gathered to determine if context affected principals' perceptions about collaborative school culture and how it is shaped. Seven demographic indicators were identified to obtain specific information about survey respondents. Principals were asked to indicate their gender and approximate age range, to report the number of years they had been in their positions, and to disclose how long they had been in the classroom before becoming principals. Finally, respondents were asked about the type, size, and grade levels served within their schools and to describe the communities in which the schools were located.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 illustrate data describing the demographic subgroups. Data describing the grade levels in respondents' schools is not reported because of the large variety and inconsistency of grade level configurations.



Table 1 shows the predominant gender and ages of those who responded to the Modified School Culture Survey.

Table 1

*Gender and Age Ranges of Survey Respondents*

Demographic Subgroup	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
<b>Gender</b>		
Females	165	63%
Males	93	36%
Total	261	
<b>Age Ranges</b>		
> 60	31	12%
51-60	95	37%
41-50	96	37%
30-40	35	13%
< 30	1	
Total	260	

The results presented in Table 1 show that almost twice as many females (165) than males (93) responded to the survey. In addition, principals in the combined age range 41-60 accounted for 74% of total survey respondents.

Table 2 shows data that describes the number of years respondents have been principals and classroom teachers.

Table 2

*Number of Years Participants Served as Principals and Years as a Classroom Teacher*

Demographic Subgroup	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
<b>Years as Principal</b>		

	1-3	102	39%
	4-10	121	47%
	11-20	25	10%
	> 20	9	3%
	Total	259	
<hr/>			
Years as Classroom Teacher	< 5	33	13%
	6-10	93	36%
	11-20	95	36%
	> 20	32	12%
	Never	6	2%
	Total	261	

Table 2 shows that almost half (121) of respondents reported that they had been principals for 4 to 10 years. Slightly fewer respondents (102) reported they had been principals for 1 to 3 years. At the same time, a combined total of 72% of respondents reported that they had been classroom teachers for 6-10 and 11-20 years prior to their administrative roles. The combined response rate indicating the number of years in the classroom is significant since it represents slightly more than two-thirds of all respondents.

The last two demographic questions sought to gather descriptive data about the type of community the school is situated in and the number of students the school serves. Those data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

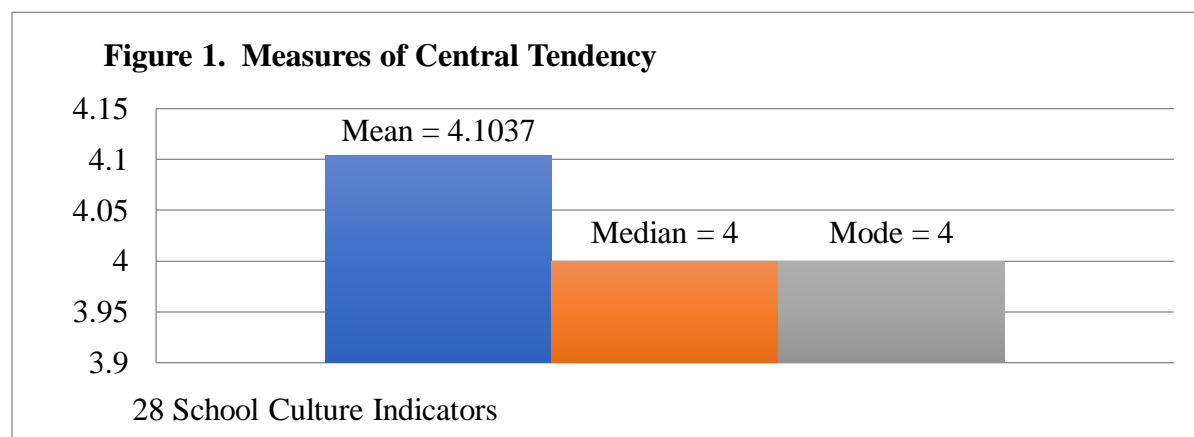
*Type of School and Size of School*

Demographic Subgroup	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
<hr/> Type of School		
Suburban	149	57%
Urban	72	28%
Rural	34	13%
Charter	3	3%
Total	260	
<hr/> Number of Students		
< 100	7	2%
100-250	27	10%
250-500	111	53%
500-800	80	30%
800-1100	18	6%
> 1100	16	6%
Total	261	

Table 3 shows that more than half of the respondents, 149, described their schools as suburban, followed by 72 respondents who described their schools as urban. The largest number of respondents, 111, reported that their student population ranged from 250 and 500 students, while 80 reported that their schools had 500-800 students.

The next subsection presents and discusses data collected in response to the second section of the Modified School Culture Survey. The second section consisted of 28 School Culture Indicators rated according to a five-point Likert scale. While the Modified School Culture Survey also contained 14 Leadership Indicators, the results from the 14 Leadership Indicators will not be examined until Research Question Two.

**School Culture Indicator ratings.** Respondents were asked to rate 28 School Culture Indicators indicating the degree to which they agreed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). These results are described in Figure 1 below according to measures of central tendency: mean, median, and mode (Salkind, 2008).



In Figure 1, overall principals chose 4 (*agree*) most often for the 28 School Culture Indicators, which is not surprising. An analysis of frequency counts revealed that principals' overall mean response was 4.1037. This response meant that although principals chose 4 (*agree*) most often, some also chose 5 (*strongly agree*). The median, 4.0 or (*agree*) is the choice that fell in the middle of all responses. Finally, the mode (4.0) was also the choice that principals selected most often.

**Most highly rated indicators.** It was interesting to discover that there were eight School Culture Indicators that were most significant in relation to the remaining indicators. While the overall mean for 28 School Culture Indicators was 4.1, eight indicators had a mean score of 4.10 or higher, indicating that respondents strongly agreed with those indicators. Table 4 lists the School Culture Indicators according to mean and standard deviation. Only the most highly rated School Culture Indicators with a mean greater than 4.10 are included in the table. Indicators 2,

4, 8, 11, 14, 16, 24, and 27 exceed that number.

Table 4

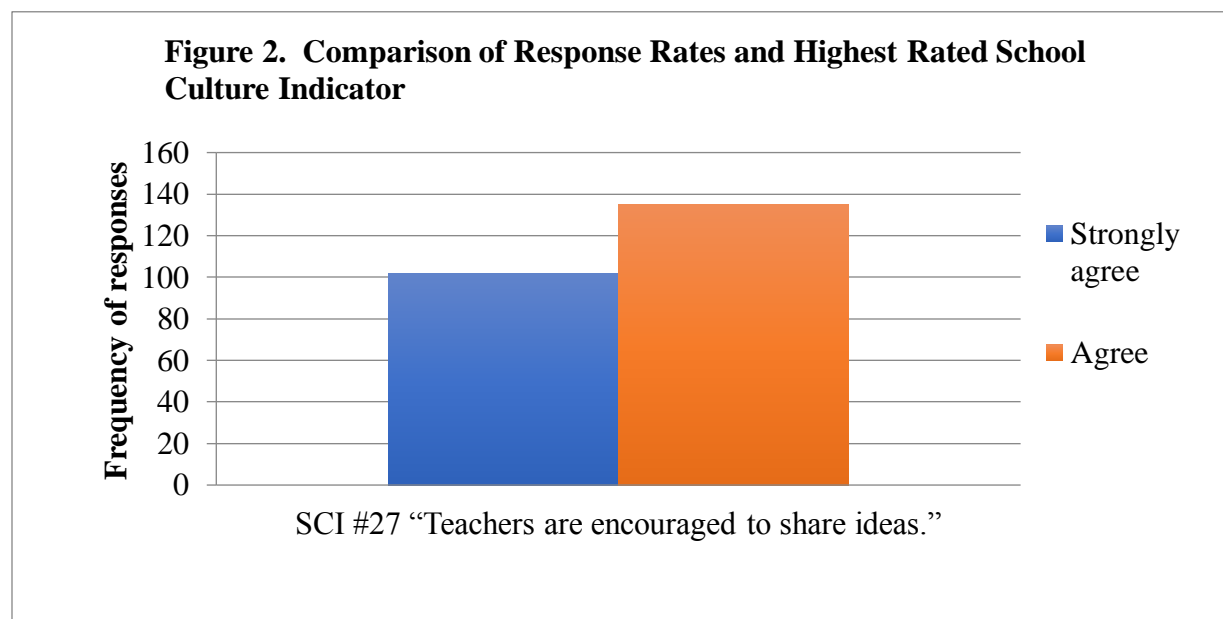
*Most Highly Rated School Culture Indicators with Mean Greater than 4.10*

Most Highly Rated School Culture Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Likert Range
SCI #2 Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects.	4.25	.740	1-5
SCI #4 Teachers support the mission of the school.	4.19	.608	1-5
SCI #8 Teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem.	4.29	.670	1-5
SCI #11 Teachers are involved in the decision making process.	4.20	.537	1-5
SCI #14 Teachers' ideas are valued by other teachers.	4.12	.624	1-5
SCI #16 Teachers are kept informed of current issues in the school.	4.29	.539	1-5
SCI #24 The faculty values school improvement.	4.23	.667	1-5
SCI #27 Teachers are encouraged to share ideas.	4.40	.525	1-5

The School Culture Indicators represented in Table 4 shed light on conditions principals believe are important to a collaborative school culture. The indicators presented illustrate the degree of significance that principals placed on them. School Culture Indicator 14, “teachers’ ideas are valued by other teachers,” had a mean of 4.12 indicating that most principals chose a Likert rating of 4 (*agree*). Indicator 27, “teachers are encouraged to share ideas,” emerged as an outlier, with a mean of 4.40. This finding is significant because a total of 237 (91%) respondents chose either 4 (*agree*) or 5 (*strongly agree*) in response to indicator 27.

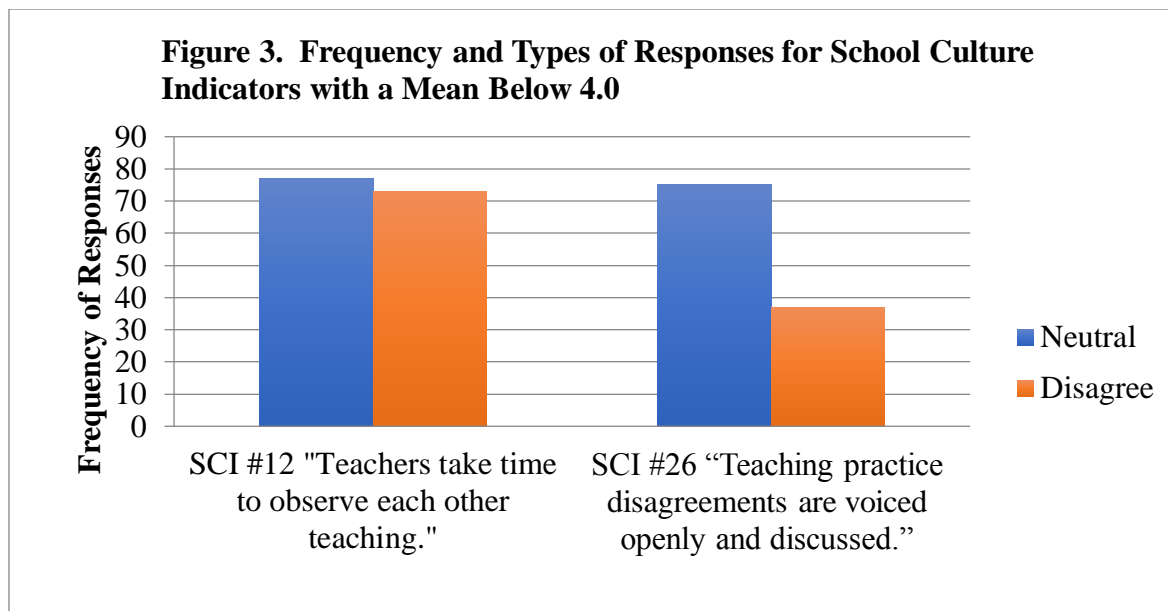
**Highest rated indicator.** School Culture Indicator 27 discussed earlier, “teachers are encouraged to share ideas,” emerged as the most significant indicator overall (mean 4.40)

because of the high number *agree* and *strongly agree* responses. Indicator 27 is a key finding because of the consensus among the respondents regarding its importance. Figure 2 illustrates the responses principals chose for School Culture Indicator 27.



The graph in Figure 2 shows the degree to which principals chose *agree* and *strongly agree* in response to the highest rated School Culture Indicator 27, “teachers are encouraged to share ideas.” One hundred thirty-five principals (52%) chose *agree* and 102 (39%) chose *strongly agree*. The fact that almost all principals *agree* and *strongly agree* (91%) with Indicator 27 is not be surprising since “encouraging teachers to share ideas” is at the heart of a collaborative school culture.

**Indicators below the mean of 4.0.** Two additional School Culture Indicators appeared to be significant since the mean score fell below 4.0. Figure 3 below illustrates the frequency counts for Indicators 12 and 26.



As illustrated in Figure 3, 77 respondents (32%) selected 3 (*neutral*) while another 73 respondents (30%) chose 2 (*disagree*) more often than 4 (*agree*) for School Culture Indicators 12 and 26. The responses rates are not surprising since Indicator 12, “teachers take time to observe each other teaching” had a mean of 2.99.

School Culture Indicator 26, “teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed,” had a mean of 3.40 indicating that 75 principals (31%) chose 3 (*neutral*) while 37 principals (15.3%) chose 2 (*disagree*). Responses to Indicators 12 and 26 are considered noteworthy since both have mean scores well below 4.1.

**Comparison of key indicators to Gruenert’s findings.** The modified School Culture Survey used in this study was adapted with permission from Gruenert and Valentine (1998). Gruenert (2005) discussed the importance of the indicators on his School Culture Survey (1998) in relation to student achievement and overall school culture. Table 5 provides a comparison of indicators from Gruenert’s survey with a mean greater than 3.5 and the Indicators that have emerged as significant in this study (mean greater than 4.1).

Table 5

*Comparison of Gruenert's Indicators (mean>3.5) and Indicators in This Study (mean> 4.1)*

School Culture Indicator	Gruenert's factors with a mean > 3.5	Indicators in this study with a mean > 4.1
SCI #1 Teachers utilize professional networks to obtain information and resources for classroom instruction.	3.85	
SCI #2 Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subject.		4.25
SCI #4 Teachers support the mission of the school.	3.60	4.19
SCI #5 Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance.	4.00	
SCI #7 Teachers regularly seek ideas from seminars, colleagues, and conferences.	3.51	
SCI #8 Teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem.		4.29
SCI #9 The school mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers.	3.55	
SCI #11 Teachers are involved in the decision-making process.		4.20
SCI #14 Teachers' ideas are valued by other teachers.		4.12
SCI #16 Teachers are kept informed of current issues in the school.		4.29
SCI #17 Teachers and parents communicate frequently about student performance.	3.78	
SCI #19 Teachers are generally aware of what other teachers are teaching.	3.88	



SCI #24 The faculty values school improvement.	3.80	4.23
SCI #27 Teachers are encouraged to share ideas.	3.70	4.40

Table 5 illustrates the most highly rated indicators according to mean scores in this study and the study that Gruenert (2005) conducted. Gruenert reported that the most highly rated indicators were 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 17, 19, 24, and 27, with a mean greater than 3.5 and a range of 3.0 to 3.5. The most highly rated School Culture Indicators in this study were 2, 4, 8, 11, 14, 16, 24, and 27. These indicators had a slightly higher mean score, greater than 4.1, and a range of 4.1 and 4.4.

Gruenert (2005) explained that he grouped and labeled all indicators on the School Culture Survey (1998) according to his knowledge of collaborative school culture. From these groupings, Gruenert proposed the following six factors based on the groupings: (1) collaborative leadership, (2) teacher collaboration, (3) professional development, (4) unity of purpose, (5) collegial support, and, (6) learning partnership. An examination of the most highly rated indicators revealed that participants in both studies believed that different factors relevant to collaborative culture were important.

In this study, Factor 1, “collaborative leadership,” emerged as most significant while in the study conducted by Gruenert (2005), Factor 4, “unity of purpose,” appeared to be most significant to a collaborative school culture. Factor 1 and Factor 4 were determined to be the most significant to respondents because these two factors had three of the most highly rated School Culture Indicators associated with them. Respondents in this study chose School Culture Indicators 2, “teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects”; 11, “teachers are involved in the decision-making process”; and 14, “teachers’ ideas are valued by other teachers,” most often. These indicators were associated with Factor 1, “collaborative

leadership.” In the study Gruenert conducted, respondents chose three different, highly rated indicators most often. Indicator 5, “teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance”; 19, “teachers are generally aware of what other teachers are teaching”; and 27, “teachers are encouraged to share ideas,” were associated with Factor 4 “unity of purpose.”

Despite the differences noted previously, one major similarity was the survey items that were associated with Factor 3, “professional development.” Gruenert (2005) indicated that School Culture Indicator 1, “teachers utilize professional networks to obtain information and resources for classroom instruction”; 9, “teachers regularly seek ideas from seminars, colleagues, and conferences”; and 24, “teachers maintain a current knowledge base about the learning process,” were attributed to “professional development.” Comparatively, the results of the Modified School Culture Survey indicated that items 16, “professional development is valued by the faculty,” and 24, “teachers maintain a current knowledge base about the learning process,” were most important for Factor 3. The differences between the most highly rated indicators and their associated factors and the indicators associated with Factor 3 in each study suggest that respondents’ professional roles may have shaped their perceptions and influenced their responses. Gruenert elicited responses from teachers; whereas, this study sought to gather data from principals.

**Summary.** Although the survey results presented thus far were discussed according to frequency counts, an important preliminary finding must be noted: principals believe that their leadership practices facilitate collaborative interactions with staff and lead to an overall collaborative culture. Three factors related to Gruenert’s (2005) description of collaborative leadership provide the rationale for this preliminary finding. These indicators are Indicator 11, “teachers are involved in the decision-making process”; Indicator 16, “teachers are kept

informed of current issues in the school”; and Indicator 27, “teachers are encouraged to share ideas.” While Table 4 illustrates the most highly rated indicators that respondents chose, a deeper understanding of the survey data was sought through crosstab analysis.

### **Crosstab Analyses of School Culture Indicators and Demographic**

**Descriptors.** Crosstab analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS software (2015) to compare 28 School Culture Indicators with six demographic subgroups. The purpose of the comparison was to uncover patterns of beliefs and identify differences among principals in six subgroups that completed the survey. Tables are used in the following sections to illustrate data that describe the frequency and types of responses gathered from respondents. In addition, a discussion of the frequency and types of responses to the most highly rated School Culture Indicators (mean > 4.1) and Indicators with a mean below 4.0 amplifies significant findings.

Crosstab analyses were conducted to compare School Culture Indicators and six subgroups: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) years as a principal, (4) years as a teacher, (5) school type, and (6) school size. More than 50% of respondents described their schools as suburban with 250-500 students, indicating that there was only one descriptor in the school type and school size subgroups; therefore, Tables 6 and 7 do not include school type and school size in the comparison of School Culture Indicators. There were a total of 28 School Culture Indicators on the Modified School Culture Survey. Only eight of the Indicators emerged as the most significant, with a mean greater than 4.1. An average of 60% of respondents in each subgroup chose 4 (*agree*) in response to the most highly rated School Culture Indicators. The next two subsections present and discuss the results of cross tabulation analyses comparing subgroups, the most highly rated School Culture Indicators, and the School Culture Indicators with a mean below 4.0.

*Comparison of most highly rated School Culture Indicators and four subgroups.* Table 6 presents data comparing responses across four subgroups: (1) gender, (2) age, and (3) years as principals (4) years as teachers to the most highly rated school culture indicators. Again, the comparison of suburban schools and schools with 250-500 students is not represented in Table 6. There were 20 missing responses within all subgroups.

Table 6

*Comparison of Four Subgroups, and Most Highly Rated School Culture Indicators (Mean > 4.1)*

Most Highly Rated School Culture Indicators (Mean >4.1)	Frequency and Percentage of Agree Responses within Subgroups (> 60%)							
	Gender		Age		Years as a Principal		Years as a Teacher	
	Female	Male	41-50	51-60	1-3	4-10	6 -10	11-20
SCI #4 “Teachers support the mission of the school.”	94 62%	56 62%	57 64%	64 70%	55 61%	75 64%	54 64%	56 61%
SCI #11 Teachers are involved in the decision-making process.	101 66%	63 70%	63 71%	60 67%	54 61%	87 74%	57 68%	66 71%
SCI #14 Teachers’ ideas are valued by other teachers.	93 61%	53 59%	66 74%	53 58%	55 61%	71 61%	46 54%	62 68%
SCI # 16 Teachers are kept informed of current issues in the school.	93 61%	57 64%	59 66%	59 64%	51 57%	78 67%	56 66%	54 59%
SCI #24 The faculty values school improvement.	85 55%	57 64%	63 71%	53 60%	47 52%	47 52%	47 55%	62 67%

Data in Table 6 illustrate that the frequency of responses ranged from 52% to 74% across four subgroups. The gender subgroup consisted of 152 females and 89 males. Male respondents

(70%) agreed slightly more often to Indicator 11, “teachers are involved in the decision-making process,” than females (66%). Despite this minor difference, males and females agreed more often with Indicator 11 than any of the other Indicators in Table 6.

There was a more significant difference in the response rates for Indicator 24, “the faculty values school improvement.” Males (64%) agreed more often than females (55%), representing a difference of nine percentage points.

Next, the response rates for two age groups (41-50 and 51-60) ranged from 58% to 74% for respondents (180) between the ages of 41 and 60 years of age. Respondents between the ages of 41-50 (74%) agreed with Indicator 14 “teachers’ ideas are valued by other teachers” at a rate that was 16 points higher than respondents between the ages of 51-60 (58%). This difference indicated that School Culture Indicator 14 was the most significant indicator within the age subgroup.

Table 6 also presented data from respondents who had been principals for 1 to 3 years (90) and 4 to 10 years (116). Again, the frequency of respondents who selected 4 (*agree*) ranged from 52% to 74%. Respondents who had been principals for 4 to 10 years (74%) agreed most often with Indicator 11, “teachers are involved in the decision-making process.” This response rate was 13 points higher than the 1- to 3-year principals, making it significant by comparison.

The last comparison in Table 6 illustrates response rates of those who reported they had been teachers for 6 to 10 (93) and 11 to 20 (95) years. The frequency with which respondents selected 4 (*agree*) ranged from 54% to 71%. Respondents who had been teachers for 11-20 years (71%) agreed most often with Indicator 11, “teachers are involved in the decision-making process.” In addition, more respondents in the 11-20 year group (68%) agreed with Indicator 14, “teachers’ ideas are valued by other teachers,” a result that was 14 percentage points higher than

those in the 6 to 10 year group. Almost the same gap was noted for Indicator 24, “the faculty values school improvement.” The 11-20 year respondents (67%) agreed more often than those who had been teachers 6-10 years, a difference of 12 percentage points.

As noted earlier, the frequency of respondents who chose 4 (*agree*) ranged from 52% to 74% in Table 6. Some observations worth noting are the Indicators that had comparatively low *agree* response rates. Females (55%) and respondents who had been principals for 1 to 3 years (52%) agreed the least with Indicator 24, “the faculty values school improvement,” while respondents 51-60 years of age agreed the least with Indicator 14, “teachers’ ideas are valued by other teachers.”

***Preliminary findings.*** The results of the comparison between four subgroups and the most highly rated School Culture Indicators varied slightly within each subgroup. Indicator 11, “teachers are involved in the decision-making process,” appeared to be the most important Indicator across the subgroups with a response rate of 70% or more in four of the eight subcategories.

There were four Indicators that differed notably within the subgroups. There was a difference of 13 percentage points between respondents who had been principals for 1-3 years (61%) and those who had been principals for 4-10 years (74%) in comparison to Indicator 11, “teachers are involved in the decision-making process.” In addition, a 14-point gap occurred between respondents who had been teachers for 6-10 years (54%) and those 11-20 years (68%) for Indicator 14, “teachers’ ideas are valued by other teachers.” Lastly, 11% more males (64%) than females (55%) and 12% more 11-20 year teachers (67%) than 6-10 (55%) year teachers agreed with Indicator 24, “the faculty values school improvement.” The differences raised questions: Did principals with more years of experience feel more confident about involving

teachers in the decision-making process? Did principals with more experience as classroom teachers reveal stronger perceptions about how the teachers in their schools valued other teachers' ideas? and Why did more males than females and those principals with more experience as classroom teachers agree that their faculty values school improvement?

***Most highly rated School Culture Indicators with less than 60% agree responses.*** Up to this point, cross tabulation analyses comparing subgroups and most highly rated School Culture Indicators have revealed that respondents selected 4 (*agree*) more than 60% of the time. Yet, some comparisons revealed that less than 60% of respondents chose 4 (*agree*) for the most highly rated Indicators. In cases where respondents agreed less than 60% with the most highly rated Indicators, they also strongly agreed with the same indicators. To clarify, Table 7 provides the total percentage of *agree* and *strongly agree* responses in comparison to the most highly rated School Culture Indicators and four subgroups: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) years as principal, (4) years as a teacher. The dashes in Table 7 represent where *agree* responses fell below the typical 60% response rate.

Table 7

*Comparison of Four Subgroups and Most Highly Rated School Culture Indicators (Agree < 60%)*

Most Highly Rated School Culture Indicators (Mean > 4.1)	Agree (< 60%) and Strongly Agree Responses within Subgroups							
	Gender		Age		Years as a Principal		Years as a Teacher	
	Female	Male	41-50	51-60	1-3	4-10	6 -10	11-20
SCI# 2 ““Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects.”	91%	87%	86%	92%	88%	90%	88%	90%

SCI# 8 “Teachers are willing to help whenever there is a problem.”	93%	90%	91%	91%	85%	94%	86%	97%
SCI# 14 “Teachers ideas are valued by other teachers.”							80%	92%
SCI#16 “Teachers are kept informed of current issues in the school.”	–	–	–	–	94%	–		
SCI# 24 “The faculty values school improvement.”	86%	88%	89%	88%	81%	–	–	–
SCI# 27 “Teachers are encouraged to share ideas.”	98%	99%	97%	99%	88%	98%	98%	98%

Table 7 shows that respondents selected a combination of 4 (*agree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*) at a rate that ranged from 81% to 99% across three subgroups. Clearly, Indicator 27 was the most significant Indicator in Table 7. Respondents (almost 100%) in all subgroups, except those who had been principals for 1-3 years (88%), strongly agreed with Indicator 27, “teachers are encouraged to share ideas.”

Additionally, there are two School Culture Indicators in Table 7 that were significant, according to the average of response rates. School Culture Indicator 8, “teachers are willing to help whenever there is a problem,” produced an average response rate of 91% across all subgroups, while Indicator 2, “teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grade and subjects,” produced an average response rate across subgroups of 89%.

Some other differences worth noting are the subgroups that had a gap of 10 percentage points or more. Principals who reported they had been teachers for 11-20 years (97%) agreed and strongly agreed more than those who had been teachers for 6-10 years (86%) with Indicator 8, “teachers are willing to help whenever there is a problem.” In addition, the 11-20 years as



teachers group agreed and strongly agreed with Indicator 14, “teachers’ ideas are valued by other teachers,” by a difference of 12 points over those who had been teachers for 6-10 years (80%).

***Preliminary findings.*** Indicator 27, “teachers are encouraged to share ideas,” emerged as the highest rated indicator across the six subgroups followed by Indicators 2 and 8. Almost 100% of respondents in the subgroups chose a combination of 4 (*agree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*) for Indicator 27, while the average of response rates for Indicator 2 and 8 was 89% and 91% respectively. These findings were not surprising when compared to the mean scores. Indicator 2, “teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects,” had a mean of 4.25 while Indicator 8, “teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem,” had a mean of 4.29. Indicator 27, “teachers are encouraged to share ideas,” was the highest rated Indicator overall with a mean of 4.4.

Surprisingly, 1 to 3 year principals (81%) had the lowest combined response rate to Indicator 24, “the faculty values school improvement,” while those who had been teachers for 6 to 10 years (80%) had the lowest combined response for Indicator 14, “teachers’ ideas are valued by other teachers.” These response rates indicated that respondents in the 1-3 years as principals and the 6-10 years as teachers may not feel as strongly about these Indicators (14 and 24).

***School Culture Indicators with a mean less than 4.0.*** School Culture Indicator 12 “teachers take time to observe each other teaching,” and Indicator 26, “teaching practices disagreements are voiced openly and discussed,” had an overall mean less than 4.0. The mean was lower than expected and indicated that less than 60% of participants chose 4 (*agree*) in response to Indicators 12 and 26. Table 8 presents the comparison of respondents who selected 4 (*agree*), 3 (*neutral*) and 2 (*disagree*) across four subgroups: (a) gender, (b) age range, (c) years as a principal, and (d) years as a teacher.

Table 8

*Comparison of Four Subgroups and School Culture Indicators (Mean < 4.0)*

		SCI #12 “Teachers take time to observe each other teaching.”			SCI #26 “Teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed.”		
		<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
Gender		42	49	46	77	77	25
	Female	28%	32%	30%	51%	51%	16%
		25	28	27	37	37	12
	Male	28%	32%	30%	42%	42%	14%
Age		20	30	30	42	28	15
	41-50	23%	34%	34%	47%	32%	17%
		25	30	29	39	31	16
	51-60	27%	33%	32%	42%	34%	17%
Years as Principal		24	36	21	35	33	15
	1-3	27%	40%	23%	39%	37%	16%
		36	32	41	61	31	19
	4-10	26%	27%	35%	52%	27%	16%
Years as a Teacher		24	27	25	33	28	17
	6-10	28%	32%	34%	39%	33%	20%
		29	28	29	50	31	8
	11-20	32%	30%	40%	54%	34%	9%

Table 8 demonstrates some subtle differences in respondents’ selection of 4 (*agree*), 3 (*neutral*), and 2 (*disagree*) responses across six subgroups in comparison to Indicator 12. All responses ranged from 23% to 40%, yet, the rate with which respondents selected 4 (*agree*), 3 (*neutral*), and 2 (*disagree*) averaged approximately 30%.

There were more notable differences in respondents' selections (*agree, neutral, disagree*) for Indicator 26, "teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed." The response rates for Indicator 26 ranged from 9% to 52%, a wider range than response rates for Indicator 12. Surprisingly, 52% of 4 to 10 year principals selected 4 (*agree*) and 51% of females selected 4 (*agree*) or 3 (*neutral*) more than twice as often as those (16%) who selected 2 (*disagree*) for Indicator 26. The female response rate indicated that teaching practice disagreement was a topic of discussion in their schools.

***Preliminary findings.*** The response rates across four subgroups in comparison to School Culture Indicator 12 "teachers take time to observe each other teaching" were unexpected since responses were spread across three Likert categories. What did these results imply? Did participants who read Indicator 12 feel that teachers themselves were responsible for finding the time to observe others? Did respondents feel that they needed to set up a structure in which teacher observations could occur?

At the same time, the results for Indicator 26, "teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed," yielded slightly different results. A majority of the respondents in four subgroups selected 4 (*agree*) or 3 (*neutral*) for this Indicator. A notably lower percentage of respondents disagreed with Indicator 26. A slightly higher percentage of respondents chose 4 (*agree*), suggesting the majority believes it is common practice to discuss issues openly. A slightly lower percentage of respondents chose 3 (*neutral*). Did these respondents feel that there could be underlying issues that staff may not be open to discussing? The next section presents data from the only open-response question on the Modified School Culture Survey. The open-response data builds upon and informs the descriptive statistics presented thus far.

### **Open-response Data**

The last question on the Modified School Culture Survey provided participants the opportunity to list any additional factors they believed were essential for a collaborative culture. Sixty-seven of 261 respondents answered the open-response question. Table 9 provides an overview of participants' demographic backgrounds. Frequency counts for the categories within each demographic subgroup are provided. The categories with the highest frequencies are indicated in bold. There were 67 total open-response submissions and two missing ones.

Table 9

*Open-response Frequency Counts According to Subgroup*

Gender		Age Ranges		Years as Principal		Years as Teacher		Type of School		Number of Students	
<b>Female</b>	<b>44</b>	< 30	-	1-3	17	< 5	9	<b>Suburban</b>	<b>45</b>	< 100	2
Male	23	30-40	6	<b>4-10</b>	<b>39</b>	6-10	22	Urban	14	100-250	5
		41-50	18	11-20	8	<b>11-20</b>	<b>27</b>	Rural	7	<b>250-500</b>	<b>36</b>
		<b>51-60</b>	<b>33</b>	> 20	3	> 20	9	Charter	-	500-800	14
		> 60	10							800-1100	6
										> 1100	3
Total	67		67		67		67		66		66

Table 9 shows that more females (44) than males (23) responded to the open-response question. The largest group of respondents indicated that they were between the ages of 51-60, and had been principals for 4-10 years. The respondents also reported that they had been teachers for 11-20 years prior to their administrative role. Finally, respondents in suburban schools (45) and schools with 250-500 students (36) answered the open-response question with the greatest frequency.

Data collected through the open-response question were analyzed using in-vivo and

descriptive coding during the first round of coding. Patterns emerged within the data once codes were assigned, making it possible to identify larger categories or themes.

### **Open-response Themes**

The themes that emerged with the highest frequency were expectations, time, and trust. These three themes each had eight responses from 24 participants. The first in-vivo theme, expectations, emerged directly from a response, “modeling what you expect from stakeholders.” Four other themes--norms and protocols, resources, building relationships, and collaboration--were identified similarly.

**Expectations.** Eight respondents offered factors related to expectations. The importance of transparent leadership and the positive intentions of teachers and administrators were among the responses. Other statements about expectations included ideas pertaining to collective responsibility among all school stakeholders and the importance of listening to teachers about initiatives and issues within the school. Finally, respondents who provided responses related to expectations felt that it was important for leaders to model what is expected from stakeholders.

**Time.** In eight statements related to time, respondents expressed sentiments about the need for time to discuss a school mission and vision. Other respondents discussed the importance of time for collaboration, including common planning time and time to look at data. Some felt that time was needed to support teachers’ goals related to student learning and that any time provided for collaboration should be held sacred.

**Trust.** Trust was also a major theme that had eight responses. Responses related to trust identified the changing role of principals and the challenges they face. One respondent offered that principals need to trust teachers because their responsibilities exceed what is expected of one person. Other respondents mentioned that trust and transparency between administrators and

teachers were important for all to feel safe and to have a sense of collaboration, not competition. Communication, empathy, and honesty were also associated with trust.

Some additional factors were listed by respondents, but with less frequency. Six statements were related to norms and protocols as well as resources, such as people, time, and money. Surprisingly, five statements were made about building relationships, but only four statements were made about collaboration.

***Preliminary findings.*** Females principals (41 to 60 years of age) who had been principals for 4 to 10 years and classroom teachers for 11 to 20 years responded most often to the 28 School Culture Indicators and one open-response question on the Modified School Culture Survey. Interestingly, seven major themes emerged from the open response data: expectations, time, trust, norms and protocols, resources, building relationships, and collaboration. The additional factors that respondents offered seemed to amplify the importance of the most highly rated School Culture Indicators. The seven themes that emerged from the open-response data speak to the school-level factors and conditions that are needed for collaborative cultures to be nurtured and supported in schools.

Survey respondents identified factors critical to the establishment of a collaborative school culture by responding to one open-response question on the Modified School Culture Survey. The next section provides data from interviews that were conducted following the administration of the survey.

## **Phase Two**

I purposefully selected ten principals with demographics that differed from the majority of the 84 survey respondents that agreed to be interviewed. The majority of survey respondents were females between the ages of 41-60. The respondents worked in suburban schools and had

been principals for four to 10 years; therefore, I tried to select interview participants who were males in urban or rural schools. I created and used an interview protocol (see Appendix E) to gather data that would describe the “lived experiences” of interview participants.

Telephone interviews were conducted over a two-week period. Following the recorded telephone interviews, audio recordings were transcribed and imported into MAXQDA (2015) software. Two rounds of coding were conducted. In-vivo and descriptive coding techniques (Saldana, 2013) were used to assign codes to principals’ lived experiences with regard to collaborative culture during the first round. A second round of coding revealed four larger categories: (1) leadership, (2) culture, (3) workplace conditions, and (4) barriers. Data were clustered according to these categories and will be presented according to the corresponding research questions in this chapter. In addition, Table 10 provides a demographic overview of respondents who completed the telephone interview.

Table 10

*Demographic descriptors for Interview Participants*

Gender		Age Ranges		Years as Principal		Years as Teacher		Type of School		Number of Students	
Female	5	< 30	-	1-3	2	< 5	3	Suburban	5	< 100	-
Male	5	30-40	-	4-10	7	6-10	2	Urban	3	100-250	1
		41-50	3	11-20	-	11-20	3	Rural	2	250-500	6
		51-60	5	> 20	1	> 20	2	Charter	-	500-800	3
		> 60	2							800-1100	-
										> 1100	-
Total	10		10		10		10		10		10

Table 10 presents demographic data that describes the principals (10) who agreed to participate in the telephone interview. I interviewed an equal number of males (5) and females (5). Most of the respondents were between the ages of 41-50 (3) and 51-60 (5) and had been principals for 4-10 years. Five respondents reported that they had taught for 6-20 years before becoming a principal. Half of the respondents are currently in suburban schools, and six reported that they have 250-500 students in their schools. The first interview question consisted of a prompt defining school culture:

School culture is often defined as the way we do things here. School culture emerges from the invisible taken-for-granted flow of beliefs and assumptions that give meaning to what people say and do. Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behaviors over time. (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 3)

I asked respondents the following questions following Deal's and Peterson's (1999) definition of school culture: How do you read the culture in your school? and Please describe your observations and understandings of the cultural symbols, interactions with staff, and existing beliefs within your school.

Based on my prompt, 10 interview respondents provided rich descriptions of their lived experiences with regard to how they initially perceived and shaped collaborative culture in their schools. Two rounds of coding revealed 11 themes:

- cultural change,
- fear and mistrust,
- influence of district culture,
- stagnant culture,



- fragmented culture,
- teacher apathy,
- low expectations, innovation, and rigor,
- invested staff,
- shifting versus shaping culture,
- walk-through observations, and
- dialogue.

The 11 themes were then grouped and organized into two categories: principals' initial perceptions of their school's culture, and strategies principals used to read culture in their schools. Table 11 illustrates the frequency of principals' responses according to the nine themes in Category 1. The two Category 2 themes are presented in Table 12 below.

Table 11

*Principals' Perceptions and Strategies Used to Read Culture.*

Category 1 Principals' perceptions

Interview participants	KR	PC	AC	DC	RM	JB	DT	DD	JP	PG
1. Cultural change		X		X		X				
2. Fear and mistrust		X				X				
3. Influence district culture					X				X	
4. Stagnant culture								X		
5. Fragmented culture			X							

6. Teacher apathy				X						
7. Low expectations, innovation, and rigor	X									
8. Invested staff										X
9. Shifting versus shaping culture		X								

Table 11 shows the frequency and variety of principals' descriptions of their schools' culture. Principals' responses were organized by theme in Category 1: "Principals' initial perceptions." While all 10 principals described initial perceptions they had about their schools' culture, their descriptions varied. One theme had the highest frequency: "cultural change" occurred three times, while "fear and mistrust" and "influence of district culture" occurred two times. Each of the remaining six themes in Category 1 had only one occurrence. Principals' descriptions that support the themes are included in the next section. The comments were transcribed verbatim and reflect the informal nature of peer-to-peer discussion. No grammatical adjustments were made.

**Cultural change.** PC, DC, and JB reported that they identified a need for cultural change. The principals expressed the emotions and activities included in effecting change.

PC advised, "If you can sort of be patient enough to not just come in and change to [sic] quickly--because it's too scary for teachers," while DC expressed that hiring new staff and implementing BSRI as a school-wide reading program both had a positive impact on the culture: "Yesterday, we became a model school...[we] worked hard to change instruction and [we were] willing to go to the professional development."

DC went on to describe how hiring staff allowed him to effect change by "hiring staff [a

guidance counselor and an assistant principal] who reflect things as I do, we want the best for our kids.

JB noted how certain organizational structures within her building needed change. She described the need to “start big and work your way down to the small increment of pieces.” JB spent “a tremendous amount of time” making changes to teacher schedules and student assessments. She reported that the changes resulted in a culture that “has gotten better and better. I feel the time is not wasted.”

**Fear and mistrust.** The short tenure of administrators in some schools influenced the overall culture. PC’s read on his schools’ culture was that staff seemed fearful of continuous administrative change. He explained the problem: “there was a principal here for only three years. She left and then another principal [was] here for three years. He left and then I came in. For a multitude of reasons there was mistrust between the faculty and administration.” JB described the evolution of trust as, “a long process. Trust is a two-way street and it’s ok to make errors...to try something new...to need help in their classrooms...and to say I don’t know everything.”

**Influence of district culture.** JP and RM reported that their schools’ cultures were reflective of the overall district culture.

JP asserted that his school had specific student-led programs “that have contributed to the positive overall school culture so that everyone has a common goal to work towards.” JP reported that the programs in his school were designed with the district’s five core values, and they “evolve every year into a theme of positive recognition for the students.”

RM explained the influence district culture has had on his high school. RM reported, “the district’s model is small school big family.” He explained that the model infers that “it’s not

just about the academics, people care about the kids, the kids care about their teachers...and that's a huge part of the culture where I'm at."

The aforementioned nine themes in Category 1 highlight the ways in which principals read their schools' cultures. In addition, there are two themes in Category 2 that describe strategies principals used to read their schools' cultures. These strategies and the frequency with which they were described are presented in Table 12.

Table 12

*Strategies Principals Used to Read Culture*

Category 2 Strategies principals use to read culture

Interview participants	KR	PC	AC	DC	RM	JB	DT	DD	JP	PG
10. Walk-through observations							X	X		
11. Dialogue		X	X							

Table 12 demonstrates that there were four principals who explicitly described how they went about reading the cultures in their schools. The strategies they described are "walk-through observations," and "dialogue." While only four principals explicitly described these strategies, the remaining six principals implied that they had come to understand their schools' cultures through observations, questions, and conversations.

**Walk-through observations.** PC mentioned earlier that principals need to get the "lay of the land" and build relationships in order to effect cultural change. DT observed her staff's interactions when, "every Friday different teachers provide breakfast in the teacher's room" and that she observes the "type of conversation they are having" and whether or not "they are talking about education, their classrooms? Professional development?" DT continued to explain that she knew the culture was positive if staff was "saying positive things about other teachers" or

“saying positive things about their children [and] wanting to come to school.”

DD corroborated that walk-throughs and observations were a viable way to learn about the culture: “You can tell just by the walking through and the overhearing and the observing interactions with kids how strong your school climate is how great it is.”

**Dialogue.** TC’s description implied that there is a strategic sequence to learning about school culture. TC believed that it was important to observe before having interviews or conversations with staff: “I made a quick assessment based on my observations and interviewing of staff on the summer that I arrived. I kind of took it from there so the culture was somewhat negative.” PC also reported that he learned about culture by “building relationships, by talking to people, and by asking [about] what is sacred and the areas people are more open to adjusting.” PC felt that it was important to “spend the majority of [his] first year sitting down with people and asking them questions and learning about them and taking an interest in how the school had gotten to this point.”

**Preliminary findings.** Consistent with the understanding that school cultures vary from one setting to the next, it was not surprising that there were nine themes related to how principals read their school’s culture. One theme that stood out as significant, as it occurred three times within 10 interviews, was “cultural change.” Embedded within this theme were many factors that principals identified as contributions to change. Comprehensive, school-wide initiatives, hiring, and professional development were a few of the major changes that were attributed positive results. In addition, school-level organizational factors, such as changes to teacher schedules and limiting student assessments, also had positive effects. Two important aspects related to effecting cultural change were gleaned from the data: the amount of time change requires, and the level of support staff needs to feel comfortable with change.

**Finding #1: The majority of principals agreed or strongly agreed that eight factors contributed to collaborative cultures within their schools.**

Principals responded to 28 School Culture Indicators (SCI) on the Modified School Culture Survey. The School Culture Indicators were statements about collaboration in schools. The responses resulted in the identification of eight key factors principals believe contribute to collaborative culture. Table 4 provides a summary of the eight most highly rated School Culture Indicators according to mean (4.12 to 4.40). The School Culture Indicators, or factors principals agreed or strongly agreed with, include (1) “opportunities for teacher to have dialogue and plan across grades and subjects,” (2) “teacher support for the mission of the school,” (3) “teachers willingness to help out whenever there is a problem,” (4) “involvement of teachers in the decision making process,” (5) “teachers valuing one another,” (6) “keeping teachers informed of current issues in the school,” (7) “faculty that values school improvement,” and (8) “encouraging teachers to share ideas.”

Most of the survey respondents were female principals (165) in suburban schools (149) between the ages of 41 and 60 (191). This group reported that they had been principals for 4 to 10 years (121) in schools with 250-500 students (111), and they had been teachers for 6 to 20 (188) years before becoming principals.

Most highly rated was School Culture Indicator 27, “teachers are encouraged to share ideas,” which had a mean of 4.40. Almost 100% of respondents chose a combination of 4 (*agree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*) for Indicator 27.

Although principals selected *agree* or *strongly agree* most often in response to the eight School Culture Indicators, there were two School Culture Indicators that had an overall mean below 4.0: Indicator 12, “teachers take time to observe each other teaching,” and Indicator 26,

“teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed.” Respondents’ choices ranged from 2 (*disagree*) to 4 (*agree*) for School Culture Indicator 12 and 4 (*agree*) or 3 (*neutral*) for Indicator 26. These findings suggest that principals’ perceptions may be that teachers do not have time in their day to observe others and that difficult conversations may sometimes be avoided.

Cross tabulation analyses were also conducted to investigate the comparison of School Culture Indicators with six subgroups. The crosstab analyses revealed the degree to which certain subgroups agreed more than others. What is interesting is that Table 6 shows that more males between the ages of 41 and 50 who have been principals 4 to 10 years selected *agree* in response to Indicator 11, “teachers are involved in the decision-making process,” to Indicator 16, “teachers are kept informed of current issues in the school,” and to Indicator 24, “the faculty values school improvement.”

In addition to the eight School Culture Indicators, seven major factors were identified as part of the only open-response question on the Modified School Culture Survey. The factors identified included (1) expectations, (2) time, (3) trust, (4) norms and protocols, (5) resources, (6) building relationships, and (7) collaboration. Three factors mentioned most frequently were expectations, time, and trust. Interestingly, the three factors and the most highly rated Indicators had similarities and suggested that certain conditions are needed for a collaborative culture. For example, time is needed if teachers are to have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects and trust is needed if teachers are going to be encouraged to share ideas.

**Finding #2: Principals’ perceptions influenced their desire to effect change within their schools.**

I asked principals to describe the initial perceptions they had about their schools' culture. Principals described their schools' culture in terms of overall atmosphere and improvements they thought were needed. Nine themes emerged from these discussions. Three principals clearly expressed that their initial perceptions inspired their desire to effect cultural change. PC reported that patience was needed to effect cultural change, especially since it could be "scary" for staff. In addition, JB described how she effected change organizationally by changing teacher schedules and student assessments.

Lastly, DC described how he implemented a comprehensive reading program and hired new staff with the hopes of improving instruction and professional development for staff. The descriptions of principals' desire to effect cultural change captured some of the aspects within schools that call attention to the need for cultural change, whether it is the process of change, as was the case for PC, or change for student improvement, as described by DC and JB.

Principals also identified school-wide initiatives and organizational factors that they considered positive contributors to cultural change. Comprehensive curriculum initiatives, hiring, professional development, changes to teacher schedules, and limiting student assessments also had positive effects. Two common threads within the cultural change theme were the length of time change requires and the comfort level of staff throughout the change process.

### **Research Question 2: To what degree do principals believe their leadership practices influence collaborative school culture?**

Research Question Two sought to gather data pertaining to principals' beliefs about their own leadership practices and the impact of those practices on collaborative culture. The data were gathered during two phases. Phase One data were collected in section two of the Modified School Culture Survey. Thirteen statements on the survey probed principals' perceptions about



their own leadership. The results are presented in this section using tables and graphs.

Phase Two data were collected using a self-designed interview protocol. During the interview process, principals were asked to describe specific leadership practices they use and the impact they believe these practices have on collaborative culture in their schools.

### Phase One Data: 13 Leadership Indicators

Phase One data for Research Question Two were collected using the second section of the survey Modified School Culture Survey. That section contained 13 Leadership Indicators, with 228 out of 261 participants responding.

Respondents were asked to rate the 13 Leadership Indicators according to a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*unimportant*) to 5 (*very important*). The results were analyzed using IBM SPSS software (2016) and described according to measures of central tendency, mean, median and mode (Salkind, 2008). A summary of the results is presented in Figure 4.

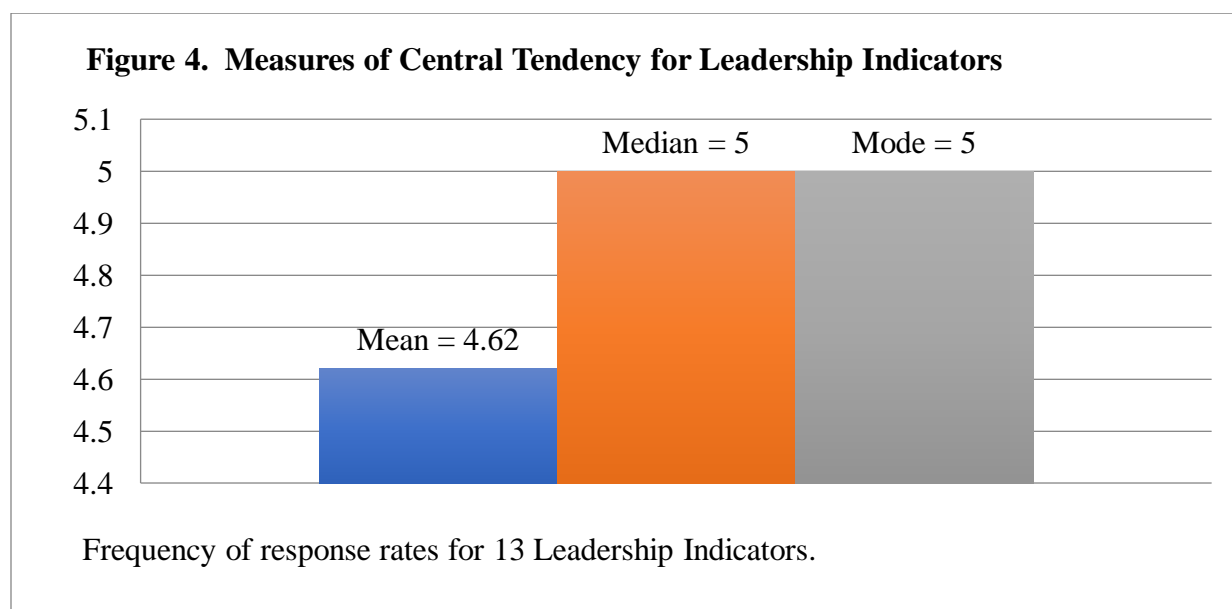


Figure 4 shows that the average mean for 13 Leadership Indicators was 4.62, indicating that overall respondents considered the statements about leadership to be *very important* more often than *important*. Furthermore, the median, or middle range of scores, and the mode, or the choice

selected most often, for Indicators was 5, implying that *very important* was selected most often

**Most Highly Rated Leadership Indicators.** Similar to the ratings given the School Culture Indicators discussed earlier in this chapter, respondents identified certain Leadership Indicators as more significant than others, based on mean scores. Table 13 shows six of the 13 Leadership Indicators that had individual mean scores above the average mean of 4.62

Table 13

*Most highly rated Leadership Indicators with a Mean Greater Than 4.65*

Most Highly Rated Leadership Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Likert Range
LI #1 Value teachers' ideas.	4.73	.46017	1-5
LI #2 Engage in dialogue with teachers.	4.80	.40909	1-5
LI #3 Frequently communicate expectations around school norms, beliefs, values, and goals.	4.66	.51118	1-5
LI #5 Foster professional relationships with staff.	4.77	.43158	1-5
LI #6 Promote professional involvement among staff.	4.93	.45185	1-5
LI #9 Protect instruction and planning time.	4.77	.41986	1-5

Table 13 shows Indicators 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 9 emerged as most significant among 13 Leadership Indicators on the Survey. The Indicators had mean scores ranging from 4.66 to 4.93, implying that respondents chose 4 (*important*) and 5 (*very important*) for these Indicators. Leadership Indicator 3, “frequently communicate expectations around school norms, beliefs, values and goals,” had the lowest mean (4.66) among the most highly rated Leadership Indicators; while Leadership Indicator 6, “promote professional involvement among staff,” had the highest mean of 4.93, meaning respondents chose 5 (*very important*) most often for this indicator. The remaining Indicators 1, 2, 5, and 9 had means that ranged from 4.73 to 4.80. Figure 5 illustrates the frequency with which respondents chose 4(*important*) and 5 (*very*

important) in response to Leadership Indicator 6.

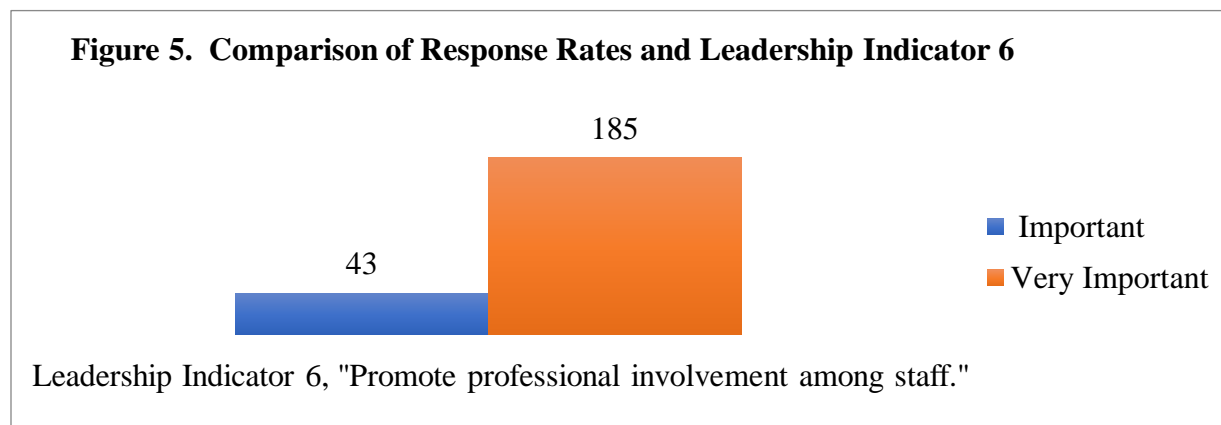


Figure 5 shows that respondents chose 5 (very important) for Indicator 6 more often than 4 (important). One hundred eighty-five (81%) of the 228 respondents felt that promoting professional involvement was critical to a collaborative culture, while only 43 (19%) chose 4 (important).

**Leadership Indicator with a mean below 4.0.** Indicator 11, “provide incentives for teachers’ professional learning,” had a mean of 3.83 making it the Leadership Indicator with the lowest mean. Figure Six illustrates the frequency and types of responses for Indicator 11.

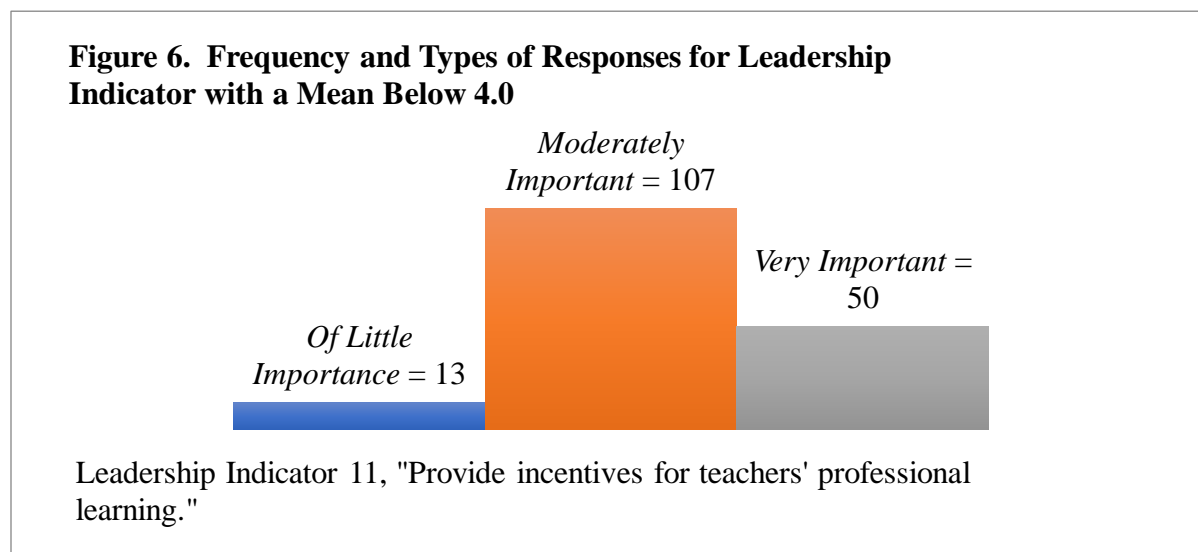


Figure 6 illustrates a total of 120 of the 228 respondents, or slightly more than half (53%), chose 3 (*moderately important*) and 2 (*of little importance*) in response to Indicator 11, “provide incentives for teachers’ professional learning.” The frequency of responses across the two Likert categories suggests that respondents do not consider teacher incentives to be critical to a collaborative culture.

Leadership Indicators 6 and 11 stood out as the least significant respectively with regard to collaborative culture. What follows is a cross tabulation analyses, comparing demographic subgroups with the six most highly rated Leadership Indicators.

**Crosstab analyses of Leadership Indicators and demographic descriptors.** The following subsections contain data that are the result of cross tabulation analyses. Crosstab analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS software (2016) to compare 13 Leadership Indicators and six demographic subgroups. Crosstab analysis was used is to identify patterns of beliefs among the smaller segments within each subgroup. Data are presented in tables according to the comparison of subgroups, with both the most highly rated Leadership Indicators and the Leadership Indicators with a mean below 4.0.

***Comparison of most highly rated Leadership Indicators and six subgroups.*** The first crosstab analysis compared 13 leadership indicators and six subgroups: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) years as a principal, (4) years as a teacher, (5) suburban schools, and (6) schools with 250-500 students. Tables 14 and 15 do not include the comparison of Leadership Indicators and suburban schools or schools with 250-500 students, since both of those subgroups had only one category. There were 228 principals who responded to this part of the survey. Of the 228 respondents, 146 were females and 82 were males. Within the age range subgroup, 168 total respondents reported that they were between the ages of 41-60. Half of the respondents were between the ages of 41-

50 (84), and half (84) reported that they were 51-60 years of age. Respondents (91) reported that they had been principals for 1-3 years, while 106 had been principals for 4-10 years. A combined total of 164 respondents were divided equally among those who reported that they had taught for 6-10 (82) years and those who had taught 11-20 (82) years. In addition, 131 respondents reported that they were principals in suburban schools, while 97 respondents reported that their schools had 250-500 students.

Table 14 shows the frequency with which respondents in four subgroups chose 5 (*very important*) for the most highly rated Leadership Indicators (mean 4.63).

Table 14

*Comparison of Four Subgroups and Most Highly Rated Leadership Indicators (Mean > 4.6)*

Most Highly Rated Leadership

*Very Important* Responses

Indicators (Mean > 4.6)

(> 70%)

	Gender		Age		Years as a Principal		Years as a Teacher	
	Female	Male	41-50	51-60	1-3	4-10	6 -10	11-20
LI #1 Value teachers' ideas.	105 72%	65 79%	60 71%	63 75%	69 76%	79 75%	62 76%	63 77%
LI #2 Engage in dialogue with teachers.	117 80%	67 82%	66 79%	71 85%	76 84%	83 78%	68 83%	64 78%
LI #3 Frequently communicate expectations around school norms, beliefs, values, and goals.	97 66%	56 68%	51 60%	59 70%	59 65%	72 68%	62 76%	49 60%
LI #5 Foster professional relationships with staff.	112 77%	66 80%	62 74%	69 82%	74 81%	80 75%	70 85%	59 72%

LI #6 Promote professional involvement among staff.	105 72%	58 71%	57 68%	64 76%	64 70%	77 73%	57 70%	56 68%
LI #9 Protect instruction and planning time.	113 77%	63 77%	66 79%	65 77%	74 81%	79 75%	68 83%	60 73%

Table 14 shows that, overall, respondents across four subgroups believed that the most highly rated Leadership Indicators were *very important*. The response rates for the Indicators ranged from 60% to 85%. What is striking, though, is that 70% or more of the respondents in all subgroups selected 5 (*very important*) in response to Leadership Indicators 1, 2, 5, 6, and 9.

Another point of interest in Table 14 is the difference in the response rates between 1 to 3 and 4 to 10 year principals and 6 to 10 and 11 to 20 year teachers for Indicators 2, 5, and 9. Although the difference in response rates for the Indicators was minor, 6 to 12 percentage points, questions arise regarding why these rates differed.

Eighty-four percent of 1-3 year principals chose 5 (*very important*) for Leadership Indicator 2, “engage in dialogue with teachers,” while only 78% of 4-10 year principals made the same choice. Respondents who had been teachers for 6 to 10 years selected 5 (*very important*) for Leadership Indicator 2, “engage in dialogue with teachers,” 83% of the time; while those 11-20 year teachers selected Indicator 2 78% of the time, representing a five-point difference.

In addition, respondents who have been principals 1-3 years selected 5 (*very important*) 81% of the time for Indicator 5, “foster professional relationships with staff,” as compared to the 4-10 year principals (75%). The response rate among those 6-10 year teachers (85%) who selected 5 (*very important*) was much greater than those 11-20 year teachers (72%) for Indicator 5, “foster professional relationships with the staff.”

Leadership Indicator 9, “protect instruction and planning time,” yielded “very important”

responses from 81% of 1-3 year principals, compared to 75% of the same responses from 4-10 year principals. Responses from those who had been teachers for 6-10 years (83%) outnumbered the responses from those who had been teachers for 11-20 years (73%) by 10 percentage points for Indicator 9, “protect instruction and planning time.”

Leadership Indicator 3, “frequently communicate expectations around school norms, beliefs, values and goals,” had response rates that were slightly lower than 70% in all but two of the groups. Respondents 51-60 years of age (70%), and those who had been teachers for 6-10 years (76%), were the only two groups to have greater than a 70% response rate for Indicator 3. Of note is that the response rates for 51-60 year olds and those who had been teachers for 6-10 years were 10 to 16 percentage points higher than the other groups for Indicator 3.

***Preliminary findings.*** Overall, respondents in all four subgroups selected 5 (*very important*) to demonstrate their beliefs about the influence of leadership on collaborative culture. While the response rates ranged from 60% to 85%, the majority of responses were 70% or above. An interesting observation was the variability in response rates for Indicator 3 and the differences between less and more experienced principals and teachers in response to Indicators 2, 5, and 9.

***Comparison of Leadership Indicators with a mean below 4.0 and four subgroups.***

Leadership Indicator 11, “provide incentives for teachers’ professional learning,” emerged as having a lower overall mean (3.83) than the other 12 Indicators. The results suggested that respondents did not feel that the Indicator was as critical to a collaborative culture. Table 16 shows the results of the crosstab analysis for the three subgroups and Indicator 11. Table 15 shows the results of the comparison of Indicator 11 and four subgroups: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) years as a principal, and (4) years as a teacher.

Table 15

*Comparison of Leadership Indicator 11 (Mean < 4.0) and Four Subgroups*

Likert Categories	Frequency of Subgroup Responses							
	Gender		Age		Years as a Principal		Years as a Teacher	
	Female	Male	41-50	51-60	1-3	4-10	6 -10	11-20
5 ( <i>Very Important</i> )	34	16	15	20	23	22	21	13
	24%	20%	18%	24%	26%	21%	26%	16%
4 ( <i>Important</i> )	34	16	42	37	38	53	36	36
	24%	20%	50%	44%	43%	50%	44%	44%
3 ( <i>Moderately Important</i> )	35	19	21	22	22	26	18	26
	24%	23%	25%	26%	25%	25%	22%	32%

Table 15 shows that the greatest percentage of respondents across all four subgroups selected *important* most often in response to Leadership Indicator 11, “provide incentives for teachers’ professional learning.” Response rates ranged from 20% to 50% for those who chose 4 (*important*), representing almost twice as many responses in some of the subgroups as compared to those who selected 5 (*very important*) and 3 (*moderately important*). I found it interesting that 20% of males and 50% of those ages 41-50 and 50% of 4-10 year principals selected 4 (*important*), and I wondered what would account for this difference.

***Preliminary findings.*** The results of the subgroup comparisons with Leadership Indicator 11 in Table 15 were not surprising. Respondents chose a combination of 4 (*important*) and 3 (*moderately important*) in response to Leadership Indicator 11, “provide incentives for teachers’ professional learning.” The results reflected the overall mean (3.83) and confirmed



respondents' beliefs that Indicator 11 was not as important to a collaborative culture as some of the other Leadership Indicators.

## **Phase Two**

Phase Two data were collected using a self-designed interview protocol (see Appendix E). Interview Question Two on the protocol provided a prompt explaining leadership styles and practices elucidated in the literature. Respondents were asked to describe the beliefs they had about their leadership and the impact it has on collaborative school culture. The survey data presented in the last section clearly indicate the degree to which respondents believe leadership influences a collaborative school culture. Interview data provided more explicit depictions of the impact that leadership has on collaborative culture. Fifteen themes emerged from the interview data following two rounds of coding:

- empathy,
- vulnerability,
- self-reflection,
- passion for leadership,
- a family first stance,
- being visible,
- communicating vision,
- setting expectations,
- establishing norms,

- empowering teachers,
- empowering students,
- having difficult conversations,
- providing teacher support,
- problem solving, and
- building relationships.

The 15 themes were then grouped and organized into two categories: personal qualities and leadership practices. Table 16 illustrates the frequency of principals' responses according to themes in Category 1: Personal Qualities.

Table 16

*Summary of Leadership Skills and Personal Qualities*

Category 1 Personal Qualities

Interview participants	KR	PC	TC	DC	RM	JB	DT	DD	JP	PG
Themes										
1. Empathy				X		X		X	X	
2. Vulnerability	X			X				X		
3. Self-reflection				X					X	
4. Passion for leadership			X	X						
5. Family first stance			X					X		

Table 16 illustrates the number of times respondents described their own personal qualities related to their leadership style. Principals discussed empathy and vulnerability most

often. Four out of 10 respondents described sentiments of empathy with regard to change and the importance of being vulnerable as a leader.

**Empathy.** Respondents described empathetic sentiments when asked about their leadership influences on collaborative culture. Examples of empathy were identified in respondents' broad statements. DD's and JB's expressions of empathy exemplified their understandings of others' feelings. DD's "motto is that I would never ask someone to do something that I wouldn't be willing to do myself. That's sort of how I live every day," while JB expressed similar sentiments, "I'm not going to ask them to do something I wouldn't do myself."

JP, DC, and DD also expressed empathy in statements that described their understanding of teachers' feelings with regard to change in leadership approaches, instruction, and teaching assignments. For example, JP described how he engendered feelings of safety by moderating his leadership approach and navigating the needs of his teachers: "I know going into team meetings that I am going to approach grade five differently than grade eight...instead of approaching everyone the same way to helping increase their comfort level."

DC explained how his leadership actions during the implementation of a new literacy program at his school helped him to "understand the pains teachers are going through in redesigning their classrooms and really changing their instruction." DC also stated that "going to the training with staff really makes a huge impact because now you are living the change with them."

DD described how coming to understand a teacher's feelings towards a change in assignment enlightened her and shaped her thinking as a leader:

The teacher just broke down. It was so powerful... That really shaped my own behavior... I'm probably going to be faced with the same problem next year and

I'm...trying not to stress anyone out or worry anyone that they are not going to have a job. They may need to move and that's going to be ok and I'll support them through I and I'll get them what they need.

**Vulnerability.** KR explained that overall, she wanted her staff to understand that, as a leader, “just being a human” was important. DC also admitted his initial vulnerability, stating that “when I took this job, I was afraid because it was a huge, huge change...but my biggest [fear] was trying to recognize the human side of teaching.” DC went on to say that he recognized that his staff, “[have] families and I wanted them to be comfortable here with me.”

DD expressed that her easy-going personality sometimes made her feel as though her staff were taking advantage of her. DD expressed her vulnerability in the following passage:

I will say that sometimes I've been taken advantage of in that regard as far as you know [my staff asking if they could] run out or [if they need] to take a half day surrounding their kids. So you know its striking a good balance, its getting people to understand “you know I'm good and that's my good nature please don't abuse my good nature.”

While empathy and vulnerability were the leadership qualities discussed most often, Table 17 shows that self-reflection, passion for leadership, and a family-first stance were also important to the principals I interviewed. Interestingly, personal qualities were implied as part of the discussions principals had about their leadership practices. Table 17 provides the frequency of leadership themes that principals reported in their depictions in Category 2: Leadership Practices.

Table 17

*Summary of Leadership Practices*

## Category 2 Leadership Practices

Interview participants	KR	PC	TC	DC	RM	JB	DT	DD	JP	PG
Themes										
1. Being visible				X	X					
2. Communicating vision				X					X	X
3. Setting expectations	X	X	X				X			X
4. Establishing norms		X								
5. Empowering teachers		X		X		X			X	X
6. Empowering students			X						X	
7. Having difficult conversations			X	X		X				
8. Providing teacher support								X		
9. Problem solving	X							X		X
10. Building relationships	X	X	X		X			X	X	

Table 17 shows that within the leadership practice category, three themes were described most often: building relationships, setting expectation, and empowering teachers.

**Building relationships.** Six principals expressed or, at a minimum, implied the importance of building relationships as a leadership skill. TC expressed that “the key is relationships...we’re in the people business, we’re helping to develop and grow young people into adults but to do so we have to have the relationships with the adults to make that happen.” KR and DD described the importance of building relationships with certain “informal leaders in the building.” KR went on to say that “if you spend good time harvesting and reaping those relationships, I think that it can help prevent some of the rumblings before they blow up.”

DD concurred with KR and added, “I have an amazing relationship with the union

president.” RM discussed the importance of having relationships with students as well as adults in the school, stating “We have 400 kids in this school. I certainly know all of the juniors and seniors. The sophomores I will know by the end of the year and the freshmen I am working on. I know almost every kid.”

JP described how he utilized his school campus to facilitate relationship building, stating, “We’ve added an outdoor fitness park...and it has been very well received. Some teachers come in before school and do things together, it has helped to build community factions within the school.”

Finally, PC described his carefully developed entry plan that included “listening to people [since it] shows a level of respect.” In addition, he emphasized the importance of “having an open door and having people feel comfortable to share good, bad or ugly.” PC believed that these practices engendered a climate of relationship building and helped developed trust: “trust is huge here, so I spent longer than I thought I would not really trying to implement anything, just doing the relationship building piece before shifting to identify what we could start to adjust.”

**Setting expectations.** Five principals discussed the importance of setting expectations in their efforts to shape a collaborative culture. TC explained that first and foremost, as a principal, you need to model the behavior that you are expecting for others.” He elaborated, claiming that it was important to, “[make] clear what [the] expectations were of the people that you work with.” TC also explained that setting expectations was not always easy:

I was doing things for people and I didn’t feel as though some of them were appreciative of those things that I was doing. So, I came on pretty strong and I made it clear to them that I can do things for everyone in this school.

TC concluded by expressing that when he was setting expectations, “you got to tell people both what you stand for and what you won’t stand for.”

PG also set expectations with the whole school in mind, stating that “the first thing we did was define the expectations for the entire building, for behaviors, and for interactions.” Her overall expectation was to have “all classroom teachers work with the parents to establish the expectations that are needed for students to be successful.” PG’s expectations also focused on student behavior, observing that “[students] hold the door for somebody else and if somebody drops something you help pick it up” and that “in the hallway [and in classrooms], [we or people] treat other people with respect.”

PC discussed his expectations simply, stating “I say to kids we have one rule and that rule is “do the right thing,” while KR reported that she has “really high expectations for our kids.” These expectations, according to KR, were based on beliefs about students reaching high levels of success, that “we do have the belief, or we’re moving really quickly to the belief that of all kids can and it’s our job to figure out how to get to this high level of learning and understanding.”

Lastly, DT, described that she framed her expectations based on “what’s important to me in the school community.” She explained that teachers know, “what I’m looking for in classroom observations: and that they “know what I value and what’s important for me.” DT also expected her teachers “to share what they value and what they want me to be looking for and things that are important for them.”

**Empowering teachers.** Five principals reported that empowering teachers influenced collaborative culture, especially in situations involving decision-making. Principals reported that giving teachers a voice in decision-making benefitted students, increased staff well-being, and

decreased staff resistance. DC reported that part of his overall vision included staff input. He stated very simply, “I wanted to give the faculty a voice.” PC concurred and added, “it’s just really important to give teachers a voice and, give opportunities for teachers to air their concerns or their grievances.” PC also identified the cultural shift that can happen when *all* [emphasis added] teachers have a voice in the decision-making process:

The key anywhere...is involving teachers in the decision-making process. If you can shift the focus of the group that’s on the fence and the group that’s gung ho... the naysayers eventually become outliers...they can stay on the outside or join everyone else that’s moving in a positive.

In addition to the cultural shifts that can occur when teachers are given a voice, principals also discussed the forum in which they are given opportunities to express opinions. PG and JP described how they shared leadership with teachers by establishing committees. PG stated that she “works by committee quite frequently.” She explained that “although many of the decisions such as, security protocols, emergency exiting from the building, setting up of our lunches are top down...many of the other decisions are decided on with input from both the classroom teachers and the interventionists.” PG concluded by stating that her “committees empowered teachers and resulted in equitable decisions that benefitted students.”

JP explained that “teacher led divisions have contributed to positive morale” in his school. He went on to say that “teachers have had hands on a lot of good decisions as far as what we’re doing academically for the students, as well as, their overall well-being.”

In addition to positive morale, JB reported that empowering teachers has increased problem solving and resulted in benefits for students “because the staff is taking part in probably 90% of the decision-making.” JB explained that “teachers weren’t happy with the curriculum



so...every year we've made changes to benefit the children." JB empowered teachers by "sitting down at staff meetings and talking about it, and working it out. I have a great staff and I'm happy with the decisions that they make."

**Preliminary findings for Phase Two data.** During 10 telephone interviews, I asked principals to discuss how they believed their leadership influenced collaborative culture and to describe their leadership behaviors, practices, and skills. Two categories resulted with accompanying themes. The first category focused on personal qualities and contained themes related to how principals described themselves and how they viewed situations with staff. The second category focused on leadership practices and contained themes related to how principals describe their practices in addressing school specific needs.

It was interesting to see that empathy, mentioned by four participants, and vulnerability, mentioned by three participants, emerged as the two personal qualities mentioned most often. Principals discussed the importance of "walking in others' shoes" and "understanding teachers' feelings." In addition, principals mentioned the following leadership practices: "setting expectations" and "empowering teachers" five times and "building relationships" six times. It was not surprising that "building relationships" was the theme mentioned most frequently.

**Finding # 3: The majority of principals believed leadership had a strong influence on collaborative culture.**

Principals strongly believe that their leadership influences collaborative culture as delineated by six Leadership Indicators on the Modified School Culture Survey. Principals selected 5 (*very important*) most often in response to the following statements about leadership: (1) Leadership Indicator (LI) 1, "value teachers' ideas"; (2) LI 2, "engage in dialogue with teachers"; (3) LI 3, "frequently communicate expectations around school norms, beliefs, values,

and goals”; (4) LI 5, “foster professional relationships with staff”; (5) LI 6, “promote professional involvement among staff”; and (6) LI 9, “protect instruction and planning time.” These six Leadership Indicators demonstrated individual means above the average mean of 4.65 for 13 Leadership Indicators.

Leadership Indicator 6, “promote professional involvement among staff,” emerged as the most significant Leadership Indicator overall. This Indicator had an overall mean of 4.93 signifying that respondents chose *very important* often for this Indicator. Yet, cross tabulation analysis showed that Leadership Indicator 2, “engage in dialogue with teachers,” had a response rate of 80% or more in 5 of 8 subcategories.

Table 14 also showed that a difference of 10 percentage points occurred within the age subgroup in comparison to Leadership Indicator 3, “frequently communicate expectations around school norms, beliefs, values, and goals.” The same difference occurred in the years as a teacher subgroup in response to Indicator 9, “protect instruction and planning time,” while a difference of 13 percentage points was noted for Indicator 5, “foster professional relationships with staff.”

One Indicator respondents believed was less important in the influence it had on a collaborative culture, Leadership Indicator 11, “provide incentives for teachers’ professional learning,” had an overall mean of 3.83. While few respondents (50 or 22%) saw this Indicator as *very important*, the majority (107 or 47%) felt that “providing incentives for teachers’ professional learning” was only *moderately important* in fostering a collaborative culture.

**Finding #4: Principals reported that personal qualities and school specific leadership practices influenced collaborative culture.**

Principals were asked to identify and describe their leadership practices and to discuss the impact they believe their practices have on collaborative culture. Principals reported two

personal qualities and three leadership practices they believed influence collaborative culture in their schools. Principals articulated a self-awareness of empathy and vulnerability as well as their ability to set expectations, empower teachers, and build relationships.

Principals' descriptions of empathy and vulnerability suggested that they were considerate of teachers' feelings regarding change in instruction and leadership. The personal qualities also made principals more approachable to their staff. One principal discussed the importance of being vulnerable in terms of "just being human" while other principals provided descriptions that characterized their empathy towards staff, such as "I would never ask someone to do something that I wouldn't be willing to do myself" or "I am going to approach grade five differently than how I approach grade eight. My own personal skills have helped me navigate [staff's needs] instead of approaching everyone the same way."

Principals also described how they set expectations, empowered teachers, and worked to build relationships. Principals attributed these practices most often to a collaborative culture. Principals described how they set high expectations, expectations for staff behavior, and expectations for teachers' interactions with families. In addition, principals described how they empowered teachers using committees, faculty senates, and teacher-led divisions. These structures provided teachers with the opportunity to have a voice regarding decision-making.

Lastly, principals described the importance of building relationships with students and staff as they sought to build relationships that influence overall culture and promote problem solving. TC captured the essence of building relationships, observing "we're in the people business, we're helping to develop and grow young people into adults but to do so we have to have the relationships with the adults to make that happen."

Principals identified two personal qualities: empathy, and vulnerability; as well as three

leadership practices: setting expectations, empowering teachers, and building relationships. The way principals expressed their personal qualities and the effects of these personal qualities on their leadership practice was interesting. In some of the descriptions, principals suggested that there was a relationship between personal qualities and leadership practices.

**Research Question Three: What organizational and psychosocial workplace conditions do principals associate with a collaborative school culture?**

The purpose of Research Question Three was to gather data about the organizational and psychosocial workplace conditions that principals identified within their schools. The data was collected through telephone interviews with 10 principals. An analysis of the interview data related to Research Question Three resulted in five school-wide organizational conditions and eight psychosocial conditions. This section begins with an examination of five workplace conditions and then relates the psychosocial effects to those areas.

**The Organizational Workplace Conditions**

The interview data revealed five organizational workplace conditions: (1) effecting organizational change, (2) management of physical building and financial resources, (3) school-wide staff structures, (4) school-wide meeting structures, and (5) opportunities for professional learning and feedback. Four of the five organizational conditions had supporting subcategories, which are delineated below.

According to Johnson (2006), organizational conditions create a context within which teachers work by defining “teachers’ formal positions and relationships with others in the school” (p. 2). Table 18 provides a summary of five organizational workplace conditions and the related subcategories principals reported.

Table 18

*Organizational Workplace Conditions and Subcategories*

Organizational Conditions	Subcategories	Interview Participants									
		KR	PC	TC	DC	RM	JB	DT	DD	JP	PG
1. Effecting organizational change		X		X		X			X		
2. Management of resources											
3. School-wide staff structures	Physical building space	X					X				X
	Building based resources					X		X			X
	Financial resources						X				X
4. School-wide meeting structures	School-wide expectations	X					X				X
	Informal leadership teams				X			X	X	X	X
	Staff assignments						X				X
	Scheduling								X		
	Staff meetings			X				X		X	X
	Data meetings				X						
	Agendas	X		X	X						
	Teacher teams		X								

5. Opportunities for professional learning and feedback	Teacher common planning time	X		X		X	X		X	X	X
	Time for collaboration	X	X					X		X	
	Peer observations	X	X				X				
	Professional development	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	
	Teacher evaluation tool										X

Table 18 shows that, among five organizational conditions, three organizational factors are most often attributed to a collaborative culture: informal leadership teams, teacher common planning time, and professional development.

**Informal leadership teams.** Half of the principals (five) interviewed described how they established and managed informal leadership teams in order to effect a collaborative school culture. Using informal leadership teams, principals could give staff a voice, include them in decision-making, and effect overall school change. Principals described their leadership teams by identifying types of members, models, purpose, and the affect these teams had on staff. PG described that she:

[h]as a very strong leadership team consisting of a sped, reading, ell, math teacher, and one person from each grade level. We have meetings in order to identify problems. We also have a student study team that meets a couple of times a month.

DT described her leadership team's purpose and model "as a decision-making structure

we typically use a committee model. We try to have representatives from each school and...each grade level.” DC described his team as a “faculty senate, consisting of one teacher from each grade...including our special education staff, and our learning program staff.” DC stated, “the purpose of his senate was to create a cohesive culture.” He asked his senate, “what do we need to change? What would you like to see in the building? What initiative can we bring about?”

Finally, JP described his leadership team’s effect on staff, stating “teacher led divisions have contributed to teachers’ positive morale. They’ve had hands on a lot of good decisions being made as far as what we’re doing academically for the students, as well as their overall well-being.”

**Teacher common planning time.** Common planning time was the most frequently discussed factor within the school-wide staff structure category. Seven out of 10 principals reported the use of common planning time within their schools. JB reported that she “instituted a common planning.” KR also reported instituting common planning as a first step in her school, noting “the organizational piece always supports my greater mission in life so that is one of the first things I did and then I also put in common planning time.” PG discussed in more detail how she implemented common planning and the benefits for staff:

As far as the collaboration and collegiality, one of the first things that I tried to establish in the building was common planning time every Monday. So every week the teachers had between 50 minutes to one hour. They are able to sit down as a team, and discuss the lessons that are going on, where the children having trouble, what worked well and what didn’t work in a lesson.

TC also reported that he used common planning across different disciplines in order to implement a school-wide social curriculum: “I have common planning time for every grade

level. Common planning time for art, music, and physical education are the first 55 minutes of the day.” TC explained that, “as a result, the responsive classroom social curriculum that happens in every classroom following announcements. No kids are pulled out until that morning meeting takes place.”

JP reported that he eliminated teacher duties to establish common planning time: “There are no teacher duties, which gives the teachers meeting time across grade level every day.” He further notes that by “using input from teachers, giving one individual planning and then a meeting time,” he has “structured it as day-to-day meetings.”

RM was also “able to work on teacher’s duty schedules” and “create a schedule that had common planning time for departments so they were able to do things together.” RM reported that “additional time during the school day for teachers to collaborate more together resulted in greater collaboration through common planning.”

DD was the only principal who reported that common planning time was a contractual agreement: “my teachers have job-alike meetings that are contractual so they meet regularly...once a week or once every other week.” Despite the contractual mandate, DD reported that “It’s [meetings are] supposed to be once a month but I think they are meeting weekly or bi weekly.” DD also explained that she limited her involvement “because [she] feels that they need time as a group to meet without the principal hovering but I’m available or I ‘ll make myself available.”

DD also explained that the contractual common planning time created a unique opportunity for her to meet with students and teach a large group lesson that supports a positive school culture: “I have something called team time two to three times a month where the kids will go to the café from 8:30-9:00. The teachers will meet with a curriculum specialist, or I have



a prompt that I want them to work on or I have them looking at data.” DD believed the common planning time “is really a great opportunity for two reasons; it gives curriculum specialists time with the teachers, and it give me time to be with students that I might not be able to carve out in my schedule.”

**Professional development.** Professional development was the most frequently discussed factor within the opportunities for professional learning and feedback category. Seven out of 10 principals reported that professional development was a factor that enhanced collaborative culture within their schools. JB reported that professional development “is a constant of the district,” while RM reported “professional development in the form of professional learning communities (PLCs) provides the structure for student personalization and teachers’ professional learning.” RM explained that PLC time is used “to focus on that and ways we can personalize education for students by looking at formative assessments and looking at different websites or software that can help personalize learning.”

KR reported that she used professional development in her school to create a common understanding focused on instruction: “the first year we did a lot of professional development because there was a lot of need that needed to be done and there was such a diverse understanding of what good instruction was.” JP explained, more specifically, that professional development in his school gave teachers and special educators time to collaborate:

As far as students coming in with special needs, professional development is a part of working with the students. The first thing is the conversations we are having with the teachers every day and making sure they feel supported. Getting the experts in the building to make sure that they have the ongoing opportunities to develop an ongoing plan, and then taking the time to revisit the plan.

DC's description of professional development echoed the reports of other principals. DC described a high level of teacher participation during summer professional development, claiming "my K through four teachers involved in the BSRI program did some professional development over the summer...I bought them lunch and we got 93 teachers. The only one who didn't come was one honeymooning in Europe."

While some of the principals reported the use of professional development to clarify school-wide instructional practices or implement a new program, DT discussed how "teachers that lead professional development" in her district. She explained that they "had a full day professional day with probably 25 workshops offered, 20 of them were offered by teachers so that helps with the culture of building the community around initiative. If we're doing a new literacy program we have teachers and literacy specialists work together to deliver the training to new teachers or other teachers." DT stated that, "the feedback received was very positive," and "teachers like to learn from their peers. They typically will seek out their school peers...it makes it more authentic when it comes from people in the classrooms that are dealing with the same [kinds of] students."

PC also discussed the benefits of teacher-driven professional development: "we've really tried to shift from a top down professional development model where it was just this is what we're doing for professional development to having it be teacher driven professional development." PC stated that in his district, "teachers don't only give input but they're really making decisions about how we're using the professional development time."

Principals exemplified the importance of informal leadership teams, common planning time, and professional development as organizational conditions that foster a collaborative culture. The variety of configurations leadership teams took, how common planning was

implemented and how professional development was delivered and by whom seemed to address the different needs of the schools in which they occurred.

### Psychosocial Workplace Conditions

Research Question Three also sought to investigate psychosocial workplace conditions as reported by principals. Johnson (2006) posited that psychosocial features suggest effects that included how teachers experience their work, their motivation, and commitment towards their work, and the opportunities they have for learning and growth (Johnson, 2006, p. 2). I extracted the psychosocial effects based on principals' accounts of organizational workplace conditions presented in the last section. Eight major themes emerged related to psychosocial effects: (1) accountability, (2) angst, (3) support, (4) collegiality, (5) collaboration, (6) cooperation, (7) trust, and (8) mutual respect. Extracting the psychosocial effects was difficult due to the fact that these effects were based on principals' reports as no teachers were interviewed for this study. Table 19 presents a summary of five psychosocial effects in relation to organizational workplace conditions.

Table 19

#### *Psychosocial Effects Related to Organizational Conditions*

Organizational conditions	Psychosocial effects	Interview participants									
		KR	PC	TC	DC	RM	JB	DT	DD	JP	PG
1. Effecting organizational change											
	Trust					X					
	Mutual respect	X									
	Collegiality			X						X	
	Collaboration			X						X	

2. Management of resources											
Collegiality	X										X
Support	X										X
3. School-Wide staff structures											
Trust		X									X
4. School-Wide meeting structures											
Accountability				X							
Collegiality				X							
Cooperation					X						
5. Opportunities for professional learning and feedback											
Trust	X				X						
Mutual respect	X										
Angst					X						

Table 19 shows that there were five occurrences of collegiality and four occurrences of trust indirectly reported by principals. Principals reported incidents of collegiality as part of the overall culture, staff accountability, and in the management of physical space within their buildings. Trust, consequently, was established through leadership teams, teacher assignments, and scheduling.

**Collegiality.** JP reported how modeling respectful, collegial interactions throughout the school could foster an overall collaborative school culture: “I think within a school you get a feeling that people are there for the right reason, especially when you see the way adults interact

with each other and the kids.” He went on to say, “I want to work in an atmosphere where you’re walking down the hall [and] you’re talking to the kids and the adults, even if you don’t know who they are. You’re still engaging with them.” JP believed that “we’re all in this together, if you work in the building or just visiting, everyone should feel good about walking in. I try to model that every day for everybody.”

In addition to modeling collegiality through respectful interactions, DC described the importance of holding staff accountable. DC explained that his goal was to create highly effective teams and required them to have meeting agendas whenever they met: “I track [my staff’s use of agendas] and give them evidence [about how often agendas are used], and they’ve not missed giving me an agenda for a meeting all year. So it’s the accountability piece.” He expressed indirectly that collegiality was part of creating highly effective teams: “we have to set up norms of you know they have a purpose and we want them to share ideas, we encourage them to share ideas.”

TC, KR, and PG described how physical space and reorganizing teachers’ classrooms engendered teacher support and collegiality. TC implemented a “task force” to reorganize classrooms according to grade level. He reported his staff became more collegial towards one another because of the reorganization, stating “we kept a mix of third and fourth grade teachers across the hall and side by side” resulting in “more collegiality and more collaboration about curriculum from one grade to the next.”

KR also reorganized the physical locations of teachers’ classrooms. She sensed that teachers became more supportive of one another as a result, as well, claiming “the teachers started using their own time to meet and to depend and rely on each other by just moving their rooms closer together.”

Finally, PG described how her very crowded building fostered teacher support: “they work together to support each other because everybody realizes the situation we are in and they want to stay together as a team.”

**Trust.** RM described how the less experienced staff in his building assisted him with the implementation of online grading. Because this change was teacher driven, RM was able to gain the trust of more veteran teachers. The newer teachers reported positive experiences with the online grading system, which in turn made change “a little easier” for the senior teachers, according to RM. He added, “when you do have those situations which will pop up your staff will be willing to try some new things, to pilot things.”

Principals also identified the importance of trust in establishing school-wide expectations, informal leadership teams, staff assignments, and scheduling. PG described her beliefs about how trust and respect develops over time: “trust and respect comes from the being together for so long and everybody knows everybody’s strengths and weaknesses.” PG also implied that trust and respect were needed for collaboration: “you’re always going to have one or two teachers that may not be as flexible as far as their instructional practices go.”

PC shared his self-imposed expectations about trust and how he met with groups of teachers, students, and parents to establish it: “trust is really big in any organization... Trust is huge here and so I spent probably longer than I thought... listening to people.” PC believed that listening “showed a level of respect” and that trust is nurtured “by having people feel comfortable to share good, bad, or ugly.”

RM described the two sides of providing feedback to his staff. He explained that observing teachers in the halls and classrooms provided him the opportunity to establish trust, as it gave staff a sense that he was there to offer support: “I think in terms of trust, visibility is a key

thing people get to see you, you get to know who they are in their work place.” KR also discussed the importance of trust and mutual respect, especially during peer observations. She created a safe environment for staff to visit others’ classrooms by establishing norms. The results contributed positively:

We spend a lot of time talking about how important it is that we have mutual respect for everybody and I think that they all did a really great job on that and they a couple of them came to me and said I really love what this one did can I go and talk to her about that.

While psychosocial workplace conditions were difficult to identify, principals were aware of teachers’ feelings and the motivation they had for their work. Principals’ understandings of teachers’ well-being in the workplace was carried out in their descriptions of organizational workplace conditions and resulting psychosocial effects.

**Finding #5: Principals identified three organizational factors that contributed to collaborative cultures.**

Principals identified three factors that contributed most often to collaborative culture: informal leadership teams, common planning time, and professional development.

Half of the principals interviewed, 5 out of 10, reported informal leadership teams as an organizational structure they implemented in their schools. Principals described their teams as committees or faculty senates that consisted of teachers from various disciplines and grade levels. Principals also reported some of the benefits of informal leadership teams. The informal leadership teams provided a collaborative structure that supported shared leadership by giving teachers a voice in decision-making and change.

In addition, more than half of the principals interviewed, 7 out of 10, discussed how they fostered collaborative culture by implementing common planning time. The principals reported

common planning time helped to establish a school wide mission, to increase collaboration, and to create a defined structure for problem solving. It was no surprise that time, in general, was the most important factor related to a collaborative culture. Principals described how they utilized staff meetings, implemented teacher common planning time, and provided time for collaboration with greater frequency than any of the other organizational structures.

Seven out of 10 principals identified professional development as the third factor that they believe supports a collaborative culture. Principals reported that regular, job-embedded, teacher-driven professional development enhanced teacher certainty by focusing on instructional practice. Teacher-driven professional development was the most effective, according to principals because it gave teachers control over their own learning and allowed them to participate in school-wide decision making.

**Research Question Four: What barriers do principals identify in establishing collaborative cultures in their schools?**

Research Question Four sought to ascertain barriers that inhibit principals as they work to establish collaborative cultures within their schools. Principals were asked to describe internal as well as external threats they believed inhibited a collaborative culture and to describe what they believed they could do to overcome the barriers. Again, data were collected through telephone interviews with 10 principals. The interview data yielded three categories of factors that inhibited collaborative culture: teacher resistance, school level factors, and external factors.

Those factors are presented in Table 20.

Table 20

*Factors that Impede Collaborative Culture*



Factors	Subcategories	Interview Participants									
		KR	PC	TC	DC	RM	JB	DT	DD	JP	PG
1. Teacher resistance											
Resistance to new administration			X		X						
Resistance to instructional strategies					X		X				
Resistance to collegial relationships				X					X		
2. School level factors											
Lack of resources		X									
Lack of physical space											X
Lack of communication											X
Union influences		X									
3. External factors											
Community demographics							X				
State and local mandates						X		X			

Table 20 shows slightly more than half (6) of the principals described a variety of conditions related to teacher resistance. Principals described situations involving resistance to new administration, instructional strategies, and collegial relationships with colleagues.

**Resistance to new administration.** DC described how his staff was resistant to new leadership initially: “I had some people, when I came in here, I was not their cup of tea.” DC went on to explain, that despite teachers’ resistance to his new leadership, “I had some addition by subtraction...they left and I was able to hire some really talented people.” DC concluded by stating that teacher resistance can be a barrier, but he was able to overcome resistance: “We hired well and that is big because, you know, there are some people here who wanted to be me, just

like I am sure, there are some people who want to be you. Those people are the barriers because they're arrogant."

PC also described how teacher resistance made it difficult to foster a collaborative culture. Resistance was attributed to PC's newness and to the frequent turnover of previous administrators due to the geographic location of his school: "Because we're on an island, they've had a lot of turnover in all 3 schools; elementary, middle and high school." PC explained that his initial feelings of staff resistance centered on "teachers sort of waiting out the flavor of the month. In other words, if I just wait long enough this guy's not going to stick around and someone else is going to come in." PC lamented that his staff was "not so quick to get on board [because of] their history and the fact that island life is not for everybody, a lot of people come and go."

**Resistance to instructional strategies.** JB described how some of her teachers were resistant to sharing instructional practices with their colleagues: "there are wonderful things going on, but there is still that me, me, me concept that they're not going to share, where others are fully ready." DC also described resistance in terms of "the [difficult] mindset between the K to 5 and the middle school. Sixth grade is really good but seventh and eighth grade [are challenging]." DC explained that teachers' resistance to "a more 2015 style of teaching" was important for students who are "used to being in groups...to being collaborative with one another." DC felt it was critical to students' success to overcome teachers' resistance to new instructional practice:

[Teachers think] they're traditional high school teachers...just stand and deliver. But that's not what the kids are getting down below. [So] what's happening in some cases is

it is not allowing kids to progress [they are] not used to just stand and deliver. Then, when they go to seventh and eighth grade, it's a missing piece.

**Resistance to collegial relationships.** TC described how collegial relationships were an expectation, but sometimes difficult to establish: "I cannot, nor can any principal, force a congenial relationship with every person. Having that relationship with every other person, the collegial aspect of it in terms of respect and working collaboratively, that is an expectation."

DD implied similar expectations, yet her staff was resistant to providing help to new teachers, indicating a lack of collegiality. DD reported that her teachers had "this attitude of 'I had to do this on my own' and 'I don't feel like I need to give you everything.'" DD felt as though she "had a pretty collaborative staff, but there's just this one pocket of people who are really holding back, a little bit cliquish if you will." DD worked to overcome the resistance by "inserting [herself] in that situation and said 'I really need your help. I need you to support this person. I need you to help this person.'" She concluded by saying that she did feel as though she was, "breaking down those barriers."

**Finding #6: Principals identified teacher resistance as the greatest inhibitor to building a collaborative culture.**

Principals were asked to describe the factors they believe inhibit a collaborative culture. I was surprised to learn that, of the nine factors reported, teacher resistance was the greatest inhibitor to a collaborative culture. Six of the 10 principals reported one of three forms of teacher resistance: resistance to new administration, resistance to instructional strategies, and resistance to collegial relationships.

Principals also provided earnest discourse about how they worked to overcome teacher resistance. DC described how teachers in his school were resistant to new administration. Yet,

DC could overcome the resistance by hiring new staff: “I had some people when I came in...I was not their cup of tea...they left and I was able to hire some really talented people.” DD described how she confronted teacher resistance to collegial relationships by outwardly asking for a teacher’s help by communicating “I really need your help...to support this person...I need you to help this person.” DD felt as though she was successful in breaking down the barriers created by cliques in her building.

Surprisingly, principals identified few barriers to collaborative culture in their schools. Yet, their accounts of teacher resistance shed light on the difficulty individuals have with change.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented data organized according to four guiding research questions. Phase One survey data and Phase Two interview data were collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics, and descriptive and in-vivo coding strategies. Six major findings emerged from an analysis of the data. The findings that resulted from the study include principals’ perceptions about their own leadership and the nature of collaboration in their schools. The findings also highlighted organizational and psychosocial factors that support collaborative culture and factors that impede collaboration. Chapter Five discusses each of the six findings and proffers recommendations for future research. It ends with final reflections about the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: STUDY SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

### **Introduction**

This chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) Introduction, (b) Study Summary, (c) Discussion, (d) Future Research, and (e) Final Reflections. The Summary reestablishes the importance of the study and recapitulates the essential points made in Chapters One through Four. This Summary provides a context for the information contained in the Discussion, which sets forth practical and theoretical implications, and for the recommendations related to the six findings. Given the delimitations and limitations of this study, I recommend pathways for future research exploring the factors and conditions that support a collaborative culture. The pathways are delineated within the section headed Future Research. Chapter Five concludes with a Final Reflection of my thoughts about conducting the study and the findings that emerged.

### **Study Summary**

The role of principal leadership is complex and has become more challenging with increased school level and external demands. School principals are faced with buffering the forces of federal mandates while managing day-to-day operations within their schools, all while maintaining focus on increasing student achievement (Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitch, 2010). Strong school leadership is essential for student success and is second only to good teaching (Anderson, Leithwood, Louis & Walhstrom, 2010; Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitch, 2010). In addition, there is widespread research that supports the benefits effective school leaders have on teaching conditions and the importance of a collaborative school culture (Blase & Blase, 1999; Leithwood, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). There have not been many studies conducted about the specific practices leaders use to influence

teachers or to nurture collaborative cultures in which these practices take place. Therefore, this study sought to understand how principals perceive culture in their schools, how their perceptions inform their practice, and how they ensure high yield, collaborative workplace conditions for teachers to benefit students.

The following four Research Questions provided the focus for this study and guided the collection of data:

1. How do principals perceive collaborative culture in their schools?
2. To what degree do principals believe their leadership practices influence collaborative school culture?
3. What psychosocial and organizational workplace conditions do principals associate with a collaborative school culture?
4. What barriers do principals identify in establishing collaborative cultures in their schools?

I collected data in two phases. Phase One data were obtained using the Modified School Culture Survey (see Appendix D). The survey was designed to gather principals' perceptions about collaborative culture and leadership influences. Phase Two data were collected during telephone interviews. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix E) that provided prompts and open-ended questions that sought to gather principals' detailed descriptions about collaborative culture in their schools.

Phase One data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Measures of central tendency were computed using IBM SPSS (2016) software. Phase Two data were analyzed using in-vivo and descriptive coding. In addition, MAXQDA (2016) software was used to organize and

manage data and to uncover patterns. The following section provides a discussion of each finding that delineates theoretical as well as practical implications, and recommendations.

### **Discussion**

Six major findings emerged from this study. The findings, theoretical and practical implications, and recommendations are described in this section.

**Finding #1: The majority of principals agreed or strongly agreed that eight factors contributed to collaborative culture within their schools.**

**Theoretical implications.** Phase One data revealed eight factors principals believe are important for a collaborative culture: (1) opportunities for teacher dialogue and planning, (2) teacher support for the school's mission, (3) teacher willingness to help when there are problems, (4) involving teachers in decision-making, (5) teachers valuing other teachers, (6) keeping teachers informed of current issues in the school, (7) a faculty that values school improvement, and (8) encouraging teachers to share ideas. These factors were identified by respondents' selections of School Culture Indicators on the Modified School Culture Survey. The eight factors represented a framework for collaborative culture based on respondents' beliefs. A clear definition of school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1990) supports these findings and provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the importance of collaboration and school culture.

Deal's and Peterson's (1990) definition of school culture provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how principals' perceptions about collaborative culture are shaped. Principals' perceptions about their schools' culture are developed through the everyday experiences they have, their observations, and their understandings of underlying feelings and mores that permeate the school environment. Deal and Peterson have described culture as:

This invisible taken-for-granted flow of beliefs and assumptions gives meaning to what people say and do. It shapes how they interpret hundreds of daily transactions. This deeper structure of life in organizations is reflected and transmitted through symbolic language and expressive action. Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time. (p. 7)

Deal's and Peterson's (1990) definition of school culture emphasizes that culture comes from social interactions between individuals. Furthermore, Hongboontri (2014) asserted that culture consisted not only of the combination of individuals, their interactions and the environment, but also the context. She added that culture is "unique and distinctive" (p. 66) and created by people considered part of a school's context. An interesting aspect regarding the conditions principals identified was the degree to which principals from certain subgroups agreed with the importance of the conditions.

Hongboontri (2014) ascertained that culture depends on the interaction of individuals and their environment. In this study, principals identified three factors and eight conditions they believe support collaborative culture; however, the degree to which principals agreed and strongly agreed varied across subgroups. For example, male respondents between the ages of 41 and 50 who had been principals for 4 to 10 years agreed more often. The variability that resulted from respondents in six subgroups suggested that among the eight conditions, some were more important than others, amplifying Hongboontri's assertion that cultures are "unique and distinctive" (p.66). Phase Two data sought to understand principals' perceptions about collaborative culture more deeply by capturing their lived experiences.

**Practical implications.** This study determined that there are eight specific factors associated with collaborative culture in schools, despite varied demographic conditions. At the



school level, the findings indicated that principals in all contexts have tremendous power in shaping a collaborative culture. The findings suggest that principals, therefore, must be self-aware because of the level of influence they have. As principals attempt to learn about the culture within their schools, they must be proactive in shaping collaborative cultures. To explore the link between their perceptions, self-awareness, and leadership further, principals could ask: How do I perceive the culture in my school? What aspects of the culture support collaboration? What are the beliefs underlying the culture? Why do these beliefs exist? What needs to shift or change? Principals must act on their perceptions by being reflective about their own understandings of the existing culture within their schools. As well, they must then be thoughtful in their responses by building relationships with their staff, setting norms and expectations around communication, and encouraging staff participation in discussion and problem solving.

**Recommendations.** Educational leadership programs that prepare individuals for the complex role of principal leadership must bring to the forefront the importance of collaborative culture in schools. Courses and discourse must be promoted regarding the relationship between school leadership, workplace factors and conditions, and the influence of these within schools. Programs should include components that educate future leaders about the value of self-awareness and reflection and encourage them to mindfully explore their own perceptions.

Moreover, discourse, personal reflection, and field experience should be explicit requirements during the leadership practicum. These experiences will provide future leaders opportunities to experience and understand the connections between principals' perceptions, workplace conditions, and leadership influences on collaborative school culture.

Finding #2: Principals' perceptions influenced their desire to effect change within their schools.

**Theoretical implications.** During telephone interviews, principals expressed their desire to effect cultural change more frequently than the other eight themes that emerged as part of this finding. Principals also reported that walk-through observations and dialogue with staff shaped their perceptions about collaborative culture.

We know that principals foster collaborative cultures by providing direction, exercising influence, emphasizing accountability, and shaping opportunities that lead to school improvement (Anderson, Leithwood, Louis, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Meier & Wood, 2004). PC, a principal in the study, warned that patience is also needed because effecting cultural change can sometimes be “scary” for staff. PC’s statement about patience adds to a growing body of research and literature. DC set direction and effected cultural change by implementing a comprehensive reading program to improve instruction and professional development for staff. Other principals described how they effected cultural change through hiring, making changes to teacher schedules, and limiting student assessments. While principals sought to effect changes unique to their schools, effecting change to improve collaborative culture overall, is not a new idea.

Historic research (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975) has provided a basis for understanding how principals’ perceptions about collaborative culture in their schools fueled their desire to effect change. Berman and McLaughlin reported decades ago that effective leadership and essential workplace conditions are needed for good education to result. These researchers coined the phrase, “mutual adaptation” (as cited in Honig, 2006, p.106) to describe the unique interaction that resulted from individuals interpreting and implementing reforms within their specific schools. Finding #2 makes it clear that “mutual adaptation” is a timeless concept that can still be used to describe the interpretation and implementation of change in schools.

Organizational behavior theory (Johns, 2006) adds to the understanding and importance of principals' perceptions about collaborative culture. Although philosophical, Johns (2006) definition of context supports and amplifies principals' perceptions and how they come to learn about collaborative culture in their schools. Johns defines context as "situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables" (p. 386). During telephone interviews, principals expressed that they gained valuable cultural understanding by walking through and observing interactions among staff during grade level meetings and professional development. The connections and types of interactions staff had with one another informed principals about the degree to which the culture was collaborative and resulted in their desire to effect change.

**Practical implications.** Research asserts that strong leadership is second only to good teaching in schools (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). This finding suggests principals' observations and conversations shape their perceptions about collaborative culture and often result in organizational change. There are many models of leadership that suggest strategies to foster collaborative culture. While it is important for principals to have knowledge of leadership models, it is also important that they understand that strong leadership implies certain responsibilities and represents a blend of models carefully matched to each situation. Research suggested that principals who effect change by providing direction, exercising influence, and emphasizing accountability foster collaborative school cultures.

**Recommendations.** Again, educational leadership programs that stress the importance of self-awareness and reflection while also providing a theoretical knowledge base focused on various leadership models and organizational theory will successfully prepare future school leaders. Having knowledge of leadership models and leadership perspectives will further

enhance these opportunities. Therefore, future leaders are encouraged to communicate with experienced principals to learn how leadership strategies affect teachers and influence collaborative culture.

Principals currently leading schools must continuously be mindful of their schools' culture and consider the impact leadership strategies may have on certain situations. Leaders must foster and maintain strong communication with teachers to affect positive changes in their schools.

**Finding # 3: The majority of principals believed leadership had a strong influence on collaborative culture.**

**Theoretical implications.** Principals believed that six Leadership Indicators on the Modified School Culture Survey were *very important* to a collaborative culture. The Leadership Indicators were statements that captured leadership practices that strongly influence collaborative culture. The statements principals believed were *very important* include (a) “value teachers’ ideas,” (b) “engage in dialogue with teachers,” (c) “frequently communicate expectations around school norms, beliefs, values, and goals,” (d) “foster professional relationships with staff,” (e) “promote professional involvement among staff,” and (f) “protect instruction and planning time.” The leadership practices that principals identified as *very important* are validated by earlier research that disseminated various models and responsibilities of leadership (Blase & Blase, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005; Sheppard, 1996).

Previously described instructional and transformational leadership models (Blase & Blase, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Sheppard, 1996) asserted that certain principal-led strategies had positive effects on teachers’ overall commitment and trust. The six statements

principals identified align more closely with the transformational leadership model (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Sheppard, 1996). Transformational leadership emphasized shared leadership roles and promulgated the importance of the school leader in establishing norms, expectations, and a common vision that influenced professional involvement of staff.

Research (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005) demonstrates a set of leadership responsibilities worth reiterating in relation to this finding. Marzano et. al., (2005) identified 21 leadership responsibilities that had an implicit or explicit relationship to school culture and student achievement. The six Leadership Indicators principals identified as *very important* in this study echo two of the responsibilities explicated by Marzano et al. (2005): providing opportunities for teachers to share ideas and opportunities to participate in problem solving and decision-making. The responsibilities further solidified sentiments with respect to creating shared beliefs, building community, and promoting cohesion among staff.

**Practical implications.** The six statements respondents identified as *very important* imply practical action steps for principals looking to shape collaborative culture in schools. First, principals must have a clear understanding of their own beliefs, values, and goals since these attributes will serve as a foundation for the work they do. Secondly, principals can model the six aspects of leadership they identified as *very important*. From a practical standpoint, principals who communicate and model expectation, engage in dialogue with staff, and respect teachers' will be successful in supporting a collaborative culture. Finally, fostering professional relationships and promoting professional involvement will lead to collaborative and meaningful professional learning.

**Recommendations.** School culture and collaboration underlie what is achievable in schools; therefore, it is critical for future school leaders to not only have a strong knowledge base

and sense of self-awareness, they must also be reflective in their practice by understanding the impact their practices have on staff. These skills are best played out in real-world settings within schools. Again, opportunities to talk with principal leaders in the field, to talk with teachers in schools, and for future leaders to reflect on practicum experiences will provide the best opportunities for the development of these skills.

**Finding #4: Principals reported that personal qualities and school-specific leadership practices influenced collaborative culture.**

**Theoretical implications.** Principals identified empathy and vulnerability as the two most frequently described personal qualities in this study. They also suggested that setting expectations, empowering teachers, and building relationships, were leadership practices most often associated with collaborative culture. Leaders' effectiveness is determined by a small handful of personal traits. Leithwood (2008, pp. 27-28) noted that the relationship between principals' personal qualities and leadership practices demonstrate effectiveness in how they draw upon and apply leadership practices to support a collaborative culture. Principals shared the considerations they made in approaching issues or problems, stating that one approach may not meet the needs of all staff. TC expressed, "we're in the people business," while two other principals (DD and KR) indicated that they believed it was important to have strong relationships with union representatives working in their schools. Principals also described situations in which they would not ask staff to do a task that they as principals hadn't done.

**Practical implications.** The principals in this study clearly articulated their own personal qualities, including empathy and vulnerability, in relation to situations within their schools. These principals stated the importance of being in touch with who they are as leaders as well as the importance of empathy in letting staff know that they were "just being human" and

that they “recognized the human side of teaching.” The principals elaborated on their personal qualities by simultaneously describing leadership approaches they used in response to certain situations. The qualities principals discussed suggest that, across many settings, it is critical for principals to understand the feelings of others and to be able to walk in their shoes. Principals also expressed a desire for staff to regard their principal as genuine, understanding of teachers’ feelings and approachable.

In addition to the personal qualities principals reported, they also believed that certain leadership practices, such as building relationships, setting expectations, and empowering teachers, had a strong influence on collaborative culture. These three leadership practices embodied principals’ feelings of empathy and vulnerability while creating a collaborative culture.

**Recommendations.** Like the first three findings, my recommendation is that principals not only demonstrate self-awareness but that they also exhibit traits that make them relatable to their staff. Principals made it clear that they wanted staff to see that they were “human,” making their expressions of empathy and vulnerability even more important. Principals reported other qualities less frequently; self-reflection, passion for leadership, and family first stance. These traits are also important and capture the personal qualities that a principal should have.

**Finding #5: Principals identified three organizational factors that contributed to collaborative cultures.**

**Theoretical implications.** The three organizational factors principals reported that contributed to collaborative cultures were informal leadership teams, common planning time, and professional development. According to principals, leadership teams, time, and professional development were managed differently in each school. Leadership teams were sometimes

referred to as faculty senates or committees that consisted of different grade and subject specific teachers. Common planning time was implemented by managing teachers' duties and was used for increased collaboration and problem solving. Teacher driven and job-embedded professional development were deemed most effective since it gave teachers control of their own learning.

Leadership and organizational conditions are essential in building schools that function as interdependent organizations (Johnson, 2012; Leithwood, 2006; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996). Interdependent organizations rely upon the combination of organizational conditions such as resources and structures. Organizational resources and structures that are connected to schools' vision and mission have the power to influence collaboration and enhance culture (Johnson, 2012).

As principals described the organizational workplace conditions in their schools, they expressed the psychosocial effects these conditions had on teachers. Principals described how leadership teams and common planning fostered a sense of trust and collegiality amongst teachers. This assessment was not surprising, as similar sentiments have been documented in earlier educational research (Leithwood, 2006; McLaughlin, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1989).

Teacher workplace conditions affect motivation as well as commitment and adversely affect collaborative culture and student learning (Leithwood, 2006; McLaughlin, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1989). Trust and collegiality, two psychosocial effects reported by principals in this study, add to the already existing body of research that emphasizes the importance of these influences on overall school performance (Emerick, Hirsch, & Reeves, 2007; TELL Mass Survey, 2012). Opportunities that empowered teachers, provided them professional growth, and gave them time to collaborate enriched culture by increasing teacher certainty and commitment (Rosenholtz, 1989).



Furthermore, Drago-Severson's (2012) research supports the importance of establishing leadership teams, common planning time, and professional development. Drago-Severson emphasized the importance of recognizing teachers' individual strengths, providing them time for social conversations and professional collaboration, and building community. She affirmed that these suggestions were known to enhance collaborative culture.

Drago-Severson (2012) asserted that leaders' practices strengthened collaboration and teachers' commitment to a school wide vision. She also claimed that a learning-oriented culture assisted teachers in making sense of their experiences by adding to their "technical knowledge base" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 5), resulting in psychosocial effects that included increased certainty and confidence about their practice.

**Practical implications.** The practicality of implementing organizational conditions that have positive psychosocial effects on teachers and ultimately enhance collaborative culture in schools begins with understanding teachers' professional needs.

Principals in this study reported that informal leadership teams, common planning time, and professional development opportunities supported collaborative cultures in their schools. Furthermore, principals indirectly reported that teacher trust and collegiality was enhanced by the organizational structures principals established. Trust and collegiality, however, do not always result from the establishment of collaborative structures. Therefore, principals must also clearly frame and communicate the vision they have for teachers' work during leadership team meetings, during common planning time, and during professional development activities. The principal's vision can be carried out through a set of agreed upon norms and protocols determined by the group.

Principals can further enhance the psychosocial well-being of teachers by publicly acknowledging teachers' strengths and the work that teachers have done within the collaborative structures. These acknowledgements should also include the benefits for student learning and the school overall.

**Recommendations.** Organizational workplace conditions can affect teachers' attitudes and overall sense of well-being within schools. Therefore, there are critical considerations principal leaders must be aware of regarding the implementation of certain organizational structures, such as informal leadership teams, common planning time, and professional development. The role of professional learning communities as part of a collaborative culture was discussed in Chapter Two.

In addition, it is also vital for principals to be transparent with staff and include them in decision-making when establishing certain organizational conditions so that positive psychosocial effects result. What follows are some questions principals might ask themselves before making decisions that impact teachers: How will my decision to include certain staff impact others? Am I selecting certain staff fairly and equitably? Have I clearly explained how the establishment of an organizational structure will benefit teachers and students?

Certain leverage points are also critical in establishing organizational structures. Principal leaders must consider not only the purpose but also the timing of establishing organizational structures in order to minimize any negative effect on teachers' psychosocial well-being. There are certain times in the school year when the culture and climate within a school may be more positive. It is during those times that principals may have more success in establishing certain organizational conditions, especially if they represent changes.

**Finding #6: Principals identified teacher resistance as the greatest inhibitor to building a**

## **collaborative culture.**

**Theoretical implications.** Principals reported teacher resistance as the greatest inhibitor to collaborative culture. It is important to understand that while teacher resistance is only one factor, certain cultures in schools may not support collaboration (Hargreaves, 1994). Hargreaves asserted that “balkanized” and contrived cultures are two examples of non-collaborative cultures that work to divide groups of teachers into insulated and competing subgroups. Hargreaves offers the following definition of balkanization:

Patterns mainly consisting of teachers working neither in isolation, nor with most of their colleagues as a school, but in smaller sub groups within the school community, such as secondary school subject departments, special needs units, or junior and primary divisions within the elementary school. (p. 213)

Balkanization has negative educational consequences for teachers and collaborative culture. Furthermore, Hargreaves (1994) asserted that, “imbalances of power and status between tightly bound groups make it difficult for teachers to reach common agreement in areas that threaten their career opportunities, resources or conditions of work.” (p. 215)

Many of the principals in this study reported that teacher resistance was most apparent upon their arrival as new administrators. Based on the reports of principals, some of the situations that led to teacher resistance were based on frequent administrative turnover and staff members with “toxic attitudes.” These descriptions suggest that teacher resistance was the result of organizational changes that had negative psychosocial effects on teachers.

**Practical implications.** For administrators new to a school, understanding the overall culture--and the beliefs that inform that culture--is important. Principals must seek out information that will help them to understand why teachers are resistant. In some situations,

teacher resistance comes from individuals who may have been passed over for leadership positions, resulting in hard feelings or from the turnover of administration, resulting in uncertainty and instability. Teacher resistance may also stem from the introduction of new instructional practices or staff, which may not directly affect principal leaders, but must be addressed to foster a collaborative culture.

**Recommendations.** There are some school level implications for overcoming barriers that impede a collaborative culture. Principal leaders must become skilled in gathering perceptual information about their schools' culture through observation and conversation. Only then can they begin to understand how or why a certain culture exists. Principal leaders must also possess a vision that supports a collaborative culture to ensure that their plans can be implemented and minimize teacher resistance. Part of that vision is that principal leaders need to provide time for teacher collaboration to occur naturally so that collaboration is not forced.

### **Future Research**

The conclusion of Chapter Two emphasized the need for principals to understand that their own leadership and workplace conditions affect collaborative school culture. Furthermore, the limitations and delimitations of this study unveiled several areas for future research. By probing more deeply into the survey data, I learned that there were some subgroups that responded less frequently. In addition, the telephone interviews yielded certain data that could have been enriched by face-to-face interviews. Despite this limitation, I learned that most principals believe their leadership practices facilitate collaborative interactions with staff and led to an overall collaborative culture.

While this study was limited in scope, I propose that future research examine more deeply how and why certain conditions exist and the effects of these on teachers and staff in

schools. The following recommendations are provided to inspire future research that will investigate how collaborative culture is established and its effects on those in schools:

**1. Replicate this study with a larger sample size.** One of the delimitations of this study was that it included Massachusetts' principals only. Would principals in larger geographic locations have similar perceptions about collaborative culture in their schools? Would they identify a different set of organizational factors related to collaborative culture?

**2. Replicate this study in a different location.** Like the first recommendation, replicating this study in a different state may yield different Phase One and Phase Two results.

**3. Replicate the study at different intervals throughout the school year.** By conducting the study at different intervals throughout the year, different results may emerge. One of the delimitations of this study was that the survey was administered very close to the beginning of the school year. Respondents were given a two-week window to participate in the survey. Telephone interviews were conducted within a couple of months of the survey. Had the survey been administered at a different time in the school year, would principals' perceptions have been different? Would interview data have been different?

**4. Focus on subgroups that had less representation.** Most respondents in this study were females in suburban school with 250-500 students. The respondents had been principals for 4-10 years and teachers from 6-20 years. They reported that they were between the ages of 41-60. Future research could certainly focus on some of the other subgroups that had fewer participants in this study. For example, a future study may focus on males in urban schools with 800-1100 students.

**5. Include teachers and other staff.** Another delimitation of this study was that it only included the perceptions of principals. While principals play a major role in shaping

collaborative culture, they can't do this alone. The perspectives of teachers and other staff members could provide the impetus for future research.

**6. Conduct face-to-face interviews.** Telephone interviews were conducted because of the time and convenience for scheduling purposes. Future research may include the opportunity for the researcher and principals to have face-to-face conversations. Because of the limitations telephone interviews had, I may have missed some non-verbal communications.

**7. Collect artifacts from participants' schools that provide evidence of collaborative culture.** In addition to conducting face-to-face interviews, collecting artifacts could provide evidence of schedules that have been changed to foster collaboration time. Principals' written communications that contain the schools' vision and mission statements would also add to the validity of what they report during the interview process.

**8. Include site visits to participants' schools.** Similar to how principals in this study learned about collaborative culture in their schools, walking through schools, observing and having conversations with staff could provide rich additional data as evidence of a collaborative culture.

**9. Conduct a study that focuses on leadership practices used to carry out the eight factors principals in this study attribute to collaborative culture.** Principals agreed most often with eight of the 28 School Culture Indicators on the survey. A future study that investigates specific leadership practices used to carry out the factors could provide valuable information, especially for new principals.

**10. Conduct a study that examines the role of three organizational factors on collaborative culture.** To what degree do informal leadership teams, common planning time,

and professional development foster a collaborative culture? Moreover, if these factors do not affect collaborative culture, what needs to be done differently?

**11. Investigate the degree to which higher education programs that prepare school leaders for the field emphasize the importance of collaborative school culture.** There are many graduate programs that prepare educators for the role of school leader. An investigation of school leadership programs may reveal some course offering similarities and differences. Are there some programs of study that better prepare school leaders emerging in the field? Are there programs that emphasize the importance of collaborative school culture as a vehicle for overall school improvement and increased student learning?

The recommendations for future research that I have presented are based on the key findings of this study. In addition, limitations and delimitations uncovered through this study led to suggestions for future research. Collaborative cultures are important to student and teacher success. I have learned the importance of principals' perceptions, and the factors and conditions they establish in their schools is a starting point for understanding how collaborative culture is shaped.

### **Final Reflections**

It is abundantly clear to me that I have gained valuable knowledge by conducting this study. I am a second-year principal and creating a collaborative culture is very important to me. The survey results and interview data I gathered affirmed beliefs I had about how to foster a collaborative culture. In addition to principals' perceptions about collaborative culture, I was fascinated by the ways in which principals demonstrated self-awareness. The principals in this study eloquently described the importance of empathy and vulnerability in relation to collaborative culture. Their statements were powerful in expressing their desire to be genuine

and approachable. Principals' statements describing their own personal qualities were amplified by the leadership practices they identified as essential for a collaborative culture: setting expectations, empowering teachers, and building relationships.

In addition, I also learned about specific organizational conditions and the psychosocial effects the conditions had on staff. Initially, I believed that principals would identify organizational and psychosocial conditions separately during the interview process. What I learned, however, was that as principals described organizational conditions they implemented to enhance collaborative culture, they reported the psychosocial effects the conditions had on teachers. As a result, I did not have to ask principals to describe psychosocial conditions separately since organizational and psychosocial conditions were interwoven in their descriptions.

It was interesting to learn what school-level conditions are most often attributed to teacher trust and what conditions led to teachers' sense of certainty about their practice. I was somewhat surprised to learn that teacher resistance was identified most often as the factor that inhibits collaborative culture. Educational discourse laments the impact that external factors have on schools. My assumption is that principals reported teacher resistance, a school-level factor, most often because they may feel that it is within their power to change.

The conclusion of this study has taken almost eight years. I am astounded at the experience I have had through this process. I have learned to be patient with myself, especially during times of extreme frustration. When I began this journey, I was an assistant principal and had not yet been charged with leading an entire school. Today, I am an elementary school principal. I have gained valuable insights through analyzing survey data and interviewing other principals in the field. These experiences have deepened my commitment and passion for



leadership. I cannot say enough about the generosity and the passion for excellence that all ten of my interview participants demonstrated in their roles as principals. I am thankful and impressed that principals across Massachusetts were so willing to participate and contribute to my dissertation learning experience.

Finally, this study has solidified my beliefs about the importance of collaborative school culture. I have learned that collaborative school culture holds great promise in promoting and achieving whole school improvement and increased student learning. Collaborative culture, however, is about so much more than school improvement and increased student learning; it is about people working together within an organization and the benefits they take away from collaborating with others. Through this dissertation experience, I have learned that strong school leaders call upon their colleagues for support and encourage teachers to do the same. In this way, collaboration increases learning and certainty, builds professional relationships, and establishes trust. Certainty, relationships, and trust are the true outcomes of collaboration that ultimately result in improved schools and student learning.

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## Appendix A

### Letter of Introduction and Request for Participation

Dear Principals,

As you prepare to embark on a brand new school year, have you thought about the impact that school culture has on the day-to-day operations in your school? School culture is often taken for granted and difficult to define, yet it is one of the most significant features of any organization (Deal & Peterson, 1998).

My name is Kerri L. Sankey and I am a PhD candidate at Lesley University and an elementary school principal in Massachusetts. I invite you to participate in my research study by completing a brief survey designed to gather principals' perceptions and opinions about collaborative school culture. This survey is confidential and will take less than 10 minutes to complete. You will receive a letter of consent in a separate email outlining my study in more detail.

I am excited to learn about your perceptions and the practices you put in place to shape collaborative culture. In addition, I hope to contribute significant information to a growing body of knowledge about school culture. I would truly appreciate your participation in completing my confidential survey.

Thank you for your participation!

## Appendix B

### Letter of Consent

Principal Researcher: Kerri L. Sankey

I am completing my dissertation research in the doctoral program in Educational Leadership at Lesley University. You are invited to participate in a research study that explores principals' perceptions about collaborative school culture. The purpose of this study is to understand how principals perceive and shape collaborative culture in their schools in the current educational climate in Massachusetts. More specifically, it examines two key factors -- leadership approaches and workplace conditions -- with respect to the development of collaborative school cultures in elementary, middle and high schools. It is my hope that this research will uncover some of the perceptions that principals have about collaboration and identify leadership practices that may be correlated with those perceptions.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will complete an electronic survey that contains 41 items, rated according to a Likert scale. This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The first section asks seven demographic questions. The second section contains 41 survey questions investigate principals' perceptions of six domains of collaborative school culture: collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose, and learning partnership. This survey was developed by Gruenert and Valentine (1998) and has been used to gather data in a number of other research studies. The last twelve survey questions will probe your perceptions about leadership practices. The survey concludes by asking you to consider participating in a follow-up telephone interview. Telephone interviews will be conducted following the collection and analysis of survey data.

The intent of the telephone interview will be to gather more in-depth data by using open-ended questions to help explain the results of the survey and will last no longer than 20 minutes. The names of principals who participate in the telephone interviews will not be revealed in the findings.

There are no risks to participating in this research and all information collected will remain strictly confidential. Results collected through this survey and the telephone interviews will be analyzed by the researcher and will be stored in password protected electronic files. No identifying information will be contained in the findings of the research. Survey Monkey will be used to administer the survey and collect data. Survey Monkey is a secure site that ensures safety and confidentiality during the survey administration.

Please note that you may discontinue your participation in this survey at any time without consequence. Additionally, you may contact me at [ksankey3@lesley.edu](mailto:ksankey3@lesley.edu) or my senior advisor, Dr. John Ciesluk, [jciesluk@lesley.edu](mailto:jciesluk@lesley.edu) if you have any questions regarding this research

Your opinions and experiences are fundamental to my research and I truly appreciate your time in completing this survey.

Thank you!

## Appendix C

## Gruenert and Valentine School Culture Survey

**To what degree do these statements describe the conditions at your school? Rate each statement on the following scale: 1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree**

1. Teachers utilize professional networks to obtain information and resources for classroom instruction.
2. Leaders value teachers' ideas.
3. Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects.
4. Teachers trust each other.
5. Teachers support the mission of the school.
6. Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance.
7. Leaders in this school trust the professional judgments of teachers.
8. Teachers spend considerable time planning together.
9. Teachers regularly seek ideas from seminars, colleagues, and conferences.
10. Teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem.
11. Leaders take time to praise teachers that perform well.
12. The school mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers.
13. Parents trust teachers' professional judgments.
14. Teachers are involved in the decision-making process.

15. Teachers take time to observe each other teaching.
16. Professional development is valued by the faculty.
17. Teachers' ideas are valued by other teachers.
18. Leaders in our school facilitate teachers working together.
19. Teachers understand the mission of the school.
20. Teachers are kept informed on current issues in the school.
21. Teachers and parents communicate frequently about student performance.
22. My involvement in policy or decision-making is taken seriously.
23. Teachers are generally aware of what other teachers are teaching.
24. Teachers maintain a current knowledge base about the learning process.
25. Teachers work cooperatively in groups.
26. Teachers are rewarded for experimenting with new ideas and techniques.
27. The school mission statement reflects the values of the community.
28. Leaders support risk-taking and innovation in teaching.
29. Teachers work together to develop and evaluate programs and projects.
30. The faculty values school improvement.
31. Teaching performance reflects the mission of the school.
32. Administrators protect instruction and planning time.
33. Teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed.
34. Teachers are encouraged to share ideas.
35. Students generally accept responsibility for their schooling, for example they engage

mentally in class and complete homework assignments.

Developed at Middle Level Leadership Center, University of Missouri by Steve Gruenert & Jerry Valentine. Use by written permission only



## Appendix D

## Modified School Culture Survey

**Demographic Questions 1-7****1. Which of the following best describes your school?**

Rural, Urban, Suburban, Charter

**2. How would you describe the size of your school?**

Less than 100 students, 100-250 students, 250-500 students, 500-800 students, 800-1100 students, More than 1100 students

**3. What grade levels does your school currently serve? (please check all that apply)**

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

**4. How long have you been a principal at your current school?**

1-3 years, 4-10 years, 11-20 years, more than 20 years

**5. How many years were you a classroom teacher before becoming a school principal?**

Never taught in the classroom, taught less than 5 years, taught 6-10 years, taught 11-20 years, taught more than 20 years

**6. Please indicate your age range**

Under 30 years of age, 30-40 years of age, 41-50 years of age, 51-60 years of age, Over 60 years of age

**7. Please indicate your gender**

Male, Female

**School Culture Indicators Questions 8-35**

In your role as a school principal, to what degree do you believe the following indicators describe your school: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree

8. Teachers utilize professional networks to obtain information and resources for classroom instruction.

9. Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects.

10. Teachers trust each other.

11. Teachers support the mission of the school.

12. Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance.

13. Teachers spend considerable time planning together.

14. Teachers regularly seek ideas from seminars, colleagues, and conferences.

15. Teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem.

16. The school mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers.

17. Parents trust teachers' professional judgements.

18. Teachers are involved in the decision-making process.

19. Teachers take time to observe each other teaching.

20. Professional development is valued by the faculty.

21. Teachers' ideas are valued by other teachers.

22. Teachers understand the mission of the school.

23. Teachers are kept informed of current issues in the school.

24. Teachers and parents communicate frequently about student performance.

25. Teacher involvement in policy or decision making is taken seriously.

26. Teachers are generally aware of what other teachers are teaching.

- 27. Teachers maintain a current knowledge base about the learning process.
- 28. Teachers work cooperatively in groups.
- 29. Teachers are rewarded for experimenting with new ideas and techniques.
- 30. The school mission statement reflects the values of the community.
- 31. The faculty values school improvement.
- 32. Teaching performance reflects the mission of the school
- 33. Teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed.
- 34. Teachers are encouraged to share ideas.
- 35. Students generally accept responsibility for their schooling, for example they engage mentally in class and complete homework assignments.

#### **Leadership Indicators Questions 36-48**

In your role as principal, how important do you believe the following leadership behaviors are in shaping a collaborative school culture: very important, important, moderately important, of little importance, unimportant

- 36. Value teachers' ideas.
- 37. Engage in dialogue with teachers are their performance, practice and reflection.
- 38. Frequently communicate expectations around school norms, beliefs, values, and goals.
- 39. Trust the professional judgements of teachers.
- 40. Foster professional relationships with staff.
- 41. Promote professional involvement among staff
- 42. Praise teachers that perform well.
- 43. Share leadership responsibilities with staff.
- 44. Protect instruction and planning time.

- 45. Provide opportunities and resources for teacher collaboration.
- 46. Provide incentives for teachers' professional learning.
- 47. Promote professional development.
- 48. Support risk-taking and innovation in teaching.

**Open Response Question**

- 49. Please list any additional school level factors that you believe are necessary for the establishment of a collaborative school culture.

The results of this survey are strictly confidential. Once the results are collected, I will be conducting brief and confidential telephone interviews. Please indicate your willingness to participate in a brief telephone interview below.

- 50. Would you like to participate in brief telephone interview?

Yes, you may contact me for a brief telephone interview, No, I am not interested in participating in a telephone interview

## Appendix E

### Telephone Interview Protocol

**Researcher Consent:** Thank you for your willingness to participate in this telephone interview. The interview will take approximately 20 minutes. I will be recording our conversation during this interview. Please know that all of your responses will remain anonymous and will be kept confidential. You may also opt out of this interview at any time.

**Researcher Prompt 1:** School culture is often defined as the way we do things here. School culture emerges from the invisible taken-for-granted flow of beliefs and assumptions that give meaning to what people say and do. Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behaviors over time.

**Question for Participant:** How do you read the culture in your school? Please describe your observations and understandings of the cultural symbols, interactions with staff, and existing beliefs within your school.

**Researcher Prompt 2:** According to educational literature, principals are responsible for creating shared beliefs, increasing staff well-being, and building a sense of community within their schools. In addition, certain leadership behaviors, practices and skills have been attributed to increased teacher involvement, motivation and commitment that ultimately enhance school culture.

**Question for Participant:** Please identify and describe some of your own leadership behaviors, practices and skills. How do you believe these behaviors, practices and skills contribute to your school's culture?

**Researcher Prompt 3:** Educational literature suggests that psychosocial features within schools affect how teachers experience their work. Psychosocial conditions also impact teacher

motivation and commitment, and the opportunities they have for learning and growth. Some examples of psychosocial workplace conditions are: trust and mutual respect, collegiality, collaboration, teacher certainty and opportunities for professional learning.

Organizational features create the context within which teachers work. Organizational conditions define teachers' formal positions and relationships with others in the school. Some examples of organizational conditions include the use of time, management of people and resources. Organizational conditions also include structures that enhance teacher collaboration and professional learning. Both psychosocial and organizational conditions that are connected to schools' vision and mission have the power to influence collaboration and enhance culture.

**Question for Participant:** Please identify and describe some of the psychosocial workplace conditions within your school? How do you believe these conditions contribute to the culture in your school?

**Question for Participant:** Please identify and describe some of the organizational workplace conditions in your school. How do you believe these conditions contribute to the culture in your school?

**Researcher Prompt 4:** Collaboration and collegiality are necessary if teachers are to grow as professionals. Educational literature identifies contrived collegiality and balkanization as examples of two barriers that could impede collaborative cultures. Contrived collegiality is a form of collaboration that results when leaders impose unwanted managerial control. These controls impede the spontaneity and autonomy of teachers' work. In addition, balkanization describes the way that some teachers work in smaller sub groups within their schools rather than with the whole school community. Balkanization is dangerous because it can lead to teachers' development of beliefs and values that differ from the whole.

**Question for Participant:** What aspects within your school make it difficult to foster a collaborative culture? Why?

**Question for Participant:** What external forces pose a threat to a collaborative culture within your school?

**Question for Participant:** What do you believe you can do to overcome these barriers?